

*A Gull Bay Mystery*

# Catch of the Day



ASHLEY CAIN

## Chapter 1

It was not yet eleven o'clock, but the sun was throwing out some heat as April Hart returned from her deliveries and parked her car in the last available space at the end of the harbour in Gull Bay. The tourist season was only in its first week, but the small bay was crowded with both locals and tourists who had come down early to try and find a table at one of the very few cafes, or to stake their claim on a small patch of the golden sand that fringed the sea. April had noticed, as she had driven past, that most of the tables on the terrace of her small bakery had been taken, and the two small tables outside her restaurant in the harbour also had people sitting at them. It should be a profitable day she thought, smiling up at the sky which was a bright blue with no wisp of a cloud.

“You were lucky to get that space April”. She turned at the sound of the voice and smiled as she saw Eric and his apprentice Dean navigating their small fishing boat against the harbour wall. Dean leapt on to the steps to tie the boat securely with the rope he held in his hand.

“I know. It looks like it is going to be a busy day. I thought for a minute that I was going to have to turn around and park on the hill until later. I’ve just managed to squeeze in here though”. Where she had parked was tight, and the front of her car was almost touching the harbour wall. Fortunately, she would not have to move it until much later when the tourists had left for the day and she would be able to get a much better space. She did not have to use her car until tomorrow, when the deliveries would start again.

“Marjorie needs to find more parking for locals instead of trying to take what we have away from us”. Eric scowled as Dean headed down the road towards their van that was parked on the slipway. Marjorie Loubert was the member of parliament who represented the parish of St Agnes where Gull Bay was situated. Never popular at the best of times, she had recently incensed the local population of both Gull Bay and its neighbour Gorse

Bay, by recommending that the limited car parking in both bays was reduced even further and suggesting that residents and visitors should access the bays by an hourly shuttle bus. Her view was that both bays would look much more attractive without cars parked on the road, which was technically correct, but gave no comfort to residents who lived and worked in the bays and needed to use their cars during the day.

“It will be a nightmare if she gets that agreed”. April shook her head. “I could do with a van for my deliveries as I am so busy now, but I am reluctant to buy one if I’m not going to be able to park it by the bakery”.

Since April had opened the Bluewater Bakery the year before, business had gone from strength to strength, in no small part to the talents of her bakery manager and friend Rachel. Rachel, and her new assistant Thiago, created the most amazing cakes, pastries, pies and breads some of which they sold to tea shops and café’s the length and breadth of the island. April spent the first three hours of every day delivering the baking to eager and grateful café owners and, even with the seats down, her small Audi really was not a suitable delivery vehicle for the number of deliveries that she had to make. With Marjorie on a crusade though to take vehicular parking away from the bay, there was no way that she was going to buy a second vehicle. It was hard enough parking one.

“I’m glad business is good; your grandmother would be proud of what you have achieved”. Eric reached out to steady himself to jump off the boat, and she held out her hand to help the grizzly old fisherman up the steps on to the quayside. He smelt of fish and seawater, a smell that reminded her of her grandfather who had been a fisherman down in Gull Bay all of his life. He had never retired and had fished until the day he died. It was a hard life and she wondered how he could have stuck it for so long. Eric himself looked like he was in his eighties and yet she knew that he was only around the same age as her own mother and couldn’t have been much older than 60.

“Business is booming, especially in the bakery. It seems that people cannot get enough of Rachel’s baking. The Bay Harbour Grill is doing well too, and now we are in the tourist season I am sure it is going to get busier. Miguel is really getting a name for himself for the seafood that he cooks”.

“Speaking of which, I have just brought in some lovely fresh fish. I can give you the first pick of what we have caught, before I head off to the market”. Eric nodded at the full crates of fish stacked on the back of the boat.

“What have you got?” She knew that Miguel, her head chef and Rachel’s boyfriend, would have waited for Eric to bring his boat in before planning the day’s specials. Judging by the number of people that were out in Gull Bay she would be busy in her restaurant so would need to buy a lot.

“I’ve got plenty of bass, mackerel and ray. I have a few mullet and some lobster and crabs. I can’t spare many of those though, I’ve promised them to the Pebbles Rest over at Gorse Bay”.

April mentally ran through what she had seen in the cold store last night. “I’ll take two dozen of the mackerel and 6lbs of bass. I’ll also take half a dozen of the ray. We have the Tuesday Club coming for lunch today and I know a couple of them love ray with black butter”.

“You have the widows over for lunch today, do you? Lucky you”. Eric grinned.

“Don’t call them that. They have been coming for lunch every Tuesday for the last few weeks”. April punched Eric lightly on his arm. She could understand why he had called them the widows. The four ladies, who were all in their sixties, were a group of friends who lived in the parish of St Agnes. Each of them had lost their husband in the last few years. They met every Tuesday for lunch and a few drinks.

“I’m surprised that they have not invited Hope to join them?” Eric said drily and April looked at him, her look of shock turning in to a smile when she saw the twinkle in his eye. Hope had been her much missed grandmother’s best friend and had worked for her in the café for almost fifty years when it was known as Ruby’s. Since her grandmother had died and April had turned the former café in to a bakery which also served a few customers with cakes and pastries, Hope continued to work for her, although in her case she worked in the loosest form of the word. At almost ninety April could understand why she had to take frequent breaks. Not that she had any thoughts of retiring, she had tried that once and had found it very overrated.

“I doubt Hope would want to join them for lunch, she would not have anything in common with them at all. Not that they have asked her”. She shuddered at the thought of what Hope’s response may be if they did.

“They are unlikely to”. Eric sniffed dismissively. “Hope is a proper fisherman’s wife. Not like those four who’s husband’s owned motor cruisers and yachts and who’s idea of sailing was puttering out a few hundred yards from shore and then putting anchor so that they could drink gin and tonic’s all afternoon and catch the sun. Too many of those types on the water these days if you ask me”.

“They have asked someone else to join them today though”. April thought back to her reservations book. The booking today was for five people as opposed to the usual four. “I don’t know who it is”.

“Probably Samantha Jarvis”. Dean joined the conversation having returned from the van, a couple of buckets in his hands. “Her husband died last month and she lives in that house at the top of the hill, just before it joins the main road. My brother Paul does her garden for her every week”.

“You’re probably right, I would imagine it is scandalous Samantha”. Eric bent down to start sorting out the fish. “She will fit right in with those four. That’s her late husband’s boat down there”. He pointed to a cream motor cruiser further along the harbour wall, the name Lady Samantha picked out in blue italic writing. She’s a bit younger than the others though, she was Stanley Jarvis’s third wife”.

“I’ll find out soon enough”. April looked at her watch. “I’m going to have to go, will you be able to bring the fish over when you have sorted it for me?”.

“Don’t worry about that April. I’ll pick out the best for you and bring it across. You get along now; I know how busy you are”.

“Thanks”. She turned and hurried across to the restaurant. She wanted to let Miguel know what fish was coming. She was intrigued to see if the fifth guest would be Samantha Jarvis, she had not met her but had heard people speak of her. The scandalous nickname she had been given was because trouble seemed to follow her around and she did not have the best of reputations. If it was her who was coming to lunch, she would make her own mind up rather than listen to hearsay. After all, she was not exactly adroit at avoiding trouble herself if the last year had been anything to go by.

## Chapter 2

Compared to the small road that ran around the edge of the harbour, and which had been thronged with tourists enjoying the early summer sun, inside the restaurant it was an oasis of calm. They did not open fully until just before midday and, although Martha her waitress was always happy to serve people with a tea or a coffee at one of the small round tables she had

placed outside if they asked, nobody ate or drank inside until the lunch service started. It gave the staff time to focus on making sure the food and the ambience was perfect.

Although she had inherited the bakery down the road from her grandmother, and it held a lot of memories for her, it was the Bay Harbour Grill which was the favourite of her two businesses. April could not quite put her finger on why this should be; both were decorated along similar themes with striped banquettes against the walls, marble topped tables with flower arrangements in the centre and old black and white photographs on the wall. Any visitor to both would immediately recognise that the two businesses were owned by the same person, yet to April the restaurant seemed much more than a building or a business. If she had put her heart in to turning her grandmother's old café in to the bakery then it was as if the restaurant had taken her soul.

"A penny for your thoughts". Martha came through from the kitchen carrying a tray of crystal tumblers. She put the tray down on the bar and started to place the glasses on the nearest tables.

April looked at her. "I'm not sure that I was thinking anything. It is just so nice to come in to the peace and quiet after the busy morning I have had. I just needed to stop for a few moments to drink it all in. There are a lot of people out there". She nodded her head towards the door and the harbour beyond. "I have a feeling that we are going to be busy today".

"We are". Martha nodded. "That is why I have got these extra glasses. I have moved three tables out to the courtyard so we can get more people in here. We are full for lunch, reservations only".

"On a Tuesday? I can't believe it". April was surprised, they were rarely full during the week except in July and August.

“I’m surprised as well”. Martha shook her head. “We have half a dozen members of a classic car club coming in, and Marjorie Loubert has also booked a table for six. Plus of course there are the five widows instead of four. James has helped me move some of the tables around to accommodate everyone”.

April smiled. “I’d better go and see Miguel then, make sure that he is alright. And don’t worry about how busy it is going to get, I will help out here today”.

Martha smiled, and April could see the look of relief that crossed her face. Martha was assisted at lunchtimes during the week by Magda who was as slow as she was clumsy. Experience had taught both of them that the service only worked like clockwork if Magda stayed behind the bar and poured the drinks whilst Martha flitted between the kitchen and the bar serving the drinks and food to the tables. April would help out at lunchtime in the restaurant only if they were busy, which with a full lunch crowd they undoubtedly would be today.

“Thanks” she said quietly. “I was worrying about it if I was honest, but wasn’t going to ask as I know how busy you are”.

“I wouldn’t leave you with Magda on a day like this”. April patted Martha on her shoulder as she walked past on the way to the kitchen “Speaking of which, where is Magda?”

“She is in the courtyard sweeping up some broken glass”. Martha rolled her eyes. “She knocked a glass off the table when she was arranging the flowers after we had moved the tables around. Although why it is taking her so long, I have no idea. I will check up on her after I have put these last glasses out. Don’t worry, you go and see Miguel, he was asking if I had seen you”.



“He will need to know what fish I have bought”. April looked at the clock, wincing as she noticed the time. She had left it a little late. Hurrying down the corridor to the kitchen, she glanced through the open door in to the courtyard seeing Magda leaning on her broom staring in to space. Berating herself silently for employing her, when she had known that one of the reasons her former employer had closed the restaurant where she had worked was because of the bad reviews they had received for service, she opened the kitchen door and was greeted with a cry of relief from Miguel.

“Finally. I wondered what had happened to you. Rachel said she saw your car drive past half an hour ago”.

You couldn’t have any secrets for long in Gull Bay, April thought smiling. It was a small place where most people either knew or knew of people. Working and living together it was natural that Miguel would speak to Rachel frequently during the day, but April was pretty sure that half the population of the bay would have known what time she left to start her deliveries, what time she had returned, who she had spoken to and for how long and what had been said.

“I was talking to Eric and Dean, they are bringing across some mackerel, bass and ray for the lunch service”.

“Fantastic”. Miguel beamed. “I’ll stuff the mackerel with lemon, mint and parsley and roast it in the oven. That will be easy. We could do the sea bass with the honey and orange marinade that people love and of course we will do the ray with the black butter and capers. That is always popular”.

“Sounds delicious”. April wrote the specials on the blackboard that was taken from table to table when people were ordering. As well as the specials there were the staples that Miguel and James, his assistant, always cooked,

a mix of Mediterranean sea food and traditional meat dishes. Diners always had a choice of potatoes, rice and various vegetables and salads to accompany their meal, and they could mix and match. For April it was important that people felt relaxed and happy when they were dining in her restaurant, and if someone wanted herb roasted potatoes with their mackerel, and someone else wanted lemon infused rice, then that is what they each got.

“When is the fish coming, the mackerel is going to take forty minutes to roast in the oven?” Miguel glanced anxiously at the clock which showed that they would be opening their doors to the first lunch guests in less than thirty minutes.

“It is here now”. Martha opened the door behind her to shepherd in to the kitchen Dean, carrying two crates of fish that had been gutted and cleaned. James moved across quickly to help him lift the load on to the counter.

April left her staff to it, she would only get in the way if she stayed, and headed towards the door that led to the stairs and her apartment above. One of the many benefits of living above the restaurant was that she could be showered and changed very quickly if she needed to step in and help like she did today. A movement outside caught her attention. The guests that had been sitting at the two tables had left, and it looked like someone else had arrived. Through the window she could see a man, his hand on the back of one of the chairs peering through the window to see if they were open. With Martha in the kitchen helping James and Miguel, and Magda apparently having swept herself off somewhere, it was left to her to see if they wanted serving with a drink. She walked to the front of the restaurant and opened the door, the question she was going to ask dying on her lips.

The young man standing at the table was one of the most beautiful men she had ever set eyes on. About her age, or just a little older, he looked like he had stepped out of the pages of one of the clothes catalogues that her

mother used to have when she was a child, or from the screen in a Hollywood movie. Tall and slim his dark blonde hair was brushed back in waves from his face and curled over the collar of the red polo shirt that he was wearing. His jaw was firm and angular covered in day old stubble and he had the most piercing blue eyes she had ever seen, that were now staring at her with obvious interest. Jeans cut off above the knee displayed toned, muscled calves covered in fine blonde hairs. She instinctively looked around for the perfect woman that she thought must surely be hovering close by somewhere but couldn't see her.

"I asked if you were open?". He was looking at her a puzzled half smile on his face.

"I'm sorry, I was distracted". She tried to focus on what he was saying and left the explanation hanging. She was hardly about to share with him that it was his good looks that had distracted her, although he was so classically beautiful, she could hardly have been the first woman rendered speechless when confronted by him. "I can serve you a drink out here, but I'm afraid if you were looking for lunch, we are full". She was half tempted to invite him upstairs to her apartment for a sandwich but resisted the urge.

"A drink will be fine; it is a bit early for lunch anyway. Do you serve beer?"

The Adonis did have one flaw after all, she thought, thinking that it was a bit early to be drinking beer as it was not yet midday. He was probably on holiday though so could be forgiven. She silently made amends for him. "I do, but I only have bottles of the local beer, I don't serve the well-known brands or any on draft".

"A bottle of the local beer will be great. I had a very early start this morning and so am ready for a drink". He smiled the lazy smile again and sat down. It was as though he had read her thoughts and wanted to explain why he was drinking so early.

“Have you flown in today from the UK?” He had a British accent and she knew that some of the many flights that arrived in Jersey every day landed early.

“No, I have sailed in”. He nodded over towards the harbour and pointed. “That is my boat over there, the one called The Little Pelican”.

She followed the line of his finger and saw a boat, much larger and older than she had expected. She had imagined that the Adonis would have a sleek motor cruiser, not an old and battered sail boat. It was painted cream and brown and was clearly designed for sailing rather than cruising “It’s a large boat” she said surprised. “Do you have a crew?”

He laughed as though she had said something funny. “A crew? Of course not. There is just me. I live on it”.

“Really?” This was a surprise. Although he was dressed casually, with his looks and his manner she had assumed that he was a banker or a financier who had ventured in to Gull Bay for some downtime. She had not expected him to live on a boat.

“Really” He nodded smiling. “I travel around the world blogging about my adventures. I wanted to be a journalist and studied English at university, but....”. He shrugged and April thought she knew what wasn’t said. A lot of people wanted to be journalists but there were not that many opportunities and an awful lot of people never realised their dreams”.

“It sounds like a nice life” she said wistfully. She had planned to go travelling when she had finished her university degree but her grandmother had died and left her the café which she had turned in to the bakery and so had never had the chance. She didn’t regret not going, and wouldn’t change

her life now for anything, but did occasionally wonder what her life would have been like if things had turned out differently.

“It is, it would be nice to share it with someone though. I meet lots of people when I sail in to port, and spend a lot of weeks working with people to earn money for the next stage of my travels, but it isn’t the same as sharing the adventure with someone. Have you ever been travelling?”. He was looking at her with what she thought may be something more than curiosity but wasn’t sure whether she was reading more in to the friendly conversation than was there. It had been a long time since she had been romantically involved with anyone, maybe too long if she was starting to assume that every man her age who asked her a question had an ulterior motive for doing so.

“No, I’ve never had the time”. She spoke more abruptly than she had intended to, annoyed with herself for the slight feeling of regret that had rushed unbidden in to her head. “I’ll get you that drink now”. She smiled and turned away, annoyed with herself.

She had a great business, many friends and lived in what was one of the most beautiful places in the world.

So where on earth had that pang of regret sprung from for a life not lived?

### Chapter 3

April never got the chance to shower and change after all. She had spent so long talking to the handsome stranger whose name she did not even know, that by the time she took him his beer, a small crowd of early lunch guests

had gathered outside the restaurant. Rather than let them stand in the sun she had opened the door and let them in. Soon the small dining room and courtyard beyond was filled with happy chattering voices and the clinking of glasses and cutlery.

The stranger had left at the same time as the Tuesday club had arrived and so, as she had been busy greeting them, she had left it to Magda to take his money and give him his change. The four ladies stared at him with open interest as he had smiled and waved goodbye to April before walking down the quayside towards his boat.

“My goodness”. Margaret Bennet fanned her face with the piece of paper that that she was carrying which looked to April like one of Marjorie Loubert’s parking posters. “Who on earth was that good looking man April? I’ve not seen him around here before”.

“I don’t know his name” April answered as she guided them through the restaurant towards the table that they had asked for in the courtyard. “He sailed in this morning”.

“Where did he sail in from?” Penny Mondel twisted her head around trying to see which boat he was walking towards. “Is he on that boat with the French flag? He looked French to me”.

“I don’t know where has come from, but I think he is British. He sounded like he had an English accent anyway” April finished lamely. To say that she had been talking to him for about five minutes she did not know very much about him at all and the four women would be in despair at the paltry amount of information she had gleaned”.

“For heaven’s sake April” Margaret Bennet admonished her in mock annoyance. “We will stop coming here for lunch if you cannot furnish us

with any gossip. What is the point of having a prime spot in the bay to see the comings and goings if you don't see anything?"

The women laughed, and April smiled to herself. It was true that she did not know much about the handsome stranger who had sent her heart fluttering but she did notice a lot of the things that happened in the bay. She had observed over the last few days that Roland Farmer the landlord of the pub at the end of the harbour road had taken to visiting Stacey Carpenter the owner of the nail salon a few doors down from April every evening and that the gift shop two doors away from the Bay Harbour Grill had been viewed by a procession of estate agents. She was not though, and never had been, someone who tittle tattled and gossiped about what she knew. And she suspected that the Tuesday club despite their protestations to the contrary would be horrified if they thought she did. She had heard that they had moved their patronage from the Pebbles Rest in Gorse Bay to the Bay Harbour Grill because something that Penny had said at one of their private lunch conversations had become common knowledge and they suspected that it had been Jessica Tripp, the owner of the Pebbles Rest, who had shared it.

They had reached the large round table that had been set up in the centre of the courtyard for the five ladies and sat down. Margaret handed April the poster that she was holding in her hand.

"Put that in the bin would you darling" she said casting a baleful glance at the side of the courtyard towards the table of six where Marjorie was holding court. "I took it off the lamppost outside the restaurant. I'm sure you don't want that stuck there".

April glanced at the poster. There was a photograph which had obviously been taken at the end of the bake-off competition which had happened in Gull Bay a few weeks earlier. Cars, vans and trucks were parked haphazardly all across the road in Gull Bay waiting to take away the bake-

off equipment. The words Ban Cars, Use A Bus were written in bold red letters. It was very disingenuous of Marjorie, who had been one of the bake-off judges, to use that photograph. Although busy with cars, the bay rarely looked like that and the organisers of the bake-off could hardly have been expected to carry their equipment on a bus. She glanced across at where Marjorie and her guests were being served their starters by Martha. There were a couple of bottles of one of the more expensive wines that April served on the table, Marjorie was obviously here on official business rather than personal.

“I wouldn’t worry April; I doubt anything will be done before the elections next year and it is doubtful Marjorie will get in again”. It was Madeleine who spoke in her matter of fact, no nonsense style of speaking that she had as befitted her standing as a former school teacher and widow of the late vicar of the parish of St Agnes. Of the four ladies who lunched she was the sensible one who though charming did not join in the frivolous gossip that the others indulged in.

“I wouldn’t bet against her, although I think she has gone too far with this latest crusade. None of the business owners or residents in either Gull or Gorse bays will vote for her. I can only imagine how badly taking parking away would have affected my business if I still had it”. Margaret made a face although April wasn’t sure whether it was because of the parking or the loss of the business. Margaret had owned a ladies’ boutique in Gorse Bay up until a couple of years ago.

“I hear Calvin Drake is planning to run again”. The fourth lady Daisy Robbinet leant across the table imparting some gossip in hushed tones. “And I also hear that Gabriella Teixeira is thinking about it. She could take quite a lot of votes away from Marjorie”.

“I wouldn’t trust her though, isn’t she Ivan Fletcher’s latest fling?” Penny looked around the table. “He has probably put her up to it”. Ivan Fletcher



owned a number of hotels around the island as well as in the UK and lived in the largest house in Gull Bay.

As interesting as the gossip was, April could see that more guests were arriving and she would need to greet them. She handed out the menus to the ladies and signalled over to Magda to take their drink orders. “There are five of you today aren’t there?” she asked, looking at the empty chair.

“We have invited Samantha Jarvis, we will order drinks now though, she is bound to be late”. Madeleine took the menu off April.

“You invited Samantha, there is no we about it”. Margaret turned to Madeleine scowling. “I have no idea what possessed you to invite that woman”.

Madeleine looked as uncomfortable as the other three ladies looked unhappy. “It was the charitable thing to do” she said quietly looking down at her menu. “She has lost her husband after all”.

“She had only been married to him for a few years” Penny grumbled, “And she goes through husbands like I go through winter coats. She will have a new one by Christmas, you mark my words”.

“Penny”. Madeleine looked shocked, casting a glance at April. April just smiled and moved away, leaving them arguing amongst themselves. Small arguments were nothing new and she knew that they wouldn’t last long and be forgotten long before the starters arrived. All of the women had very strong opinions and were very forthright at expressing themselves. The only common bonds they seemed to share were that they had all been widowed recently, were residents of the parish of St Agnes where Gull Bay was situated and were all a similar age. Although they would have known each other it is unlikely that they would have met for lunch weekly if grief had

not brought them together, and yet the dynamic of the group worked. It would be interesting to see how that dynamic changed with the inclusion of Samantha Jarvis. Although none of the ladies seemed happy that she was joining them she could understand how Madeleine had probably felt compelled to invite her. As a regular churchgoer, and the widow of late vicar Madeleine would have wanted to offer the hand of friendship in the circumstances.

The door at the front of the restaurant opened and the hubbub of conversation stilled and went silent for a few moments. Heads turned and as April followed their gaze she could understand why. It seemed that Samantha Jarvis had arrived.

## Chapter 4

April had never met Samantha Jarvis before but had heard of her. Most people in Jersey had as she was often in the local newspaper making headlines although not always for the right reasons. Scandal, intrigue and drama seemed to follow her around although from what April had heard she seemed to court them. She had never seen her in the flesh though and had not known what to expect, but on a hot day like today it was not this.

The woman who had entered was dressed head to toe in black. Rising above black fine mesh stockings was a tight fitting, short black dress with black lace sleeves. Her face was covered with a black veil and she towered in the doorway at a height of over six foot on account of the six-inch black heels that she was wearing. Even her long talon like fingernails were painted black, although they had tiny silver lightning bolts painted on them. The only colour, if you could call it colour, came from the large emerald and diamond bracelet on her wrist that sparkled in the light. It was very ostentatious and must have cost a fortune, but then Samantha Jarvis was a

rich woman and her late husband Stanley Jarvis had been a millionaire many times over on account of owning Jarvis Freight, one of the freight companies that served the island.

As she approached, Samantha lifted her veil to display eyes heavily ringed with black eyeliner which looked at April dismissively.

“I’m meeting Madeleine Arber and her guests. Take me to her table and bring me a glass of champagne. Vintage, if you have it”. She looked around the room with the look of someone who clearly did not believe that they would.

April hesitated. “I have a 1996 Dom Perignon, but I don’t serve it by the glass as it is so expensive”. She kept a few bottles of vintage champagne as occasionally a rich resident hosted a celebration in her restaurant and wanted to splash out. It retailed though at almost £800 a bottle and so was not something that people would normally drink for lunch.

“Open it. If I don’t drink the bottle, I will pay for anything I don’t drink. Now are you going to take me to my guests or are you going to just stand there looking at me gormlessly?” She looked at April impatiently.

“This way please”. April felt herself stuttering, there was something about the woman that made her nervous. She showed her to the table and as the other ladies started to make their introductions beat a grateful retreat to the bar, where Magda was just about to take a tray of four drinks. There were three gin and tonics and a glass of sparkling water. Penny did not drink alcohol.

“If that is for the Tuesday club, I will take them” she said as Magda grabbed hold of the tray unsteadily. The last thing she wanted was for Magda to

splash a drink on Samantha Jarvis. “I just need to open this champagne and pour a glass”.

Magda nodded wordlessly and picked up a piece of paper that Martha had just put down on the bar so that she could start making more drinks. April poured the glass of champagne and walked with the tray out to the courtyard where unusually the women who were normally in the middle of some animated conversation were sitting in silence studying the menus.

“Are you ready to order?” April asked cheerfully, placing the drinks down carefully and thinking that the atmosphere had got noticeably colder since Samantha had arrived.

“I think we are, ladies?” Madeleine looked around the others.

Without waiting for anyone else to confirm if they were ready or not Samantha turned to April. “I’ll have a green salad to start, with a French dressing made with Italian olive oil. If you haven’t got Italian olive oil, go out and buy some. For my main course I will have a fillet steak, rare, with some green beans. If it is overcooked, I will send it back. And another glass of champagne” she added as an afterthought draining her glass as soon as April put it down in front of her.

The others looked embarrassed. April just smiled and nodded. “Of course, Daisy, have you chosen yet?”

Daisy looked up and smiled a smile that said volumes. “I will have the Coquille Saint Jacques to start with” she said. “Miguel makes them so well. And for my main course I will have the mackerel with those lovely garlic potatoes Miguel cooks”.

“That sounds like a lot of calories Daisy” Samantha interrupted, looking at the menu. “Instead of the Coquille St Jacques with all that cream and cheese why don’t you have the scallops with bacon, and then have a green salad with the mackerel. You will burst out of that shirt if you eat all that cream and cheese. The buttons already look like they are under a great deal of pressure”.

There was a stunned silence around the table at Samantha’s rudeness. April felt angry on Daisy’s behalf. Daisy was a large lady who loved her food but was unashamed of her curves. She knew full well that her size did not mean that she was unhealthy, she could often be seen walking around the parish, or on the beach, her three dogs in tow. April would have put money on her having walked down the hill to meet the ladies for lunch and that she would be walking her lunch off with a brisk walk up the hill back home.

Daisy gave an embarrassed laugh. “You could be right Samantha, maybe it is a little heavy for lunch. I can’t resist the potatoes with the mackerel, but maybe you could change my starter for the scallops and bacon?” She smiled up at her but April noticed the pain in her pale blue eyes and the slight redness in her cheek that suggested she had been more hurt by the comment than she was showing.

“I’ll have the scallops and bacon as well”. Madeleine spoke quickly so that Samantha could not say anything else to Daisy, “and for my main course I will have the ray with black butter. Could I have that with the green salad as well please, any dressing will do, I’m not a fussy eater”. She shot a look of pure venom in Samantha’s direction who appeared not to notice as she was too busy playing with her empty champagne glass.

“The ray was a real favourite of your husband’s wasn’t it, Madeleine?” April was desperate to break the atmosphere and thought a reference to Madeleine’s husband may cheer the table up a little. Other than Samantha, Madeleine was the most recent widow, her husband George only dying at

the beginning of the year after a long illness. He had been a popular character in Gull Bay having been the vicar of the parish for over forty years. George and Madeleine had been amongst her first customers when she had opened the Bay Harbour Grill and had eaten there once a month when he had been in good health.

“You must miss him dreadfully” Samantha looked at Madeleine, “although I am sure that it was a blessing to you that he died so quickly at the end”.

“Yes, I do”. Madeleine looked as though she had tears in her eyes and reached for the jug of water that was in the centre of the table. Her hands were shaking April noticed when she poured the glass and she wished she had not mentioned him. It was tactless of her to mention him when his death had been so relatively recent.

Both Penny and Margaret elected to have a green salad as a starter and the ray, although Margaret asked for the garlic potatoes with her main course which April thought had more to do with showing solidarity to Daisy than wanting them. She had been a model in her younger days and was strict about keeping her size eight figure. April often spent time chatting with them throughout the meal, but today other than taking their meals and drinks and clearing their plates away when they had finished, she avoided them. There was a distinctly cold atmosphere around the table and the snippets of conversation that she heard were stilted and sounded forced. None of the ladies wanted to see the dessert menu which was unusual as they often stayed late in to the afternoon and she thought that they would be leaving very soon. She was just working out their check at the bar, which given the inclusion of a bottle of vintage champagne was much higher than normal when the handsome stranger from earlier returned.

“Hi” he smiled the lazy, lopsided grin that made her go weak at the knees. “I know it is late for lunch, but can you fit me in? Beans on toast on the boat doesn’t really appeal after the journey that I have had today”.

Here was her chance she thought to find out some information with which she could cheer the ladies up with. “I’m sure I can fit you in” she returned his smile. “Where have you sailed from today?”

“I sailed over from St Malo. I spent the winter anchored in southern Spain and sailed up around Portugal and France. I’m heading for Sweden. I am going to tour Scandinavia over the winter, maybe go and see the northern lights”.

“You are not staying in Jersey then?” April tried and failed to keep the disappointment out of her voice. She thought he may have been going to stay in Jersey for the summer, but it appeared that he had other plans. It was a shame, not because she wanted to get romantically involved, which would have added complications to her busy life, but because in the few minutes she had spent talking to him she had liked his company. Even though she got on well with Rachel and Miguel, and would often meet them for a drink or a meal, the conversation when they met invariably turned to work and it would have been nice to spend time with someone completely unconnected to the restaurant.

“I’ll hang around for a couple of weeks, I’m in no rush. I made better time than expected travelling to northern France and met a guy who suggested I should sail over to Jersey. It seemed like a good idea as I had never been. As long as I get to Sweden by the end of August it will be good. That’s the beauty of my life, I have loose plans but am not beholden to anything, or anyone”. He flashed her a quick smile.

“Lucky you”. Whilst they had been talking, she had walked him out to a table in the corner of the courtyard which was now empty save for the Tuesday club, and as he sat down, she noticed that the ladies were looking at him with undisguised interest. All except Samantha Jarvis who had

covered her face with her veil again and was picking up her black Gucci purse.

“I’ve brought you the check” April said putting the check on the table. “I have itemised it so that you can see who has had what”. They always paid for what they had each eaten rather than split the bill equally and wanted to make sure that Samantha was under no misapprehension that she would be expected to pay for the vintage champagne herself.

“I’m afraid I am going to have to dash ladies, I have another appointment, thank you for lunch”. Samantha turned away from the table so quickly that her heel caught and she stumbled sideways in to the wall. Mumbling something that nobody quite heard she hurried through the restaurant and on to the street. The ladies looking at each other in bafflement.

“What was all that about?” Margaret asked the others. “Why did she disappear so suddenly?”

“She said she had an appointment” Madeleine replied, “although she had never mentioned that before. It was as though something startled her”.

“Probably the check” Penny snapped looking at it. “I’m assuming this is a mistake April, I know that she was drinking champagne but you have added it up as £790 instead of £79.

“It was vintage, and she said that she would pay for it separately when she came in. I will knock her meal off the check and take her portion of the check to her house tonight”. April sighed thinking to herself that she would probably have a real battle trying to get the money from her.



“That’s very good of you April, and you must let me know if you have any difficulties getting the money. I do not want you to find yourself out of pocket and I feel partially responsible as I was the one who invited her” Madeleine smiled thinly. “But I don’t think it was the check as she would not have known you were bringing it. Her attitude changed when you brought that young man in to the courtyard, there was a look of fear in her eyes when she saw him and she suddenly lowered her veil”.

They all turned to look at him, and as though he could sense their eyes on him, he raised his eyes from the menu he was studying and looked back at them.

“Hi, I’m Ben” he said hesitantly as though he could hear the question that they hadn’t asked “Ben Howe”.

## Chapter 5

So that was his name, April thought as the ladies of the Tuesday club batted their eyes at him. He was young enough to be their son but that was not going to stop every one of them, even the reserved Madeleine, from flirting with him.

“I think we will have another drink April” Madeleine smiled up at her, “and maybe we will look at the dessert menu after all”.

Daisy beamed. “Thank goodness, I had already decided I wanted a slice of your pecan nut pie and some salted caramel ice cream when you all said you were going to pass. I thought I was going to have to sneak in to the

bakery on my way home, although I still might anyway” she finished with a laugh.

The others laughed, except Penny who still had a furious look on her face. April was glad that the normal happy atmosphere had returned now that Samantha had left. The ladies were getting back to their usual happy mischievous selves, except Penny who still had the check in her hand and was obviously smarting at the way that Samantha had left without paying.

“I’ll get the menus” she said leaving the ladies to flirtatiously interrogate Ben, who rather than looking like a deer caught in the headlights at all the attention he was receiving was lapping it up. She left them to it, returning a few minutes later to find that he had moved in to the space that Samantha had been sitting in moments before.

“Ben has decided to join us rather than sit on his own”. Margaret looked at him with adoring eyes. “We are going to be here for another hour anyway and he only wants a main course”.

April looked at him a smile playing on the corner of her mouth. “What can I get for you?”

“I’m tempted to ask what you are offering” he said with a wink at the ladies which set them giggling like schoolgirls, “but I will go with steak and the garlic cream potatoes that both Margaret and Daisy say taste like heaven on a plate”.

“Ben is a travel blogger and has been in Spain” Margaret explained. “He has sailed over from France today and is spending a couple of weeks here”.

“I know”. April was impressed that they had managed to get all that out of him in the space of two minutes. They may be widows but they had managed to snare the most eligible man in Gull Bay.

“Ahh” Daisy interrupted, “but do you also know he is single, and would love to meet someone who could sail the world with him. We did think of you but decided Gull Bay couldn’t spare you so we are volunteering ourselves. Come on Ben, which of you are you going to choose?”

April burst out laughing as for the first time since she had met him Ben seemed momentarily discomfited. He recovered fast though. “It’s hard work you know, I don’t want you to think you would spend all your time sunning yourself on deck with a good book and a gin and tonic. And I am very chauvinistic and would expect any woman who joins me to cook and clean”.

“Damn, and there I was going to nip home and fetch my little bikinis”. Daisy tried to keep a straight face as she delivered the line but couldn’t quite manage it and they all burst out laughing. April thought how nice it was that the group had returned to their normal happy cheerful selves.

“Let me go and put your food order in” she said to Ben, “otherwise you will starve”. She left the table and hurried to the kitchen, where Miguel and James were starting to clear up after the lunch time service.

“I have one more for you guys” she looked over at them. “I hope you have some more of the garlic cream potatoes left as the ladies of the Tuesday club are promoting them for you.”

“I heard”. Miguel turned to her with interest. “I’ve been listening to them talking through the window. They seem to have got very excited over the

appearance of that guy. It's a shame the window is so high and I can't see out of it".

"He is very good looking; he has sailed in from France today and is spending a few weeks here before heading off to Scandinavia. He looks like he is hungry so give him the largest piece of steak you have".

Miguel looked like he was going to say something and so she hurried out of the kitchen back to the table to take the ladies dessert orders. Although Miguel was very good looking himself, was a brilliant cook and would do anything for anybody, he had a very passionate nature which could lend itself to jealousy and she knew that he would be a little worried at the appearance of a good-looking stranger in the bay. Not that he had anything to worry about she thought. Rachel his girlfriend adored him and would be as likely to sail off in to the Scandinavian sunset as she was, although in her case it was responsibilities that was stopping her rather than a handsome chef.

Arriving back at the table she discovered that the four Tuesday club ladies were lapping up the attention from Ben, and were listening to him regale them with stories of his journey up the coast from southern Spain. As Jersey residents all of the ladies had been used to boating themselves although the farthest they had ever been on their husbands' boats was the French coast or the other Channel Islands.

"If only I was thirty years younger" Margaret sounded wistful, "or twenty anyway".

"If only I was twenty pounds lighter, or thirty anyway" Daisy deadpanned, and they all fell about laughing.

“Do you like older women Ben?” It sounded to April as though Margaret’s question was not entirely rhetorical. With her long blonde hair and slim body, she could easily pass for a woman in her early fifties although April knew that she was in her mid to late sixties. She had owned the ladies boutique in Gorse Bay when April was a child and she remembered going in with her grandmother on the rare times she had wanted to buy an outfit for a special occasion. April could vaguely recollect the headline when it had closed down a couple of years ago, saying that Margaret had been a fixture in the bay for over forty years, and even assuming she bought it when she was in her early twenties that would put her in her mid-sixties now.

“I think age is just a number” Ben said diplomatically casting a quick look at April. “It is the connection that is important. I’m looking for a lifelong companion”.

“That counts us out then” Madeleine replied drily. “I don’t think any of us has got more than ten good years left in us”.

“Speak for yourself you old bag” Margaret replied laughing. “I intend to live to be a hundred”.

“Speaking of old bags”. Penny who April noticed had been very quiet during the flirtatious conversation joined in. “Have you met Samantha Jarvis yet? She was in here just when you arrived but left rather hurriedly when April presented us with the check. She is a little younger than the rest of us and I am sure will be on the lookout for a new husband. Her fourth has just died”.

Ben stilled and April noticed a wariness come in to his eyes. “No” he shook his head “I don’t recognise the name”. He looked down at the table.

“You must have seen her though?” Daisy prodded “She was the lady dressed all in black who left as you arrived”.

“She is no lady” snapped Margaret, “but she was dressed in black. You must have seen her Ben; she will have walked almost straight past you when she left”.

“I wasn’t really looking, I was following April, but I did notice someone in black. She had a heavy veil over her face. I haven’t met her yet; I haven’t really met anyone as I only got here this morning”.

He was prevented from saying any more by the arrival of Martha carrying a large plate piled high with garlic potatoes and a huge piece of steak. “My goodness” he exclaimed “I’m going to have to do some exercise to work all this off”.

The ladies smiled to themselves, no doubt all thinking how they would like to help him work it off but didn’t say anything. Martha took their dessert orders and April made her excuses. Although she had enjoyed their company, she had other guests to look after. Several of the tables were finishing their meals and so she had checks to prepare. She couldn’t help but wonder about the guarded look that had danced across Ben’s face when Penny mentioned Samantha Jarvis.

Ben said he had not met her, but she got the impression that he had certainly heard of her. And if he had then why lie about it? Unless his visit to Gull Bay was not as entirely unplanned as he had suggested.

## Chapter 6

It had been a profitable lunchtime, the best that she had experienced all year and April hoped that it was a precursor of things to come. Although her dinner trade tended to be reasonably busy all year round, lunchtimes were only really busy during the main tourist season of June through to September. This early in June she had not expected to be so busy. She had even had to turn people away.

The one stain on her day was the unpaid check from Samantha Jarvis. It had been very unfair of her to have drunk a vintage bottle of champagne, and eaten the most expensive steak on the menu, only to leave without paying. Although the more April thought about it, the more she was sure that she hadn't intended to leave so quickly.

Something had startled her, she was sure, and the only two events that had happened just before she rushed off claiming an urgent appointment was the check, and the appearance of Ben Howe. She hadn't even looked at the check so could not have known how much it would be, and whatever the total amount she would have been able to pay it out of loose change. Although she knew that Penny was adamant that it was the check that had forced her to leave April wasn't so sure. She thought it was the arrival of Ben in the courtyard that had made her get up from the table, make her excuses and beat a hasty retreat.

The more she thought about it the more she suspected that she was right. When Penny had mentioned Samantha at the table earlier, there had been a change in Ben, she had sensed it. He had been laughing, joking, flirting with the ladies, but as soon as Samantha Jarvis's name had cropped up in the conversation it had been as though a shadow had covered his face. He had admitted, eventually, that he had noticed her, but then how could he not have noticed her? Dressed all in black in the hot sun, with a large hat and veil covering her face, and towering above everyone else in her stiletto heels it would have been impossible for him to suggest that he hadn't.

Although she suspected that Samantha's disappearance was linked to the arrival of Ben in the restaurant, she could not for the life of her think what the link could be. Ben said that he had arrived in Gull Bay only that morning and although she wasn't paying much attention to the boats in the harbour, she thought she may have noticed it if it had arrived before. It was old and different enough from the other fishing boats and motor cruisers to be distinctive. She herself had met Ben just before lunchtime so if he and Samantha had met, even briefly, or had had some altercation then it would have had to have been very early.

She knew very little about Ben and little more about Samantha although she was a Jersey resident. She thought back to the rumours that she had heard about her. Scandalous Samantha she was nicknamed. She wasn't Jersey born, had arrived in Jersey in her late teens and had quickly found a rich older man to marry. She had been married four times, each husband wealthier and older than the last, her latest of course being the recently deceased Stanley Jarvis. If the gossip was to be believed there was numerous husbands in between that were not her own, and more than one broken marriage which had happened as a result. She was also not averse to ruining businesses as well as marriages, and more than one business had gone under as a result of Samantha opening a rival and undercutting them on price. She owned a chain of beauty salons, hairdressers and health food stores across the island, using the profits from her marriages to undercut her rivals in the early days before putting her prices up as soon as her rivals had folded. She was as admired and feared for her business acumen as she was hated for her morals. It was rare that she didn't have the upper hand and yet something had unnerved her at the table and had forced her to flee.

If Ben and Samantha had some sort of connection there was no way she could work out what it was. It was clearly not one that they wanted to advertise as Samantha had left as soon as Ben had arrived and Ben had denied knowing her. If there was a mystery it was one that April was going to have to put to the back of her mind and try and forget about. She had



plenty to do before the restaurant opened again for the evening dinner service. Looking at the reservations book most of the tables were taken and there were just three left for last minute dinner guests. Neither Martha, nor Magda were working tonight and there would just be her two young waitresses Frankie and Elena as well as Miguel in the kitchen. It meant that she had plenty to occupy her thoughts without wasting them on Samantha and Ben.

Looking at her watch she realised with a start that it was almost five o'clock. With just an hour to spare before she was needed in the restaurant there was no time like the present, she decided, to present the check to Samantha. She knew that she lived in the large white house at the top of the hill leading out of Gull Bay just before it joined with the main road. She had no intention of speaking to her, she just wanted to post the check through the letterbox with a note and so, taking a pen, she wrote a brief letter, explaining that her check for the meal and the drinks was included and that she would be grateful if she could pay it the next time she was in the bay. She had no expectations that it would be paid quickly but at least she had tried. She was reluctant to move her car as the bay was still filled with tourists and she did not want to struggle to find a parking space when she returned, so she slipped on her trainers and decided to walk. It was only a mile and although uphill on the way there she could expect to be there and back within 45 minutes.

It took her longer to get to Samantha's house than expected because there was still a steady stream of cars driving down the hill in to Gull Bay and as there was no pavement she had to keep stopping and pressing herself in to the wall to avoid getting hit by a door mirror. She was frustrated with the time it was taking, but relieved that she had not driven as there would have been no chance of her getting a parking space again. Eventually she rounded the last bend and the Jarvis residence came in to view. The gates to the driveway were electric and closed but at the junction there was a small pedestrian gate with an old-fashioned latch that was easily opened. It led to the back door of the property and was clearly a tradesman's entrance.

Walking up the path she noticed with surprise that the door, which led in to the kitchen was ajar. Crime was rare in Jersey and many people did not bother to lock their doors, but it was surprising to find it open. There was no post box visible and April was reluctant to walk in to what she could see was the kitchen unannounced. “Hello” she shouted pushing the door open a little bit so that she could lean in to the kitchen. “Mrs Jarvis, Samantha, are you there?”.

There was no answer, and the kitchen appeared to be empty. She walked through the kitchen in to a large hallway where stairs led upwards and doors opened in to other rooms on the left and the right. She shouted again but there was no answer. The house seemed deserted, which was odd if the door was open.

Leaving the house, she retraced her steps down the path, but rather than opening the gate on to the road she took the path that led down the side of the house to the driveway. The driveway was gravelled and wide and led to a double garage which was open. Inside she could see that there was one car inside, a black Jaguar, but a space where another car would normally be. She seemed to remember that Samantha had a black Mercedes convertible. It wasn't there suggesting that she was out.

April stood on the driveway unsure what to do. The house was heavily protected with alarms and high electric gates and yet the back door had been left wide open and there seemed to be no-one in the house. The sensible course of action would be to call the police, although there appeared to be no damage someone could have broken in. However, if there was a perfectly logical explanation Samantha would not be happy if April called the police to her house for no reason.

She decided that she wouldn't do anything for the moment, and instead walk back home and call in on Hope. Since her grandmother had died Hope

had stepped in to her shoes and although April had railed against it at first, she now valued the old lady's wisdom even though it was often delivered in a destructive rather than a constructive way. She would talk it through with Hope and see what Hope suggested. She had a feeling that whatever plan of action she took now would probably be the wrong one and so it was better to talk it through with someone else. Someone who could always be relied upon to give their honest opinion. It would be good to talk through her feelings with someone who could give an objective view, no matter how objectionable that view sometimes was.

## Chapter 7

She felt uneasy leaving the house but knew that if she had phoned the police straight away, she would have also felt uncomfortable. There may have been a perfectly logical reason why the back door had been wide open and if there was nothing to it then she may well have incurred Samantha's wrath. If the rumours about her were true then she certainly did not want to get on the wrong side of her for she could do a great deal of damage to her business. She didn't want to write off the bottle of champagne but was quite prepared to if she had to. If she got on the wrong side of Samantha then the loss of £800 would seem like chump change compared to how much she could lose.

Her mind was so cluttered with thoughts as she walked down the hill that she did not notice the man jump over the stile which led from the cliff path on to the road. She walked straight in to him as he stopped to straighten the rucksack that had slipped off his back as he had jumped. Pulling up short she stepped back, exclaiming in surprise when she realised it was Ben.

"We need to stop meeting like this". He grinned at her. "Sorry, I should have looked before I jumped in front of you but I didn't expect anyone to be

walking down the road, least of all you”.

“I’ve been up to see Samantha Jarvis”. She watched him closely to see if there was any reaction to this news. Again, she thought that she saw a guarded look flicker across his face before he placed his rucksack on the ground and tied the straps securely which had come loose. His face was hidden but she felt sure that he had been startled to hear where she had been.

“And did you?” he asked lightly.

“Did I what?” She watched him fasten the rucksack thinking it was very large for a walk over the cliffs. It was almost the size of him, the type of rucksack that you would take on a hiking expedition over the mountains, not on an afternoon walk along the cliffs.

“See Samantha Jarvis?”. He straightened up and shouldered the rucksack again, straining under the weight.

“No, she wasn’t in. Well, I don’t think she was in, there was no answer and her car was gone from the garage”.

“Your bad luck is my good luck”. He leaned on the wall letting the top of the wall take the weight of the rucksack. You walked up here for nothing, but I get to see you again”. He grinned.

April shrugged. “I just left the letter on the kitchen worktop so it wasn’t a wasted trip”. She pointed to the rucksack. “That bag looks heavy, what on earth have you got in it?”.

“A sailor always knows that they need to be prepared, even when they are on land. I’ve got maps, waterproofs, a coat, a first aid kit, a compass. You wouldn’t believe everything that I can fit in here. Old habits die hard”.

“I know who to contact then if I ever get lost on the cliffs”. April smiled at him thinking that on the cliffs around Gull Bay all he really needed was a mobile phone. The island was so small that even if he had got lost, he would never have been very far away from a civilisation. “Where have you been?”

“Just for a walk on the cliffs, I needed to walk off that large lunch you gave me”. He turned and set off walking down the hill and April naturally fell in to step beside him. “I’m glad I have seen you actually as I was going to ask you something when I left, but you had disappeared. I asked the older waitress where you had gone and she thought you had gone upstairs”.

April cringed at the thought of what Martha would say if she knew that she had been described as the older waitress. At almost fifty Martha took real pride in her appearance and was never short of male attention which she encouraged, especially if the attention came from a much younger man. Not that she would have been impressed at the gap in age being pointed out. “I’d taken the opportunity to have a shower and get changed seeing as lunch service had finished. I live just above the restaurant”.

“Madeleine said you owned the restaurant, and the bakery as well. I didn’t realise, I thought you just worked there”.

“That is what they meant when they said they could not lose me from Gull Bay”. She smiled, a smile that was not entirely without regret. “It is why I can’t go sailing around the world, even if I wanted to”. If she was honest with herself, she didn’t want to go sailing around the world although she wouldn’t have been averse to spending a few weeks sailing around the Mediterranean with Ben if the opportunity had presented itself.

“More’s the pity”. It seemed to April that Ben’s smile also seemed filled with regret. “Can you at least come on a trip though? I have been told Les Minquiers are beautiful and well worth a day out”.

“They are indeed”. April nodded. It had been years since she had visited Les Minquiers, the most southerly islands in the British Isles. The small group of islands was uninhabited but had an abundance of birds and an amazing sandbank for sunbathing. She was tempted to say yes, but caution told her to be careful. She had only met him this morning and knew nothing about him at all. It would not be wise to sail off to an uninhabited island with a stranger, no matter how tempting it was.

“I’m not sure”. She decided to be cautious. “It is very busy in the restaurant at the moment and I have deliveries to make every morning, there is no-one else who can do them”.

As if sensing the real reason for her hesitancy he turned to her. “Look, I understand your reservations I really do. After all, you don’t know me at all. You wouldn’t be on your own with me, I am taking a couple with me, the guy I met in France who suggested that I visit Jersey and his girlfriend”.

“It is too short notice, there is no way I can do tomorrow. I’m sorry”. She shook her head disappointed. The truth is she would have loved to have gone and the fact that there would be others with him as well offered her some reassurance.

“I understand but we can fit around your work. If you have to do your deliveries then we don’t need to leave until midday. I’ve been told it would take me about 90 minutes to get there and back, so even if we aim to have you back at the restaurant for six in the evening that is still three hours that we have on the island. I understand it is beautiful but there isn’t really

anything to do so three hours will be more than enough time to sunbathe and explore”. He looked at her pleadingly. “Please say yes, it would be a chance for us to get to know each other”.

They were almost at the bottom of the hill now. She was tempted, and if it was just the afternoon then she could easily fit the trip in. Her deliveries would be finished by late morning and although she helped out at lunchtime if they were busy, she did not officially work and was not on the rota. As long as she was back before the start of the evening service then it would be fine.

“OK” she nodded throwing caution to the wind, and a little thrill of excitement fizzed up inside her. It had been ages since she had been on a date, and although this was not officially a date, Ben had said that he wanted to get to know her better which was the first time she had heard a man say those words in a long time. And a man that looked as good as Ben Howe had never said those words to her. A little uncomplicated romance could be just what she needed in her life, to remind her what she was missing. She spent all her time working and if she was not careful, she would end up in her seventies wondering why she had bigamously married both a restaurant and a bakery. Both of which may provide her with security but couldn’t give her any warmth and comfort on a cold winter’s night.

“Great, I am so glad that you have said yes”. Ben looked genuinely thrilled. “What time is good for you?”

“I can do eleven. That gives us a little more time there, but I have to be back in Gull Bay at six at the absolute latest”.

“I promise you faithfully I will have you back here for six”. Ben stopped and looked at her intensely. “Thank you for saying yes, you have made my day”.

“I’m looking forward to it as well, shall I bring a picnic?”

“Only if you want to, but I have fishing rods so I thought we could catch our own fish which we can barbeque. I’m assuming you are not squeamish about that”.

April laughed “I own a fish restaurant so hardly. It would be very two-faced of me to happily serve fish that other people have caught but not want to catch my own”.

“April, I think you are my perfect woman. I’m going to do all I can to persuade you to leave your restaurant and come sailing away with me. Until tomorrow”. He blew her a kiss and was gone, his long legs striding down the road towards his boat, his rucksack swinging on his back.

April smiled to herself. She got the distinct impression he had only been half joking when he had said that. She walked the few steps to Hope’s cottage, remembering that she needed to see her to ask her opinion about the open door at Samantha Jarvis’s house. She would also let her know about her trip tomorrow, even though she was sure that the old lady would not be pleased that April had decided to go off to Les Minquiers on a whim with a virtual stranger. She would have to reassure her that she was not going to be alone with him, that there would be others there as well.

It was only when she knocked on the door that she realised that she had completely forgotten to ask who the other couple was.

## Chapter 8



Hope answered the door as soon as she knocked. Rather than stand back and let her in she peered out in to the road, her alert eyes fixed on the back of Ben as he continued to walk down the quayside towards his boat.

“Is that the young man who has been sniffing around you all day?” she asked, transferring her keen gaze to April.

“Really Hope, I sometimes think you do not have a good word to say about anyone”. She glared at her in annoyance. She loved Hope dearly and valued her opinion and her wisdom enormously, which meant that she had to be prepared to ignore the abrasive way in which it was delivered. Hope didn’t look at life through rose tinted spectacles, but glasses ringed with thorns and brambles. Unfortunately, April had to admit that her judgement was right more often than it was wrong.

“Never mind that, is it him, or isn’t it?” She drew up her 5ft 3-inch frame as much as she could, leaning on the wall for support as she craned her neck to watch him through the now thinning crowd. “I’m assuming as he is heading for that old tub of a boat over there it is. How he managed to get from the tip of Spain to here in that old vessel I will never know”.

April looked at her old friend in amazement. Hope had been working in the bakery all morning and normally then returned home to eat the sandwich that Rachel had made for her, before heading out on a walk over the cliffs. She had few friends who could have passed on any gossip about the eligible stranger who had sailed in that morning. How Hope could have known where he had come from, she didn’t know.

“Yes, it is him”. April nodded. “His name is Ben and he has not been sniffing around me as though I am a bitch on heat as you so eloquently put it. I had a brief conversation with him in the restaurant and then I met him

on the road as I walked down from Samantha Jarvis's house. How do you know about him?"

"Come in and I will tell you, I've just made a pot of tea". Hope grabbed her by her arm and pulled her in to her small, dark front room. As usual every available surface to sit on was covered with an assortment of papers, books, knitting and clothes. April moved an atlas from the 1970's and a couple of boating magazines from one of the chairs at the table, and deposited them on top of a pile of magazines on the sofa so that she could sit down. A plate in the centre of the table held a half dozen Pastel del Natos, the Portuguese custard tarts that Miguel made, and April smiled to herself. She had a sneaky suspicion where Hope may have got her information from.

"Has Miguel been to visit?" She reached for one of the custard tarts suddenly realising that she had completely missed lunch, and given that it was almost six and she would need to be in the restaurant in half an hour to prepare for the early guests, she would not have chance to eat until almost midnight.

"Yes, and Rachel. Miguel brought me a piece of sea bass for my supper and these Pastel del Natos, and Rachel brought a couple of bread rolls. They popped in for half an hour". April suppressed a smile; she knew that Miguel had probably been asked by Hope to take some food to her. Hope saw free food as a perk of both the job and her relationship with April, and April doubted that she ever bought food for herself.

"That is how you know about Ben". It all made sense now. Although Miguel and Rachel both worked for her and were of a similar age and had become close friends, Miguel did seem to have taken on the role of the older brother she didn't have, and felt the need to look out for her. He had obviously told Hope that she had been talking to Ben in the restaurant.

“I knew that you had been all over each other in the restaurant. Although I understand that he was also flirting and carrying on with those high and mighty ladies who have nothing better to do than lunch. Disgusting carrying on like that at their age, they should know better. They are old enough to be his grandmother”.

“Not quite his grandmother, Hope, they are not as old as you”. April reddened as she remembered how loud and flirtatious they had got as the afternoon wore on. Quite a few of the last lunch guests had looked over to the courtyard to see where the noise was coming from. Even though she had left them to it when the ladies’ desserts had arrived, it would not have done the reputation of the restaurant much good if people had got the wrong idea and she had looked like she had been part of the party.

“Grandmother or mother, they should not be carrying on at their age. And you should not have been encouraging them, you run a reputable restaurant, not a knocking shop”.

“I think that is a little harsh Hope, they were only having fun. They have all lost their husbands in the last couple of years and so it would have done them good to let their hair down and have a good time. And they would have needed it as they had invited Samantha Jarvis and the atmosphere had definitely not been jolly whilst she was there. It was a relief to everyone when she left”.

“Miguel didn’t tell me she had been there”. Hope looked deep in thought. “That is probably why this Ben character appeared in the restaurant. I couldn’t understand why he would have wanted lunch after he had eaten such a huge breakfast”.

“What do you mean?” April looked at her with surprise. “Ben doesn’t know Samantha Jarvis”.

Hope shot her a quick look. “I think you will find he does. He was in the bakery asking about her this morning. That is how I know he sailed up from Spain”.

“Was he?” April felt her heart being gripped with an ice-cold hand. She had thought there had been something strange about the way Samantha had suddenly left the table when Ben had arrived, and that she had seen a wariness in his eyes when she had asked him if he knew her. He had denied it, but if what Hope said was true, and despite her age she had an excellent memory and a sharp mind, he had lied to her.

“Yes”. Hope was watching her carefully. “He came in and had a huge breakfast of pancakes, maple syrup and fruit as well as a couple of pain au chocolat and some granary toast and marmalade. He said he was starving after sailing across from France in the early hours and then told me all about his journey”.

April knew that Hope would have been only too keen to talk to him as it would have meant that she would not have had to do any work. It was how she managed to find out what was going on in the small community before anyone else.

“Did he mention how he knew Samantha?” April tried to keep the tone of her voice neutral and indifferent but imagined that she was failing dismally. Hope would be able to tell that she was very interested and would not let her get away without extracting from her why she wanted to know.

“No”. Hope shook her head and took a sip of her tea watching her carefully over the rim of her cup. He asked if I knew where she lived and I told him that she lived in the large house at the top of the hill. I did ask him how he knew her and he gave some very vague answer about coming across her and

her husband when he had been in Spain. I didn't really listen to be honest because the landlord from the pub came in for a takeaway coffee and a pastry, and was huffing and puffing at the counter because he had had to wait for more than twenty seconds".

Despite her misgivings about Ben, April smiled. Roland Farmer, the landlord of the pub, was one of the friendliest men you could ever wish to meet and if he was getting impatient at the lack of service, he must have been waiting to be served for considerably longer than twenty seconds. She wondered where Holly, Hope's granddaughter who had recently returned from Cyprus and who she had taken on in the bakery for the summer to help Hope in a morning had been, but that question would have to wait for another time. Given that Ben had lied to her she had more important things to worry about.

"Samantha Jarvis, is the reason I came to see you actually". She put her cup down and looked at Hope. "I have just been up to her house to take the check for the vintage champagne she drank at lunch and the back door was wide open".

"Was she in the house?" Hope put her own cup down and folded her arms on the table.

"I don't think so, her car wasn't in the garage, I could see because it was open".

"But it is unlikely that she would have driven it surely, if she had been drinking at lunchtime".

"I didn't think of that". April looked horrified "Do you think I should have called the police?"

“That depends, there may be a simple explanation. What was Ben doing up there?”

April looked at her, surprised she thought Ben may have been at the house. “Ben wasn’t up there, I met him on the road when I was walking back down”. She stopped as a thought struck her. He had been climbing over the stile from the cliff path, the cliff path that if memory served her right went past the bottom of Samantha Jarvis’s garden.

“Spit it out” Hope was looking at her. “I can see the cogs in that brain of yours whirring. What are you thinking?”

April sighed. “Just that he was coming off the path from the cliffs, the one that runs past the Jarvis garden. If he had been asking where she lived, he could have been there before me, although honestly Hope he doesn’t look the sort of person who would break in to a house”. She thought it prudent not to mention the rucksack that he had been carrying which looked like it had been full. The more she thought about it the more she began to realise that a map, compass and waterproofs could not possibly account for the shape and weight of the rucksack. There had to have been a lot more in it than that.

“Well, we know that you are not the best judge of character” Hope said dismissively, a charge that she often levelled at April and which April felt was totally unjust. “But let us not get ahead of ourselves and assume that because he had been asking where she lived, he had been there. It is almost time for you to go and open the restaurant and you don’t want to be tied up with having to answer questions”. She pushed her chair back and stood up. “I will have a walk up to Samantha Jarvis’s house and knock on the door, I’ll think of some reason on my way. If there is no answer and the door is still ajar, I will then phone the police. Don’t you worry about it”.

“Thanks Hope.” April stood up feeling grateful for her old friend. “I’ll see you in the morning”. Given their conversation she decided not to tell her that she was planning to go out with Ben on his boat tomorrow. Now she knew that he had lied to her about not knowing Samantha Jarvis she wasn’t entirely sure that she would go.

## Chapter 9

April had had a restless night. Since her conversation with Hope, she had been in two minds whether to go to Les Minquiers with Ben, or whether to make an excuse and plead pressures of work. He had lied to her, and she was apprehensive of the fact that the little she thought she knew of him may not be the truth. Common sense told her that it would be madness to get on a boat with a stranger she barely knew, yet curiosity reminded her that it was a golden opportunity to try and discover the real reason why he had appeared in Gull Bay.

As dawn broke and April dragged herself out of bed to get showered and drink two cups of the strong black coffee that she had set on timer, she knew that it was curiosity that had emerged the victor of the war in her brain. She had convinced herself that whatever reason Ben had for sailing in to Jersey, it had not been to cause any harm to her. He was completely unaware of the conversation that she had with Hope, and could not possibly know that she had caught him out in the lie that he had told her. She also couldn’t help wondering if there was a perfectly innocent explanation, that maybe he had met Samantha and her husband in Spain. He may not have been aware of Stanley’s death, had only discovered this on his arrival and then felt embarrassed when he had arrived and found out he had died. That though did not cover Samantha’s odd reaction when he had arrived in the restaurant. April shook her head to try and clear it of the disturbing and conflicting thoughts that were swirling around in her brain; there was only

one way to try and discover the truth and that was to spend the afternoon with him.

Rachel looked around in surprise as she walked in to the bakery kitchen, straightening up from the oven in to which she had just put several trays of pastries “You’re early” she said in surprise, “I have only just put the pastries in. They will need twenty minutes to cook and another twenty to cool”. She looked at the clock anxiously.

“Don’t worry, I don’t want to start the deliveries just yet. I am going on a picnic with Ben, the guy who sailed in from France yesterday and I just want to make a few sandwiches.”

“Is this the guy who was in the restaurant yesterday?” Rachel looked at her with interest. “Miguel said he was very good looking and very confident”.

“That sounds like him. It isn’t a date before you ask, there are four of us going and he is taking us to Les Minquiers. I haven’t been for years”.

“I’m glad it is not a date”. Rachel looked at her with a slight look of concern. “I wasn’t exactly telling the truth when I told you what Miguel had said earlier. He actually said that the guy was good looking and full of himself”.

April laughed. “That sounds like Miguel. I don’t know why he takes a dislike to any man who looks half way decent. It is as though he is jealous of them and he has no reason to be. He is very good looking himself”.

Rachel pulled a face. “I know. I have spoken to him about it. He gets so jealous and so possessive. It is as though he doesn’t trust them but I told him it gives the impression that he doesn’t trust me which is very unfair. He



accepted it and is working on it". She laughed. "Obviously it is a work in progress with his reaction to this Ben yesterday".

April looked at her in concern. "Everything is good with the two of you, isn't it?" Rachel and Miguel had been together for eighteen months and April hoped that there would be wedding bells in the not-too-distant future. She didn't like to think that there were cracks starting to appear in the relationship, even though she suspected that all relationships had their ups and downs after a certain amount of time. She herself had never been in a relationship that had got beyond the first down, and was naturally worried when she heard that anyone she cared for may be experiencing a rocky patch.

"Yes, absolutely". Rachel turned, smiling from the batter mix she was preparing for pancakes and waffles. "He is taking me to meet his grandparents in Portugal when the tourist season ends. They live in a small fishing village in the Algarve and my parents are taking a holiday there at the same time so that we can have a few days altogether".

"Good, I am glad". April smiled to herself as she grabbed a loaf from the basket on the work top. Rachel usually made bread puddings from any bread that was left over from the previous day as April would never use day old bread in the cafe, but it was perfectly fine to make sandwiches with for the picnic later. She cut a dozen thick slices and started to butter them ready to fill with ham, chicken, egg and cheese.

Rachel watched her. "I'll put some salads together for you later when Thiago gets here". She looked at the clock and moved over to check the pastries in the oven. "Why don't you start to put the orders together and we can just add the pastries at the end. Then you can get on the road before seven and should be finished by nine today. We have twenty orders but most of them are over this side of the island".

April nodded and went across to check the list of her deliveries. It would be good if she could be back earlier, it would mean she would easily be able to find a parking space before the tourists arrived. She could see through the window that it was going to be another glorious day. She picked up some boxes and started to pack the cakes, biscuits and pies that her customers wanted. Twenty orders were two more than the day before. It was going to be a squeeze to get them all in her car.

Despite Rachel's assurances that she should be back before nine, it was almost half past when she turned off the main road on to the lane that wound its way down to Gull Bay. Glancing through the open gates of Samantha Jarvis's house she saw that there was a police car parked in the drive. The garage beyond was open, and it seemed that Samantha's car was still not there. April wondered if Hope had called the police, or whether Samantha herself had called them if she had returned home and found her door wide open.

Her thoughts on the matter were overtaken by thoughts of a more immediate nature when she turned the corner in to Gull Bay and saw the number of cars that were already parked on the roadside. This was getting ridiculous she thought angrily, rather than worry about banning cars altogether it would be better if Marjorie arranged for residents parking bays so that at least those who lived in the bay and did not have access to a garage or a drive could park somewhere. Seeing a small space between a Mercedes convertible and a Range Rover on the corner that other people had obviously left hoping for an easier space further down the road, she manoeuvred her car with difficulty in to the gap. It took her several attempts and her car was almost touching the cars at either end, but she didn't need her car for the rest of the day and the other cars were likely to be gone by the morning.

As she got out, she looked at the Mercedes with interest. The roof was down showing a bright red leather interior. Mercedes convertibles were not an unusual sight on Jersey's roads, but this did look very much like the one

that Samantha Jarvis drove. She tried to remember if the car had been parked here the day before, but then she had been engrossed in conversation with Ben and hadn't been paying attention to her surroundings. When she had driven out of the bay this morning there had not been many cars parked on the road, but her mind had been on the boxes of pastries stacked all around her and she had not been looking at the cars.

Cursing herself for her lack of observational skills she hurried to the bakery to see if Hope had any news. As she reached the bakery, she noticed that Holly was serving the customers outside and Hope was sitting at one of the few occupied tables inside talking to Mr and Mrs Paget, two local residents who popped in several times a week for breakfast.

Smiling at Mr and Mrs Paget, and jerking her head at Hope in an attempt to indicate that there were three customers at a table to her left who were looking eager to be served, she walked through to the kitchen, noticing with irritation that Hope had not taken the hint to serve the customers and had instead followed her through.

"I've been waiting for you to come back" she said as soon as the door closed behind her. "I tried Samantha Jarvis three times last night and couldn't get hold of her so phoned the police this morning".

"I thought you were walking up last night?" April noticed with relief that the customers had managed to attract Holly's attention as she had attempted to walk past them and she was taking their order. She knew from experience that she would get no work out of Hope until Hope had told her what she had learned.

"I was, but on my way to her house I noticed that car of Samantha Jarvis parked at the end of the lane and thought she may be on the boat that she has down here, but she wasn't. She had been on it though because her black Gucci handbag was on the table".

“You went on to the boat?” April looked shocked.

“Of course I did. I shouted her name and when there was no answer I climbed on board and knocked on the door. It was unlocked”.

“She was carrying that handbag when she was in the restaurant for lunch” April mused. “So she could have driven down for lunch and then gone on to the boat after she had finished rather than walk up the hill home. Perhaps she was trying to sober up a bit before attempting to drive”.

“If that was the case then she must have decided to walk home later. Her car keys were in her bag but her house keys were not there”.

“You looked in the bag?” April was aghast. She couldn’t believe that Hope had rummaged in Samantha’s bag”.

“It might have given a clue as to where she was. I then tried to phone her three times at home but there was no answer”.

“Why didn’t you call the police last night”.

“And say what?” Hope snapped. “That I had phoned her three times last night and was worried because there was no answer. I would have had to admit that I knew the back door to her house was open and then I would have had a lot of awkward questions to answer as to why I had been wandering around Gull Bay in the middle of the night. Which I hadn’t of course because it was you who had told me the door was ajar. If I had admitted that, it would have dragged you in to it and the police would have wanted to know why you hadn’t alerted them yesterday afternoon. Don’t start accusing me of not doing my civic duty young lady when you haven’t

done yours. I phoned them this morning and told them I was worried because I hadn't heard from her".

April looked away. Hope had a point. She wished that she had phoned the police herself yesterday now, but hindsight was a wonderful thing. Regardless of the fact that she didn't like the woman, if something had happened to her and April had been in a position to help but hadn't done anything about it, she didn't think she would be able to live with herself.

## Chapter 10

Hope had been distracted by the Paget's leaving and so April took the opportunity to grab the platter of sandwiches that she had made earlier, and the picnic hamper that Rachel had filled with potato salad, coleslaw, a three-bean salad and a huge Victoria sponge cake, and made her escape out of the back door. Hope was in a bad mood because of her questioning and she did not want to antagonise the old woman any further by telling her that she was going to Les Minquiers with a man she had met not 24 hours before and an unknown couple.

Once home the decision had to be made as to what she was going to wear. Her initial thoughts, when Ben had asked her, was to wear the pink and purple one-piece bathing costume that she had bought in the sale last September, and which accentuated the curves on her chest and flattened the curves around her middle. Over it she had planned to wear a white crocheted poncho, and on her feet, white and silver wedge sandals. That was before he had lied to her about Samantha Jarvis though and she now did not want to give him any romantic encouragement. She opted instead for a blue and white gypsy style dress with long wide sleeves which came

down to her ankles. If they had any plans to go swimming in the sea, she would just sit on either the beach or the boat. Because it was a hot day, she grabbed a wide brimmed straw hat and oversized sunglasses. Looking at her reflection in the long bedroom mirror she was pleased that Ben would barely get a glimpse of any naked flesh and couldn't get any amorous ideas.

Shoving her feet in to the white and silver wedge sandals and grabbing a pair of flip flops which meant that she would be able to go paddling at least, she shut her apartment door and made her way quietly down the stairs. She did not want to attract Miguel's attention as he would no doubt have an opinion on what she was doing. She looked through the crack in the kitchen door that was ajar and noticed that he was busy filleting fish, whilst James was peeling prawns. They were both engrossed in their task and did not notice as she walked past and through the restaurant which had already been set up for what looked like was going to be a busy lunch service. She momentarily stopped and wondered if she should stay and help out but no sooner had the thought hit her that she discarded it. She was not due to work and both Martha and Magda were working as well as Frankie. They could cope and she had bigger fish to fry.

Making her way down the quayside, dodging tourists who seemed incapable of walking either quickly or in a straight line, she soon found herself at Ben's boat. He was on the deck sorting through some fishing floats when she waved her hand in greeting. He looked her up and down and smiled.

"I hope you have a swimming costume under there" he said taking in the all-encompassing voluminous dress that she was wearing. "It is going to be a beautiful day and I thought we could do some snorkelling and swimming as well as fishing".

"No, I haven't got one" she lied, crossing her fingers behind her back and thinking she was just as bad as him for not telling the truth. "I'm always so

busy I don't have time for relaxing or going on holiday".

"No worries" he smirked. "You can always go skinny dipping. I don't think there will be many people over there this afternoon. There will only be us four and by the time we get there we will all know each other quite well".

She froze, one foot on the side of the boat. She wasn't a prude and had been skinny dipping once with an ex-boyfriend when she was younger, but she was certainly not going skinny dipping with Ben who she had only just met. She was about to make some excuse and go back for her swimming costume when a noise behind her made her spin around.

"April Hart, what a surprise".

By the tone of his voice the owner thought it not a pleasant surprise. She would know that sardonic drawl anywhere. She looked around in to the face of Isa Van Leeuwen who looked very unhappy at the sight of her. Like April he lived in the bay, although she always tried to avoid him wherever possible as she neither liked nor trusted him. He had tried to ruin her business when he had first moved in to Gull Bay, although had redeemed himself recently when he had rescued her after she had discovered who had murdered the restaurant critic and television presenter Maurice Devine. Typically, as he attracted good luck as well as good looks, he had been hired by Nelson Fieldhouse, the billionaire owner of the Sarnia Media group to replace Maurice and present a weekly cooking show on Sarnia TV called Infuse with Isa. The format was that Isa would visit a struggling restaurant and give a review of their cooking before helping them cook a much-improved meal. He had been in the Bay Harbour Grill with his latest girlfriend the week before and she had overheard him saying that the first series was going to be a gastronomic tour of Europe and he was going to France first before heading to Spain, Portugal and Italy.

“I thought you were in Europe” she said looking at his girlfriend and thinking that although she looked similar to the blonde he had been with the week before there was something different about her. Given that he seemed to have a different woman with him every time he went out, she wouldn’t be surprised if this was indeed someone different.

“I was. We finished filming in France and go to Spain at the weekend. I had five days free and was going to stay in France but I met this reprobate in a bar in St Malo, discovered he was coming to Jersey and after a few too many Cognacs decided to hitch a ride with him. Nelson is happy, he doesn’t have to fork out for a hotel for me for the next four nights, and I am flying down to Spain in Nelson’s private jet on Saturday”.

“And I’m happy too that I get to spend more time with him” his companion said hugging him proprietary tightly around the waist. She had been looking at April with a tight smile but relaxed when she realised that she was not going to have competition. “I’m Gemma, Isa’s girlfriend”.

Isa scowled and shrugged her arm away, obviously displeased that she had staked a semi-permanent claim on him. “Are we about ready to get underway” he asked Ben, jumping aboard and crouching next to him.

“Can we wait ten minutes? I just need to go back and get a swimming costume”. If April had had reservations about skinny dipping with Ben, she was certainly not going to let Isa grab a glimpse of her naked body. He would not doubt make some sarcastic comment about her shape.

“You don’t need to go back” Gemma said brightly. “I have brought three with me, you can borrow one of mine”.

“That’s a shame” Ben winked at Isa. “I suggested that she could go skinny dipping”.



Isa smiled tightly “Typical of you Gemma to spoil our fun”. April could see that the look that he gave her made Gemma regret offering the use of one of her costumes, although she clearly thought that was better than the alternative suggestion that Ben had had. “Hopefully one of them will fit you” she said cattily as she brushed past her to stand next to Isa. “Where shall I put my bag babe?” she asked pointing at the large summer bag she had brought with her that was larger than the suitcase that April used on the odd occasion she managed to get away.

“You can put it down in the cabin”. Ben pointed through the open door where some steps led down in to a quite spacious cabin with a table, a galley kitchen and three bench seats with orange and brown patterned cushions that had clearly been in fashion in the seventies when the boat was made and hadn’t been changed since. “There are some beers in the fridge, and wine, and tonic water if you want a gin and tonic. I’ve also got some of that cognac left if you want that mate”. He nudged Isa.

“Bit early for me”. Isa grabbed the picnic hamper off April as she jumped down in to the boat. “Jesus, April, I know that you own a café and are used to mass catering but how many people are you planning to feed?”

“What we don’t eat I can leave for Ben”. She took the hamper off him. “Do you want me to put these in the kitchen?” she asked Ben.

“Please” Ben smiled up at her, a smile so genuine and happy that she regretted judging him for the lie. It was only a small lie that he had told and there could well be a plausible explanation. She was not going to let it, nor the company spoil the day. Isa was scowling at her as though she had done something wrong.

“Is there a problem?” She challenged.

“No” he said as Gemma joined him and looked up at him adoringly. He planted a gentle kiss on her lips and April turned away. What was it about Isa that always made her on edge? She looked at Ben who was looking at her and Isa, an odd look on his face.

“I’ll put these in the kitchen”. She smiled at Ben as she picked up the hamper. “Do you want me to bring you a beer?”

“That would be great” he said, smiling, although his smile and tone lacked some of the warmth of earlier. She hoped that whatever was eating him would disappear quickly. Whatever misgivings she had about him, the company, or the trip, she was determined to enjoy the day. It was so rare that she had the day off and she was after all in the company of two gorgeous men, even though they both had serious flaws and neither could be trusted.

She decided to put the lie and the questions out of her mind and just try to relax. If an opportunity presented itself to question Ben, she would take it, but she wouldn’t force it. Ben was staying in Gull Bay for the next couple of weeks and so there would be time enough when they returned to shore to try and understand what if any relationship he had with Samantha Jarvis. She seriously doubted that anything could happen in the few hours that they were away that would shed any light on what had happened to her and where she may have gone.

## Chapter 11

The sea was calm and April leaned back against the side of the ship and watched Ben as he steered the ship over the water. He had stripped off his

shirt and his lithe body was tanned, a slight smattering of dark blonde hair covering his defined chest and long legs. His was a body that had been sculpted by manual work rather than in the gym. He had told her that as well as making money as a travel writer he had worked his way around Europe and North Africa for the last five years, working on small holdings, building sites, vineyards and on an archaeological dig. It was an easy going and laid-back life, the one that he had chosen, but April was under no illusions, it was also a hard life, and one where he lived very much from one day to the next. His boat which was not only his means of transport, but his home, was expensive to run and maintain and as she looked around her it looked more battle scarred than him.

She took another sip of the gin and tonic that Gemma had poured her, which contained far more gin than tonic and transferred her gaze to Isa, who lounged on a hammock. Gemma was kneeling on the floor next to him, massaging his feet and no doubt his ego. In contrast to Ben, Isa's body had been built in the gym and finished in the bathroom, his washboard stomach showing the merest hint of a six pack and broadening out to a muscular chest, covered in dark hair that he had clearly shaved. His arms were huge, the muscles knotted and as she let her gaze move slowly downwards to the turquoise briefs that left little to the imagination she saw that he was well developed in every region. She bit her lip and blushed slightly.

"What are you thinking about?" She was brought out of her daydream by Isa's voice, and as she looked up, she saw that he was looking at her, a grin on his face. She had been caught staring. Gemma had stopped massaging his feet and was stroking his calves, a look of malice on her face. If looks could kill the side of the boat on which she was leaning would give way and she would fall and drown in the waters below.

She had to think quickly. She couldn't admit to him what she was really thinking, she wouldn't dare admit that to herself, but she could hardly deny the fact that she had been ogling him, given that she was doing it so openly.

“I was just thinking that you will probably lose your six-pack given the new job that you have. It’s going to be difficult to maintain your physique when you are eating your way around Europe”.

“Not really”. Isa swung his legs, kicking Gemma’s hand away in the process and sat on the edge of the hammock looking at her. “I do two hundred press ups and two hundred sit ups every morning. It means I can pretty much eat what I like”.

“I can vouch for that”. Gemma smiled up at April, a smile that did not quite meet her eyes. “I counted them this morning, didn’t I babe?”. She put her hand on this thigh and kept it there, looking at April as though challenging her to try and steal him away from her.

April mentally rolled her eyes, or thought she had, but wondered by the flash of annoyance in Isa’s own whether she had in fact actually rolled them. “If you had a proper job like Ben, you wouldn’t need to do all those exercises” she said, and was rewarded by a wide grin from Ben. “A natural look is so much better than artificial”.

She wasn’t sure why she had said it, but if she was hoping to provoke a reaction, she was not disappointed as she saw the barb had hit home. “I don’t think you can comment on anyone else’s body without showing your own”. Isa lifted himself off the hammock and walked the few steps across the deck to take a second can of beer out of the cool box by Ben’s seat. “Why don’t you slip in to one of Gemma’s bikinis and we can offer you our unadulterated opinions on your body. What do you say Ben?” he passed a beer to Ben. “Shall we give her points out of ten?”.

“I’d definitely give her a ten” Ben said looking at her with a smile that would probably melt most women’s hearts but only slightly thawed hers.

April wondered if her heart was meltable, a thought she wasn't about to put to the test by looking at Isa.

“Well given that it would probably kill Isa to give me any more than a zero, we can assume that between you I will rate an average five”. That could be considered generous she thought to herself, wondering if the twice weekly jogging sessions she did counteracted the daily cake tasting sessions she indulged in, for quality control purposes of course.

“We barely know each other, and yet you seem to know me so well”. Isa flashed her a rare smile that seemed full of warmth. “Although as per usual you are automatically assuming the worst”.

“That way I'm never disappointed”. She parodied a saying from Hope whose motto it was to always imagine the worst. “Anyway, I'm happy to stay dressed as I am, I'm quite comfortable and the sun is very hot”.

“You're going to get wet though”. Ben cut the engine and the boat drifted to a stop. “I can't get any closer to the island than this because of the rocks. We are going to have to swim ashore”. April shielded her eyes from the sun and looked across towards the sandbank that stretched out towards the sea. It was a good two hundred metres away.

“Bad luck” Isa grinned and walked across to Gemma who was looking mutinous. “Why don't you show April the other two bikinis you have brought, let her choose the one that fits her best”.

“I don't think any of them are going to fit” Gemma answered sulkily looking at April. “They are going to be far too small”.

“I’m sure that she will manage to squeeze in to one of them”. He touched her lightly on the back of her thigh and tickled her which made her giggle with pleasure. He whispered something in to her ear and she nodded.

“Alright” she agreed sullenly. “I’ll see if one of them fits. Come on April, they are in my bag on the table down in the cabin”.

She opened the door in to the cabin and April reluctantly followed. She was annoyed with herself for not bringing her swimming costume as it now meant she was going to have to wear a bikini. She had been in two minds whether to refuse or not and just stay on the boat but she didn’t want to spoil the day, and the truth was she did want to sunbathe. She was so busy cursing herself for her stupidity that she did not hear what Gemma had said.

“Pardon?” she asked, wondering why Gemma was scowling at her.

“I said how do you know Isa?”

“I don’t really” she was surprised by the tone of the question which had come across very accusatory. “I just know of him because we live close to one another and he briefly worked for me in the bakery. And of course, he was in the bake-off recently and I was one of the judges. We know each other in passing but I wouldn’t say I know him”.

“Oh”, Gemma opened the zip of her bag and pulled out two of the tiniest bikinis April had ever seen. One was white which she mentally discounted straight away as one drop of water would render it see through and therefore completely pointless. The other one had a leopard print design. April put out a silent prayer to the universe that it would fit because otherwise her choice was going to be to stay on the boat or swim across to the island naked. Neither option appealed.

“Have you ever been to his apartment?” It suddenly dawned on April why she was asking the questions. She was jealous. If she was going to take a dislike to every woman she thought Isa had slept with then April suspected she would find herself with very few female friends on the island. His eligible bachelor status was about to get even higher once he found himself on television, a status that April imagined he would take advantage of to the fullest.

“No, why would I have?” It was only a half truth. She had not been to the apartment that he lived in now, but had visited him at the previous apartment he rented. It was only to sack him though and not to jump in the sack with him, which is what she presumed Gemma was really trying to find out. She needed to stop this line of questioning dead for if Gemma continued, she would never get the chance to try on the bikini and Isa and Ben would come down looking for them. She did not want to be caught by either of them in a state of undress.

“Look Gemma” she said firmly. “I barely know Isa and have absolutely no intention of getting to know him any better which is a view that I would imagine Isa shares about me. She gave a half laugh. “It is probably the only thing we have in common”.

“I’m not worried about you”. Gemma threw the bikinis on the table dismissively “You had better try them on but I don’t think they are going to fit”. She turned and headed for the deck. It sounded to April that Gemma’s last comment had been said to reassure herself more than anything else. She was glad that she had no romantic illusions and could just enjoy the day rather than trying to impress someone else. She sighed as she looked at the bikinis, this was going to be an ordeal.

She went through the door in to the private space that she assumed Ben used as a bedroom. She didn’t expect either of them to peek through the window in to the cabin as she was changing, but she was going to make

sure they couldn't. To her surprise the bikini fit. It didn't turn her in to a model, she hadn't expected it to, but she filled out the top perfectly and the clever cut of the bottoms pulled in her waist and tightened her thighs. As she looked at herself in the mirror she was pleasantly surprised at the result, the extra stone she had been carrying over the winter had all but disappeared due to the jogging sessions and the odd cake that she tried now and then had not done as much damage as she had expected. She turned this way and that, marvelling at how good she actually looked and stubbed her toe on something hard that was under the bed. Bending down to rub it she glanced at the offending box and noticed with a start that it was a black lacquered jewellery box with the letters SM inlaid in crystals on the top.

SM must stand for Samantha MacQueen she thought with a jolt. MacQueen had been Samantha's maiden name, she knew that because her chain of beauty salons was called Live like a MacQueen. This had to be Samantha's jewellery box and her mind was instantly transported back to yesterday afternoon when she had met Ben, and his rucksack had been both heavy and bulky. Had he been carrying this jewellery box, and if so, had this meant that he had been the one who had been in to Samantha's house and left the door wide open?

She could hear laughing and joking on the deck at the back of the boat and so with shaking fingers pulled out the jewellery box from its hiding place under the bed to have a closer look. Opening it she sat back with a start. It was filled not only with jewellery, but watches and expensive looking pens. The value of the contents of the box had to come to many hundreds of thousands of pounds. As she sifted through the bracelets, necklaces and diamond encrusted Rolex watches she came across something that she recognised, a bracelet with two rows of diamonds flanking a row of emeralds. She had seen that bracelet before, for Samantha had been wearing it at the lunch with the ladies from the Tuesday club. And if it had found its way in to this box then this must mean that Ben had met with Samantha yesterday afternoon. Before she had disappeared.



## Chapter 12

“What is taking you so long?”

She started, guiltily at the sound of Ben’s voice shouting at her from outside the cabin. She heard muffled voices and then a laugh and thought that Isa, or perhaps Gemma had made a joke at her expense.

“I’m just coming, it took me a while to get in to this bikini” she lied. At least it was a plausible excuse that would not be challenged. She grabbed her dress and put the emerald and diamond bracelet in to one of the large pockets at the front. She wouldn’t ask Ben about it, would instead take it to the police as soon as she got to shore. Closing the jewellery box, she carefully lifted it down to the floor and quietly pushed it back in to its position under the bed. She did not want to give any sign that it had been disturbed.

Walking back through the galley, she felt on edge. If Ben had Samantha’s jewellery box, then he had clearly been at her house the day before, had just been returning when she had met him where the cliff path met the road. That he had gone up there uninvited she was in no doubt, if he had been there by invitation, or for some perfectly innocent reason, she was sure that he would have returned on the road. The cliff path ran past the bottom of Samantha’s garden, but the house was well protected by a wall and trees. To have gained access to her property he would have had to climb over the wall, for she had walked that path herself and she knew that there was no gate that led in to the garden. He must have left just before she arrived and she wondered if that was why the door had been open, he had seen her approach and made his escape quickly before he had been seen.

She had never thought she would have been glad to spend the day in Isa's company but she was. She was a terrible actress and she knew that she would struggle to play the part of a carefree woman when the man she had gone on a boat with had stolen jewels from a woman who was missing. Whilst she was in no doubt that Ben had stolen the jewellery box, she did not like to think that he had anything to do with her disappearance. If in fact she had disappeared. There may be a perfectly logical explanation why Samantha was not at home and could at this very moment be sunning herself in the garden of a potential husband number five, drinking his vintage champagne completely unaware that her jewels had been stolen.

"What's the matter, you look like you have seen a ghost?". Ben looked at her with concern as she emerged from the cabin and walked up the two steps that led to the deck.

"I went in to the bathroom, to check my appearance in the mirror and didn't like what I saw". She pulled at the bikini bottoms trying and failing to stretch them so they completely covered her. "You were right Gemma; it is a bit tight" she grimaced.

"Tight in all the right places if you ask me" Ben looked at her approvingly. "Who would have thought that you had a body like that hiding under all those baggy clothes that you wear".

She looked away, embarrassed, but not before she had caught the look that Isa was giving her as well. She felt like a piece of meat and wished that she had a sarong or a kimono to throw on. It was at times like this that she envied people like Gemma and Isa who were completely unashamed of their bodies and basked in the attention they got. She just wanted to cover herself up rather than flaunt what she had.

At least though her obvious discomfort masked the real reason why she felt so ill at ease, and Ben was completely unsuspecting that she had found what

he had hidden under the bed. She had been careful to remove all traces that she had even been in the cabin and had left her clothes neatly folded on one of the bench seats. She had not heard anyone come in to the galley when she had been changing and so she would just claim that she had changed there if anyone asked. Not that it was likely that anyone would, the other three were in high spirits at the thought of swimming to the island.

“Shall we have a race?” Isa suggested grinning. “Last one to the island pays a forfeit?”

April did not like the sound of this. “What sort of forfeit?” she asked, narrowing her eyes.

“Nothing that would upset you too much?” he winked at her. How about the loser cooks the fish that we catch when we get back to the boat?”

“That’s not fair” Gemma pouted. “Obviously it is going to be either me or April that loses”.

“Ok then, how about we pair up, me and you and Ben and April. The winner gets five points, second gets three, the third person gets one point and the loser gets none. The pair that loses cooks the fish”.

“Great idea, April are you up for that?” Ben looked at her.

“Sure” she replied, thinking that Isa’s scoring meant that the everyone but the first person’s placings were irrelevant. She was a good swimmer, but not a strong swimmer and she wondered how Ben’s swimming was. Looking at the two guys as they stood on the edge of the boat, she was struck by how different their bodies were; Isa was built for power, but she suspected that Ben was built for speed.

She got up on to the side of the boat and stood next to Ben. He winked at her and her heart gave a little leap. He was so good looking and she wished that she could enjoy the afternoon, but knew that with what she had found she couldn't. She knew he was a liar, and suspected that he was a thief, and did not like to think that he also may be a kidnapper as well. She looked across at Isa, she didn't like him, nor trust him, but knew that he would at least protect her if Ben realised what she knew. He was counting down, a grin on his face, his arrogance giving him the confidence that he knew he would win. He shouted go and she dived off the boat, aware that Ben's dive had taken him twice the distance that her own dive had. As she surfaced, she saw the blonde head of Ben a good five metres in front and the dark head of Isa a metre in front of him. A splash and a shriek behind her told her that Gemma had jumped in. At least she thought as she started to crawl through the cold sea, she wouldn't be last.

## Chapter 13

April walked out of the sea on to the sand to discover that Ben had reached land twenty seconds before Isa. Isa consoled himself by walking out to sea to grab and then carry a shrieking and giggling Gemma on to the beach like a hero lifeguard rescuing a stranded swimmer and then walking off to explore the uninhabited buildings. Or that is what he had said they were going to do anyway. It meant that Ben and April were left together on the beach. At least it gave April the chance to talk and she was going to use the time to attempt to do some general prying without making him suspicious. The last thing she wanted was for him to become wary and check the jewellery box. There were a lot of jewellery in there but the one that she had taken was very distinctive and he could well notice that it had gone.

She flopped down on the golden sand next to him and stared out to sea, idly looking at the boat bobbing a few hundred metres away. There were a couple of fishing boats in the distance but other than that the sea was empty. It felt like they were alone, miles away from anywhere, and she should have felt rested and relaxed. But the discovery of the jewellery box, and the certain knowledge that he had lied to her about Samantha Jarvis, put her on edge. The butterflies in her stomach fluttered with anxiety rather than in anticipation.

“You’ve been very quiet”. Ben lying next to her rolled over on to his side and propped himself up on one arm looking at her intently. “Is everything alright?”.

“Everything is good” she lied continuing to stare at the sea. “I think my body has shut down with the shock of not having to work, and it has passed the message to my mouth as well”. She forced a smile as she turned to him. “It is just so nice to be able to do nothing for a few hours, I very rarely get any time off”.

His face turned serious. “You work very hard; I was watching you yesterday. When we met, I didn’t realise you owned the restaurant, and the bakery further down the road. It was one of the ladies who told me. I thought you just worked there”.

“I love my work but it is an awesome responsibility. I have people working for me, people who depend on me for their rents and their mortgages. It means that I have to ensure that I make the businesses a success. And...” she stopped and bit her lip.

“And...?” he prompted, looking at her in concern.

April swallowed. “I have to make it a success for my grandma. She owned a café in the bay for fifty years. It was she who left me what is now the bakery”. She thought back with a smile to the old wooden shack that her grandmother had owned on the prime piece of development land that stood in the centre of the bay. “Although it is very different now to when she had it”.

“You were lucky”. There was a trace of bitterness in Ben’s voice that made her look at him in surprise. “I have had to make my own way in the world”.

This was her chance, April thought, to try and get him to open up. If she could just steer the conversation in the way that she wanted to.

“You have the freedom to do whatever you want though, that must count for something. I was planning to go travelling, had the trip all planned out, when I got the call to say my grandmother was seriously ill. I came back and discovered that she had left me the café and then my life seemed to be all mapped out in a different direction”.

“Why didn’t you sell the café and cut and run? That is what I would have done” He waved his arm at the expanse of sea. “There is a whole world out there waiting to be discovered”.

She shook her head and smiled. “I did think about it briefly”. She thought back to the day that she had found out that she had been left the café, the shock, disappointment and responsibility that she had felt. “But I guess that I thought I would be disloyal to my grandmother if I did that and so I stayed and turned it in to the bakery”. It hadn’t quite been that simple but she would find nothing out if she spent the time talking about herself. She wanted to find out about Ben.

“I’ve never had that family bond.” Ben said simply staring out to sea. “Nothing that would have kept me anywhere. Not yet anyway”. He turned and gave her a look of such intensity that she blushed.

“What did your parents say when you told them that you were going to sail around the world?” Her own mother had not really taken much of an interest in her when she was growing up, and had devoted much more of her time to the men in her life, but she still thought that she would have been horrified if she had announced one day that she was going to spend her life sailing around the world. It may have been an exciting life, but it certainly wasn’t an easy one, or as carefree as Ben made it out to be, doing a succession of jobs in the countries that he visited just so that he could continue the next stage of his journey.

“I haven’t got any parents. No ties to keep me in a place, no one to worry about what I am up to and where I am. No-one to notice if I disappear”. He laughed a hollow laugh and April felt for him. She could never rely on her own mother and had felt bereft and alone when her grandmother died, but she had friends, Hope and the security of a business. It must be awful to feel you have no-one. She touched his arm lightly, feeling the fine blonde hairs on his tanned skin. “It can’t be nice to feel alone”.

He shrugged. “I’m used to it. My mum sent me away to boarding school when I was six and I rarely saw her. She managed to farm me off to my friend’s parents in the holidays, and so Christmases were usually spent either skiing or in the Caribbean and the summer holidays were often spent in France or Spain. She died just before I finished university and I swear that it was the shock that I might want to live with her for a while that killed her”. He laughed bitterly.

“I’m sorry”. She genuinely was. Even though she didn’t trust him after what she had found she felt for him. “What about your father?”

“I never knew him and my mum never talked about him. The only time I ever saw her get angry was when I asked her about him. She started to smash plates and glasses and then hit me and so I never asked again. It was just after that that she sent me off to boarding school and I thought it was a punishment for asking” He shrugged.

“Didn’t your mum leave you anything in her will?” She felt noseey for asking but now he had started to open up she wanted to find out as much about him as she could. The boat was old but it was large and she knew from living in Jersey that even an old boat of this size would have been expensive. And from what she had seen when she had been snooping although it may have looked ramshackle on the outside it was well equipped with all the latest navigational equipment inside.

“Not really. I discovered after she had died that the apartment she lived in was rented. I used to think that she must have some money because she never worked and the school fees would have been expensive but according to her lawyer when the will was read out there was very little money in the bank. She had some nice pieces of jewellery and some antiques which I sold at auction, and with what I made I bought this boat and set off to see the world”

“And now you have sailed in to Jersey. What brought you here?”

“Nothing in particular, although I may be tempted to stay” he grinned for the first time in minutes. I wasn’t planning to at all, was going to spend some time in St Malo and then sail slowly along the northern coast of France to see the world war II beaches, but I met Isa in a bar and we got talking. He said he lived in Jersey so I thought I would visit. And I am glad I did” he looked at her appreciatively.

April just smiled. He was a traveller, he had no ties and his time was largely his own, but it seemed such a coincidence that he would sail to Jersey on a



whim just after meeting a guy in a bar. His story matched with what he had told Hope but he had asked about Samantha Jarvis when he had been in the bakery and her jewellery box was under his bed. St Malo was the French port that was nearest to Jersey. She wondered if he had been planning on coming all along, and meeting Isa had just given him a convenient explanation to use.

She was stopped from asking anything further by the sound of Isa and Gemma running across the beach “I’m starving” Isa shouted dragging Gemma in to the sea. “Double or quits, last pair to the boat cooks lunch”. He plunged in to the water.

Ben jumped to his feet, a grin on his face “You cheating little...” he stopped and raced in to the water after Isa.

April got slowly to her feet. It was irrelevant whether she came last or not. She liked Ben, liked him a lot, but she didn’t trust him. Which was a shame she thought, because Ben seemed to like her and if she gave him the slightest encouragement, she thought he may stay in Jersey for longer than he had planned. Maybe even for ever.

## Chapter 14

It had been April and Ben who had cooked the mackerel that they had all caught, and they had spent an enjoyable afternoon sailing around Les Minquiers, exploring the little coves and swimming in the sea. It had been the longest time that she had spent in Isa’s company, and although she didn’t think they would ever be friends, he wasn’t as bad as she had thought. She even found herself, as they sailed in to the harbour, inviting

them all to eat in the Bay Harbour Grill that evening as a thank you for letting her join them. Isa and Gemma politely declined her offer as they had other plans, and Ben also shook his head, professing himself full. Ben had returned the offer with one of his own, a drink on his boat after she had finished but she had refused, regretfully. It would be late, she said, and she had an early start in the morning. And the truth was if she had gone, she did not trust herself to leave.

As she walked across the quayside to the restaurant to get showered and changed for the evening service, Hope's front door opened and she beckoned her inside. It was clear that she had been standing by the window waiting for her to return. "What is it?" she asked, shaking her head at the offer of a cup of tea "I haven't got long as I need to work tonight".

"Samantha Jarvis is still missing. I've had the police here to take a statement and they want to see you later as well but I told them you would be busy and they would be better off seeing you tomorrow".

"Was it Sergeant Tozier who spoke to you?" Sergeant Tozier was the local police officer for the parish of St Agnes and was a likeable laid-back young man, but even so April couldn't imagine that he would be overly impressed at having his diary dictated to by Hope.

"Yes. He had that miserable constable with him, you know the one with the long ponytail and the even longer face. She never looks happy. He was more than amenable to speaking to you tomorrow, but she tried to insist that they needed to speak to you tonight. When I pointed out to her that you couldn't tell them anything about her disappearance and therefore it would make no difference to them whether you gave a statement tonight or tomorrow, she soon shut up".

April sighed inwardly. For some reason PC Mallet didn't like her at all, and having been put in her place by Hope would have even more reason to

dislike her. April would be in for an unpleasant morning.

“What did you tell them? I need to make sure my story ties in with yours”.

Hope nodded. “If there are any discrepancies the police are sure to think that you are trying to hide something. They are fools, have no sense whatsoever”. Hope had a very poor opinion of the police, an opinion which had taken a battering a couple of years before when April’s café and home had burned down and the police had suspected her of doing it herself.

“Did you tell them that I had tried to call on Samantha and noticed that the door was open, or did you stick to the story that you had discovered it?” April felt uneasy. Her only reason for not contacting the police herself was that she had not wanted to upset Samantha if there had been a logical reason. Now her reluctance to annoy Samantha was going to backfire badly, as she was embroiled in a lie that could easily unravel.

“No, I didn’t, and don’t you get an attack of conscience and start blabbing that you found the house open. I know what you are like”. Hope glared at her. “I stuck to our original story that I had been trying to phone her, and when there was no answer, I had looked in on my morning walk. I never mentioned you at all, and there is no reason for you to say that you were up there”.

“I see” April was relieved but also surprised. “So if they don’t know that I paid her a visit why do they want to speak to me?”

“Because you were one of the last to see her. The police also want to visit Margaret, Madeleine, Penny and Daisy to find out if she gave any indication to them where she was planning to go. Not that they will get any sense out of them, they looked pretty drunk to me when they left yesterday. The police believe Samantha returned home after the lunch as the outfit that she

was wearing yesterday was on the bed, but they do not believe she stayed there last night. The police are not too alarmed at this stage as Samantha has only been missing for twenty-four hours and she could easily have stayed with a friend. A man friend as she is unlikely to have any women friends”.

April shook her head. “She did say that she had another appointment to go to when she left the table in such a hurry, and I assumed that it was because Ben had turned up, but perhaps it was completely innocent and she really did have to be somewhere”. She pushed her chair back as Hope’s clock on the mantelpiece chimed six times to indicate the hour. “Hope, I’m going to have to rush, we have a busy night and I need to get showered and changed”.

“You go”. Hope made a shooing motion at her. “I just wanted to catch you before the police did. I told them that you were normally back from your deliveries about ten, so they will be waiting for you in the bakery. If you are late, I will give them a coffee and a pastry on the house. We don’t want them sitting there all officious, it won’t do business much good”.

April gulped. It certainly wouldn’t. The last thing that tourists wanted to see when they were on holiday was a couple of police officers sitting in a café looking important. Much better to feed them so that they looked like they had just popped in for breakfast. Even so April resolved to speed around her deliveries as quickly as possible so that she could meet them at ten. She did not want them to have to linger.

As she hurried down the road to the restaurant, she was aware of something jangling in her pocket. It was the emerald and diamond bracelet that she had taken from Ben’s boat. She had intended to speak to Hope about it but she had momentarily forgotten, and there was now no time to go back. She would have to leave it for tonight and just hand it over to Sergeant Tozier and PC Mallet when she met with them tomorrow. It could wait, nothing much was likely to happen between now and then.

It was a thought that she was going to regret.

## Chapter 15

April was woken by shouting the next morning, and thinking that she had overslept leapt out of bed before glancing at her clock and discovering that it was not yet six o'clock. Wondering what all the noise was about she padded through her bedroom to the living room that overlooked the harbour, and cracked open the curtains to look out. What she saw made her jump back and wrap the curtains around her so that anyone looking up would not see her in nothing but the comfy old t-shirt that she slept in.

Not that anyone was likely to look up.

The quayside was swarming with a half dozen police officers, a couple of paramedics, a man and woman in white medical suits and a dozen fishermen who were standing around drinking tea and chatting to one another. That she was looking at a major crime scene was evident even before she noticed the yellow crime scene tape stretched across the road between lampposts. Looking to the right she noticed that the crime scene tape was tied to the handrail at her front steps, closing the harbour and quayside but leaving the road that ran alongside the beach open. A small group of residents, including Hope, were clustered about forty metres away, held back from coming any closer to the harbour by PC Mallet.

Dressing quickly April made her way downstairs and through the restaurant to the front door. Opening it, she peeked out, and saw that the police were surrounding a large bundle that was on the quayside. She moved to go down

the two steps that led on to the street and attracted the attention of PC Mallet who swung round.

“Get back inside” she barked. “No-one is allowed out here”.

What a ridiculous thing to say, April thought as she closed the door so that it was just open a crack, and peeked out at the swarms of people that were milling about. She was not going to be kept a prisoner in her own home. Retracing her steps, she climbed the stairs and met Rachel who was just on the landing dressed in her baking clothes.

“What’s going on?” she whispered. “I just opened the curtains and there are loads of police outside”.

“I don’t know”. April whispered as well, although she wasn’t quite sure why they were talking in hushed voices. “PC Mallet told me to get back inside when I opened the door so I was just coming back to get dressed for work. She can’t keep us cooped up inside when we have a business to run”.

“I’ll wait for you then and we can go out together”. Rachel opened her own door. “Miguel is still asleep; he can sleep through any noise”.

“I’ll only be five minutes”.

Forgoing a shower as she had had a bath before she went to bed, and was too intrigued as to what was going on outside to waste time, she dressed quickly and met Rachel again on the landing. Descending the stairs, they walked through the restaurant, but this time she opened the door boldly and walked on to the street. PC Mallet shouted at her once again.

“I told you to stay inside, get back”.

April walked towards her, Rachel following in her wake. “We need to go to work, we have to open up the bakery and I have deliveries to make”.

PC Mallet’s face went purple. “When I tell you to go inside you go back inside. How dare you disobey me”. Spittle flew out of her mouth, and the people at the barricade sensing a drama turned to see what the commotion was. “I will have you arrested”.

The shouting had attracted the attention of the police officers on the quayside and Sergeant Tozier came running across.

“April, Rachel”. He held out his hand towards PC Mallet as though he was concerned she was going to launch herself on the two women and he needed to hold her back. “This is a crime scene; you can’t be out here”.

“We need to go to work” April explained patiently. “What has happened?”

“That is none of your business, you do not ignore a police officer. I...” PC Mallet was so angry she looked like she was going to burst. Her long pony tail swished backwards and forwards as she shook with rage.

“It’s alright Tina, I will deal with this”. Sergeant Tozier interrupted his colleague. “Could you ensure nobody else gets through please?”

He motioned for April and Rachel to move to one side and walked with them towards the railings which ringed the beach next to the harbour. “A couple of the fishermen have found a body washed up on the rocks just outside the harbour early this morning. We need to keep people out of the harbour whilst we complete our examinations. We can’t have people

walking about even though it is unlikely that you are disturbing anything out here.” He smiled at her.

April’s thoughts immediately swung to Samantha Jarvis who had been missing for the last couple of days. Was the body hers, and had she had an accident or was it something more sinister? “Do you know who the body is?” she asked.

“Now you surely can’t expect me to tell you that, or give you any details”. Sergeant Tozier smiled. “You are just going to have to put that legendary curiosity on hold until we have completed a formal identification and the next of kin have been informed”.

“How did they die?” April couldn’t help herself. If the body had been found in the water, then it suggested drowning, but she couldn’t help thinking of the open door that she had found at Samantha Jarvis’s home. She felt a pang of guilt. If the body was indeed Samantha’s and she had been attacked in her home, then April may have been able to do something about it. She desperately hoped that the body was not hers, that it was some unfortunate sailor or swimmer who had had an accident well away from the shores of Jersey and had floated here on the tide.

“We will know more when we have examined the body”. He looked back at where the ambulance doors had been closed. It looks like they were about to take the body away. “I will ask PC Mallet to open the cordon to let you through so that you can get to the bakery, but I’ll warn you now, she will have strict instructions not to let you back in until we have cleared the area”.

“We only wanted to go to work, I don’t know what her problem is with me”. April nodded towards PC Mallet who was facing the crowd but kept shooting murderous glances at her. If looks could kill there would be two more bodies in the harbour.



“I don’t think she has got a problem with you; she just takes her job very seriously. You can hardly expect to have endear yourself to her if you ignore her instructions. I know this isn’t a crime scene as such, but it could have been and you cannot just walk through it because you feel like it”. He sounded mildly irritated and she accepted the rebuke.

“You are right and I am sorry. Will I be able to get my car out to do the deliveries though?” She looked back to where her car was parked, blocked in by the ambulance.

“It depends what time you need to do them. If you want to move your car now then the answer is no” he said firmly, and she knew that there was no point in trying to push it. Given that a body had been found she should count herself very fortunate that she had been allowed out of the apartment at all. A worrying thought struck her.

“How long are you going to close this area for? My restaurant is just inside the crime scene”.

Sergeant Tozier shook his head. “I can’t say but we are going to try and avoid too much disruption to the businesses here, we know that it is the tourist season. The fishermen need to get their catch delivered as well. It looks like they are going to take the body away now and so I would imagine we will need just a couple of hours to search the area for possible clues. I think the area will be cleared and open before nine”.

April nodded with relief. She was sad that a body had been found but grateful that her business would not be too disrupted. With the incident it may mean that more people would come to Gull Bay and she may even benefit from an increase in trade. As soon as the thought hit her, she stopped

as guilt swamped her. She shouldn't think like that she berated herself, someone had lost their life.

She stared across at the harbour, shielding her eyes from the sun. Sergeant Tozier had said the body had been found just outside the harbour, on the rocks that butted up against the outer harbour wall. If the tide had washed it in, then there was nothing that would suggest that the body had entered the water in Gull Bay. Regardless of them not having formally identified the body, they must know who it was and have reason to suspect that the body had come from the harbour for them to be looking for clues. Her gaze wandered along the harbour wall and she gasped as her eyes alighted on the bare granite stone.

There was a gap where Ben's boat had been moored against the wall. It was missing, which meant he must have left sometime in the night. He had had no plans to leave for he had invited her for a drink only twelve hours ago. Was his disappearance linked to the discovery of the body, and if so, did that mean he had something to do with it? She sighed. She did not want to think of Ben badly but the longer she knew him the more he seemed to have to hide.

## Chapter 16

The small café attached to the bakery didn't usually open until eight, but given that she was unable to do any deliveries, and there were a number of people already in the bay who were hungry both for breakfast and information, she opened early. Whilst Rachel busied herself taking the dough that she had prepped the evening before out of the cold store and fashioned it in to plaits, twists and crescents for the pastries that would take twenty minutes to bake in the oven, April set the tables both inside and

outside on the terrace. By the time that she had finished a crowd had formed at the doorway in eager anticipation that she was opening.

Normally on a Thursday morning she could expect to have a half dozen tables occupied when she opened, but on this particular Thursday she was full, and a few people had even bought a pastry and a coffee and taken it to lean on the railings across the road overlooking the beach. As well as her Thursday regulars, her neighbours in the few houses that lined the quayside had popped in, as had most of the residents who lived in the houses dotted on the hillside overlooking the bay. Those fishermen who had not been caught up in the discovery took tables on the terrace outside, and even a couple of the police officers called in for a quick coffee and one of Rachel's chocolate nut plaits. She took Sergeant Tozier his favourite almond croissant as a thank you for letting her and Rachel out of their apartments, pointedly ignoring PC Mallet who glared across at her from her post on the cordon.

As she had expected, the discovery of the body was the only topic of conversation. She heard snatches of conversation as she dashed from table to table and was able to swap information with Hope who, unusually, was not lingering to talk to people but moving between tables herself. April smiled to herself. With so much gossip, and so many different theories, Hope wanted to gain as much information as she could for herself and come to her own conclusions, rather than rely on the views of others which may ultimately prove to be wrong.

Eventually the customers started to thin out as, with no firm news and only theories, the conversations dried and people went back to their own lives and businesses. There were many different variations of what had happened, but sifting through the various bits of knowledge the consensus seemed to be that it had been the body of a woman that had been found, she was dressed only in her underwear and she had been tangled in a fishing net. The assumption that most people were making was that she had fallen off a boat out to sea somewhere, and so they did not believe that the body

had come from Gull Bay. April did not agree with them, and from the look on Hope's face she didn't either. April believed that the body was that of Samantha Jarvis.

With Holly now able to cope with the very few customers that needed to be served, April and Hope had just settled down at a table to compare notes with a cup of coffee and a peach pastry each when four ladies entered who April had not expected to see. It was the Tuesday club. Thinking with a smile how quickly news travelled in the parish of St Agnes, she motioned to them to take the table in the corner and stood up herself to take their order.

"We have come for tea and information". Margaret smiled up at her as she sat down on the seat. "Is it true that they have pulled the body of Samantha Jarvis from the sea?"

"Ladies, ladies, wait please". Daisy was looking across at the counter where the pastries were arranged under large glass domes. "Can we order first before we pump April for information? She will start to think we have just come in to gossip when really we have come for breakfast". She winked at April.

"Nobody would ever think you haven't come in for breakfast Daisy" Madeleine said drily. "Perish the thought. I thought though you had told me you were eating breakfast when I phoned you earlier?"

"Shush" Daisy hushed her. "I didn't say I was having breakfast, I said I was eating some toast. I'll have an almond croissant and a pain au chocolat please April, oh and one of those Pastel de Natos that Miguel makes, they are wonderful".

"Thiago, Rachel's assistant makes them now, but they are just as good". April wrote down the order on a pad. "What would everyone else like?"

All the ladies elected to have a pastry, except Penny who asked for a black filter coffee. “I’ve already eaten” she explained, “and unlike Daisy I don’t want two breakfasts”. She grinned at Daisy to take the sting out of her words and April seemed to remember that before all the ladies were widowed Penny and Daisy had been close friends. Bereavement had brought the four ladies closer, but unlike Margaret who had owned her own ladies’ boutique and Madeleine who had combined being a schoolteacher with being a vicar’s wife, neither Penny nor Daisy had worked and had often lunched together.

“Coming right up” April turned and went to the counter to get their order. Hope followed her.

“Find out all you can about what Samantha Jarvis said to them at what appears to be the last supper. Odd that they should have returned to the scene of the crime don’t you think?”

April was aghast. “You don’t think any of those four ladies had anything to do with Samantha Jarvis going missing, do you?” She asked in amazement. “What possible motive would they have?”

“I don’t think for a minute they had anything to do with it” Hope snapped, “although I don’t think any of them particularly liked Samantha Jarvis. If you ask me though it is very odd that they should have asked her to lunch, and I cannot believe that it was done out of the goodness of their heart. There had to have been a reason. Me and Holly can cope here whilst you sit with them”.

April nodded and walked across to the table. Daisy patted a chair next to her as she put down the tray.

“April, you must tell us all you know. Is it true that the police have discovered Samantha Jarvis’s body?”

April shook her head. “I don’t know”. The ladies looked disappointed. “All I know is that a body of a woman has been washed up and she was wrapped in a fishing net. Two of the fishermen found her early this morning on the rocks”.

“Penny believes it is Samantha Jarvis, don’t you Penny?” Madeleine looked at her. “That is what you told me when you phoned me earlier”.

Penny looked embarrassed. “That is what I was told” she mumbled. “But that is how rumours start I suppose. I think we can all be a little guilty sometimes of putting two and two together and making five”. She took a sip of her drink.

“The fact that Samantha has been missing since Tuesday afternoon, and has still not surfaced does rather suggest it could be her though.” Madeleine took a drink of her tea. “It does in this situation rather suggest that two and two makes four”.

“If it is Samantha, how do you think she ended up in the water?” Margaret cut her pastry in to four quarters “And how on earth did she get herself wrapped up in a fishing net? She was surely not fishing on that yacht of hers.”

“She may have fallen off her boat”. Daisy sprayed pastry crumbs on to her plate “She was pretty drunk when she left us on Tuesday”.

“She was not drunk” Madeline looked at her. “She had drunk most of the champagne, but only had one glass of red wine. She left quickly before she

could finish the bottle of wine. April did you see her that evening when you went to present her with the check?"

"I didn't have time to go and see her" April lied, wishing for the hundredth time that she had just phoned the police when she had found the house open. "Did she give any indication of what she was going to do when she left the lunch? I heard her say that she had an appointment that she needed to keep".

"No" Penny answered. "It was the first time she had mentioned it. She only said it when that young man appeared. I got the feeling that she knew him and she was just making some sort of excuse to leave".

"That was Ben" April answered. "He told me that he didn't know her but I got the feeling that he did." She hesitated unsure whether to say what was on her mind.

"Go on, what do you want to say?" Madeleine was looking at her perceptively "I know that there is something that is on your mind, and five heads are better than one you know".

April nodded and bit her lip. "I went out on Ben's boat yesterday, he invited me to go to Les Minquiers with him and when I was on the boat, I found this". She took the emerald and diamond bracelet out of her pocket and put it on the table. She didn't mention the other jewellery she had also found. "It was under the bed".

"You found it under the bed" Margaret looked at her in amazement. "Ben's bed?".

“Yes” April reddened at the assumption that Margaret had obviously made. “I had gone in to the cabin to get changed in to a swimming costume and my toe knocked against it. I’m sure that Samantha was wearing this at lunch on Tuesday”.

“Yes, she was” Margaret looked at Penny. “Do you remember Penny, you asked her where she had got it?”

Penny nodded. “Yes, I thought it was quite striking. She said it was a gift”. She leaned across the table. “So, this suggests that they did know each other and that Ben and Samantha met up later on his boat. I’m sure that the police will want to interview Ben, have you spoken to them April?”

“Not yet. I was going to give the police a call this morning but in all the excitement I forgot to mention it. And now Ben’s boat has gone”. She didn’t contradict Penny for her assumption that Samantha had been on Ben’s boat although she thought herself that the bracelet had been taken from Samantha’s house with all the other jewellery.

“Gone?” Madeleine looked shocked. “I thought he had said that he was staying a few weeks”.

April nodded. “That is what he said to me, but the boat has gone. There is a space along the harbour wall where his boat was moored. I think he must have left sometime in the night”.

“This seems clear enough” Penny sat back in her chair. “It seems to me that Samantha and Ben must have met up on his boat on Tuesday afternoon and whether an accident or not, Samantha somehow ended up in the water and drowned. Ben maybe hoped that Samantha’s body would float out to sea but now that it has surfaced he has been forced to leave himself. Such a shame,



he seemed such a nice lad. I don't suppose he will stay missing for long; the police are sure to find him".

"It certainly seems that way" Madeleine nodded. "You must tell the police what you know April"

April nodded absently, much as this seemed the obvious conclusion to draw, she did not think it had happened like that. It was of course plausible that Samantha having discovered her jewellery had been stolen suspected Ben and went to confront him later that night, but Ben had seemed so carefree, so relaxed on their trip to Les Minquiers that she could not believe he had harmed her. Hope often said that she was a bad judge of character but was she so bad that she had spent the day with a murderer the day after he had killed and not suspected a thing? She was distracted in her thoughts by a group of seven tourists that had just come in to the café. They were insisting that they did not want to sit outside, and as there were no tables large enough to accommodate them inside, they wanted two pushed together. Hope was not prepared to do that and was suggesting that they sit on two neighbouring tables and both parties seemed unprepared to give way. With a word of apology to the ladies, she walked across to sort the problem out.

A compromise that the group was happy with was reached eventually and April took their order. It was starting to get busy again as the locals were giving way to the tourists who had come to Gull Bay to get an early start on the beach. As the harbour was still cordoned off the natural place to find out what was happening was the busy bakery and café, and April spent the next fifteen minutes alternatively taking orders and fielding questions. She was reluctant to answer the many questions she received truthfully, as a body in the water was hardly going to promote Gull Bay as a tourist destination, and so she limited her explanations to saying that someone had died and she didn't know any of the details. She was just heading for the kitchen to take an order for scrambled eggs and English muffins when she felt a tap on her shoulder. It was Madeleine.

“We have paid Holly” she said nodding in the young girl’s direction.  
“Remember to tell the police about Ben. If he has sailed off, they will need to alert the maritime police and the port authorities in France”.

April nodded, thinking that she could well have left it too late. Ben was an experienced sailor and if he was going to escape to Europe, she hardly expected him to head for one of the major ports. He would try and find a small secluded bay somewhere to moor up until the fuss died down. She would have to also tell Sergeant Tozier about their trip to Les Minquiers, he could well have tried to hide on one of the uninhabited islands although his boat would easily be spotted.

Thinking about their trip she remembered that she had left the emerald and diamond bracelet on the table that the ladies had been sitting at. Looking across at Holly, who seemed disinclined to clear the table, she went across with a tray to take the cups and plates away and retrieve the bracelet. Although when she had cleared the napkins, the table was bare. There was no bracelet to be seen. She looked under the table but it had not fallen on the floor.

The table was tucked away in the corner and was not passed by anyone. If the bracelet had been removed there were only five people who could have taken it. One of the ladies or Holly. As she glanced out of the window, she saw Sergeant Tozier and PC Mallet heading towards the café. With a sigh she knew that she would have some explaining to do.

## Chapter 17

“You should have told us sooner”. Sergeant Tozier looked serious and not at all happy. April had tried to butter the two police officers up by presenting them both with a coffee and a selection of pastries but the sweetener clearly hadn’t worked. Neither police officer had touched the pastries and it was clear that after her revelation they were not going to. In some respects, she was pleased. It could have been construed as some sort of bribe.

“I just didn’t think that it was important. I was planning on coming to see you this morning”. She felt embarrassed and could feel a flush on her face. This feeling of hers that nothing was important was getting herself in to all sorts of trouble, and she resolved that in future, however small or unimportant something looked, she would tell the police. She would no doubt very quickly get a reputation as the local gossip and timewaster, but better that than doing nothing whilst your neighbours were getting themselves robbed and killed.

“Let me get this right”. Sergeant Tozier took out his notebook. “You were out on Ben Howe’s boat yesterday and found a jewellery box under the bed. What were you doing in his bedroom?”

April didn’t know why that would be so important, if she had been there for any other reason than getting changed then it was hardly any concern of the police what she did in her private life or with who. She had no intention of antagonising the police any further though when she was clearly in the wrong. “I was getting changed out of my clothes in to a swimming costume”.

“And you found a jewellery box under the bed. Why did you open it?”

“I was curious. It was obviously a lady’s box and it had the initials SM on the top. I thought it might be Samantha MacQueen’s and as she was missing, I wondered if she had been on the boat. When I opened it, I saw that it included a lot of jewellery, but the piece that really caught my

attention was the emerald and diamond bracelet because I knew that Samantha had been wearing that the day before. As she was missing, I put it in my pocket with the intention of bringing it to you”.

Sergeant Tozier nodded thoughtfully. “I can see that makes sense, but why didn’t you ask Ben about the box, or if he had seen Samantha? You got on well with him, very well as you were happy to accept his invitation to go out for the day. Did you suspect him of having something to do with her disappearance?”

April bit her lip. She was now on tricky ground. The reason that she had not spoken to Ben was because she had found the door to Samantha’s house open and had met Ben returning from the vicinity of Samantha’s house carrying a heavy rucksack. To admit that though would be to admit that the statement that Hope had given to the police was inaccurate, and she had no intention of getting the old lady in to trouble. Not that she was worried about Hope, who would be more than a match for the police, but she was worried what Hope would say to her. Which would undoubtedly be as unpleasant as it was vociferous.

“It just seemed odd that he would have her jewellery box, and I felt uncomfortable asking him about it”.

PC Mallet smirked. “You didn’t want to admit that you had been snooping around his bedroom”.

“I was not snooping”. April glared at her. “I have told you what happened. I stubbed my toe on the box that was half under the bed and bent down to see what it was. I was curious that is all”.

“So curious in fact that you not only opened it but removed evidence”. PC Mallet fired back.

“And I have explained why I did that as well. I was going to bring it to Sergeant Tozier”. She emphasised his name to show that she had had no intention of speaking to her about it. She turned to him. “I am genuinely sorry that I did not bring it to you last night, but I did not know how events would unfold”

Sergeant Tozier put his notebook away and sighed. “I can understand that” he said, “but I wish you had. We could have spoken to this Ben character before he had chance to leave. We have already alerted the maritime police, and the coastguard are out in their helicopter searching. We think he left last night though, certainly before the body was found and so he could have already reached France”.

“He left last night?” April was surprised. She had assumed that he had been spooked by the discovery of the body. If he had left last night though, then he could not have known the body would have been washed up this morning. He hadn’t said anything to her, or to Isa or Gemma about leaving. In fact, she knew that Isa and him had been planning on meeting up for a drink before Isa flew to Spain. That meant that something else had caused him to leave.

“Yes, Eric told us that his boat was missing when they left the harbour in the early hours of this morning. He didn’t say anything to you about leaving?”

She shook her head. “He told me that he was staying a few weeks, he was going to Sweden next but he didn’t need to be there until the end of August”.

“Well, something made him change his plans, and with Samantha Jarvis’s body washing up on the rocks and him having her jewellery box then it

looks like he could have something to do with Samantha's disappearance". He spoke as though to himself, and stopped suddenly when he realised what he had said.

April jumped on his words. "The body was Samantha Jarvis then?" It was widely assumed by pretty much everyone who had been in the bakery that it was, but no-one knew for sure.

"That is none of your business" PC Mallet snapped. "Don't push your luck. You should count yourself very fortunate that you are not being charged with perverting the course of justice".

Sergeant Tozier glanced at her. "Tina, why don't you interview young Holly, see if she can remember the bracelet being on the table when she presented the four ladies with the check? And then see if you can pay them a visit to see what they know. April did you notice any of them react at all when you showed it to them".

"Not that I can remember, they seemed more interested in how I had got it than the bracelet itself". April thought back and shook her head. "No, there was no reaction at all". She watched PC Mallet walk across the café towards Holly "She really doesn't like me." she murmured. "I have no idea what I have done to upset her".

"Tina is friendly enough when you get to know her. I guess some people just don't get on. I must admit you do seem to rub her up the wrong way". He grinned and she thought that he knew more than he was letting on but didn't press it. She had more important questions to ask.

"I know it isn't any of my business, but was the body definitely Samantha Jarvis? Everyone thinks so".

Sergeant Tozier looked around him, but there was nobody close who could overhear. He leaned across the table “Yes” he said quietly. “We think she had been in the water for at least 24 hours, possibly longer. The doctor believes that she was dead before she entered the water, there is a blow to the head but that doesn’t necessarily mean she was killed. It could have been an accident, although why she would have been tangled in a fishing net is anyone’s guess. We will know more later”.

April thought back. If she had been found this morning then that meant that she had had to go in to the water the morning before or earlier. To her knowledge nobody had seen her after she had left the restaurant on the Tuesday afternoon”.

“I was possibly one of the last to see her”. April thought back. Hope tried to call her on Tuesday night and there was no answer”.

“I shouldn’t tell you this”. Sergeant Tozier leaned closer, “but the last confirmed sighting of her was about four thirty in the afternoon on Tuesday. Eric and Dean were cleaning their boat and saw her sail her boat in to the harbour before tying it up and walking down the road towards the bay. We know that she got home because the outfit she had been wearing was on the bed. We just don’t know what happened to her after that”.

April felt uneasy at the news. She herself had left for Samantha’s house about half an hour later and assuming it took her the same length of time to get there, must have arrived thirty minutes after Samantha. Had Samantha disturbed Ben in the process of stealing her jewellery and he had killed her to shut her up? If that had been the case Samantha’s dead body must have been there when she was at the house and Ben must have returned later that night to dispose of the body in the water. She wildly wondered for a second if Ben had had the body in his rucksack but discarded that idea as soon as it had flitted in to her head. She was being completely irrational; the rucksack had been big but not that big.

PC Mallet returned to the table, her notebook in her hand. “Holly doesn’t know anything; she never saw the bracelet on the table but then she doesn’t strike me as someone who would notice it if it was perched on the end of her nose. She could barely remember who the four ladies were who were sitting there, and had to ask her grandmother for two of the names. I suppose you want me to go and interview them now?”

“Yes please” Sergeant Tozier nodded. “I’ll get on to the coastguards, see if they have had a sighting of this boat of Ben Howe’s”

“Some further information has come in from the port authorities about him”. PC Mallet looked pointedly at April. “If we have finished with Miss Hart then she can leave and I will give you the update”.

“I don’t think it is particularly private information” Sergeant Tozier said firmly. “I only wanted them to confirm the date he arrived in Jersey waters. I’m sure April will keep it confidential”.

PC Mallet looked like she didn’t believe him, but he outranked her and so if she had feelings on the matter, she didn’t voice them. She looked at her notebook. “He arrived in Jersey waters at 7.20 am on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June. There was one passenger on the boat, Isa Van Leeuwen”.

“That matches with what he told April” Sergeant Tozier nodded.

“There was something else”. PC Mallet glanced at April before consulting her notebook again. “Benjamin Howe is a shortened version of his name. The full name on his passport is Benjamin Jarvis-Howe”.



## Chapter 18

April needn't have worried that her car being blocked in would lead to a huge number of cancelled orders. News travelled fast in Jersey, and when the police eventually released her car mid-morning, the vast majority of customers still wanted to take delivery of their fresh pastries, pies and cakes. If they ended up with surplus stock that they could not sell, it was a small price to pay for having a visit from someone who had been on the scene in Gull Bay when the body was found.

It was a conversational tightrope she had to walk, she thought, as she revealed what she knew for the twentieth time and listened to the wild, wonderful and downright weird theories that her customers had on what could have taken place. On the one hand she was grateful that her customers hadn't cancelled their orders, and felt that their loyalty should be rewarded with some information. On the other hand, she had promised Sergeant Tozier that she would keep what he had told her confidential, and she was not in his best books for her tardiness in telling him about Samantha Jarvis's missing jewellery. She had therefore rehearsed a standard story on her drive which she felt struck the perfect balance between giving her customers something, whilst telling them nothing that could be used against her in the future.

No, she did not know who the body belonged to, but yes Samantha Jarvis was still missing and it was the body of a woman. The body had been washed up this morning and was tangled in a fishing net and the police suspected that it had been in the water around 24 hours. There were no clear indications of whether or not it had been an accident or murder and no suspects. Nobody had been arrested, but the young sailor who had sailed in to Gull Bay had left suddenly. All she knew about him was that he was called Ben and he had arrived in Jersey from France.

She could see the disappointment on the faces of some of her customers, but what she had given each of them was more than they had heard, so they were on the whole happy. She knew by evening that they would have all been on the phone to each other, swapping stories and theories. She hoped that the police would confirm it was Samantha Jarvis soon and would notify the next of kin, whoever they were, as it seemed to be common knowledge in the island that the body was hers. As she turned off the main road in to the lane that ran down the hill to Gull Bay, and drove past Samantha's house, she wondered who the next of kin was, and her thoughts flashed to Ben, who's name she now knew was Jarvis-Howe.

She didn't know much about Samantha other than she had been married four times. As far as she was aware she did not have any children, although she had not been born on the island and could conceivably have had children before she arrived, that she had left with a father or given up for adoption. If she had had a child before she had come to Jersey then the child would be about thirty. She did not know Ben's age, had assumed that he was around the same age as her, which could have put him anywhere between late twenties and very early thirties. She shook her head in frustration, no that didn't make sense, his surname was Jarvis. If it wasn't a coincidence, and she was beginning to believe that it wasn't, then he would be related to Stanley Jarvis, not Samantha.

Stanley Jarvis had been a local man, who had built up his company Jarvis Freight from nothing and as such had been very well known on the island. She flicked back in her memory to what she had read in his obituary in the local paper when he had died a few weeks ago. He had been married forty years to his wife Phyllis, who had died over ten years ago of cancer. The couple had been childless. He had married Samantha four years ago, a marriage that had come as a surprise to many, not least because of the twenty-six-year age difference. She thought back, Stanley had died just one day short of his 79<sup>th</sup> birthday which meant that Samantha must have been 53.

It was a mystery, and there was one person she thought who could maybe shed some light on it. Isa Van Leeuwen had met Ben in a bar in St Malo and they had spent the afternoon and evening drinking before sailing across from France to Jersey. Drink loosened lips, and he might have said something to Isa in passing that had not meant anything at the time, but with the benefit of hindsight could have a great significance. Isa was not her favourite person in the world and she knew that she was not his, but they had had a good time on Ben's boat yesterday and had seemed to draw some sort of uneasy truce in their hostilities. If she just turned up on his doorstep though asking for information, he would be unlikely to give it, but if she had a reason to go round then she may be able to get him talking and in conversation he may let something slip.

She smiled as she realised that she had the perfect excuse. She had taken Gemma's bikini home to wash and it was drying on the small balcony that jutted out from her living room. She would pop home and get it and then pay Isa a visit. It was early afternoon so if he had had company, they hopefully would have left by now. It was a chance that she was going to have to take. If he wasn't able to talk then she would just have to hand over the bikini and accept that she had lost her chance.

## Chapter 19

Luck was on her side. Isa opened the door wearing a tight grey t-shirt that emphasised the muscles on his arms and the tautness of his stomach, and pale grey baggy sweatpants. He smiled when he saw her, a tight smile that suggested he was not overjoyed to see her but neither was he dismayed.

"It's you". He opened the door wide and walked down the short hallway in to his open plan living room with plate glass windows at the end that overlooked the bay. It was decorated in a very minimalist style, white and

chrome, although there was a large purple sofa against one wall which meant the room looked modern rather than clinical. He flopped down in to the sofa and she chose one of the modern white leather chairs at the other side of the glass coffee table.

“I’ve brought Gemma’s bikini back, I washed it. Is she around?”. She looked around her, the apartment seemed empty but for the two of them but she thought she could have been in the bedroom.

“Thanks, I’ll give it to her next time I see her. She isn’t here”. He looked a little uncomfortable, as though he was not sure what to say. “Do you want a coffee or something?” He leaned forward.

“A coffee would be great, thanks”. April was relieved, a drink would make it easier to talk as it would prolong the time that she could spend here. She followed him to the other end of the room where the white sleek high gloss kitchen area was situated and watched as he filled the coffee machine with water.

“Did you enjoy the trip yesterday?” she asked perching on one of the high chairs at the breakfast bar.

He turned frowning. “Yes, it was good. Ben was disappointed when you left, I got the impression that he likes you a lot. Is the feeling mutual?”

April traced a pattern on the worktop with her finger wondering how to answer that. The truth was she had liked him, had really liked him until she had found out he had lied to her and she had found the box of jewellery. She knew she couldn’t trust him, could never have a relationship with someone she didn’t trust, but her brain didn’t seem to have sent the message to her heart.

“I think he is really good company. I envy him his freedom to do what he wants when he wants. He doesn’t seem to have a care in the world and I like that about him”. She looked at Isa. “I like him a lot, but not in the way that I think you are asking”.

A look that to April seemed almost like relief flitted across his face, and he turned back to the coffee machine as though he wanted to hide what he was feeling. “I’m glad”, he said eventually. “I know we don’t have a great history and there is every reason why you shouldn’t trust me, but I don’t think Ben can be trusted and I wouldn’t like to see you get hurt”.

“Why do you say that, I thought you liked him?” April was surprised. From what she had heard and seen yesterday it had appeared that Ben and Isa were like kindred spirits, both had a confidence about them, a certain arrogance as though they knew what they wanted in life and were both filled with the expectation that they would get it.

“Don’t get me wrong, I do”. Isa placed a cup of black coffee in front of April, surprising her that he knew how she drank it. “There is a huge difference between liking someone though and trusting them”. He brought his own cup and took the high stool opposite her. “You shouldn’t confuse the two”.

April sat in silence for a moment thinking about it. It was true she thought, and she guessed it also worked the other way round. When she had first met Isa, she had neither liked him nor trusted him, with good reason she had found out to her cost, but since then he had rescued Hope and saved her from certain death. He was someone that she knew that she could turn to if she needed help or protection, but she still didn’t really like him. There was a definite thaw in their relationship, but it had gone from icy cold to luke warm. She wondered what it would be like to thaw completely, reddening at the thoughts that sprung suddenly to her mind.

“A penny for your thoughts?” Isa was looking at her with interest. “Not like you to go so quiet, you normally have plenty to say”.

April couldn't tell him what she had been really thinking, to wonder how protected and safe she would feel if those muscled arms were wrapped around her. She made something up quickly.

“I was just thinking of what you had said about Ben. Why didn't you trust him?”

“There are a few little things, on their own they don't mean much but when you add them together”. He stopped and thought. “We met in a bar in St Malo and got chatting about Jersey, but I got the distinct impression that he knew that I lived in Jersey and that he had turned the conversation around to Jersey on purpose. He asked a lot of questions about people and places. I suggested that we moored up in St Helier but he was adamant that we sailed directly to Gull Bay, and I thought nothing about it but then couldn't understand how he had got a mooring at such short notice. I'm not saying that it was anything more than a coincidence that we were in the same bar, but I'd been there a couple of days as I had been filming and if Ben had been talking to someone about Jersey, they could have easily pointed me out to him.”

“Did he give any indication that he knew anyone in Jersey?”

Isa shook his head. “No, he said he had never been. Why do you ask?”

“He had asked Hope the first morning he got here if she knew where Samantha Jarvis lived. Samantha was eating in the Bay Harbour Grill later that day and when he came in, she left very quickly, without paying the check. Not that it will ever be paid now”.

Isa tutted with annoyance. “I know that she has a reputation, but she isn’t as bad as people say she is. If I speak to her, she will pay it straight away. I know her quite well”.

April didn’t want to think too much about how Isa may know her, especially as for the two years that he had been on the island Samantha had been supposedly happily married to her husband Stanley. But she had a bigger problem to deal with, it was obvious that Isa was just about the only person in Gull Bay who was not aware that her body had been found and she was going to have to give him the news.

“Haven’t you heard about Samantha?” she asked carefully. “If he knew her very well, she did not really want to be the one to break it to him”

“Heard what?” He drained his cup and pointed at hers to ask if she wanted a refill. She shook her head.

“The police found a body washed up this morning”. She corrected herself. “Actually, Eric and Dean discovered a body this morning, wrapped in a fishing net on the rocks just outside the harbour. It hasn’t been formally identified yet, but everyone is saying it is Samantha as she had been missing for a couple of days. I’m surprised you didn’t see all the commotion in the harbour this morning, you have a perfect view from here”.

“I got up late” he said, giving no reason for why he should have got up late although April could guess. “Poor Samantha”. April looked at him carefully as he spoke but other than genuine regret that someone had lost their life he didn’t seem especially upset by the news. “She was always so full of life”.

A thought struck April. If he couldn’t tell her much about Ben maybe she could approach the problem from another angle. If Ben was looking for Samantha Jarvis there had to be a reason, and if Isa knew her well, then he may have got an inkling from her as to what that may be.

“How well did you know Samantha?” she asked looking at him.

A flicker of annoyance flashed in his eyes. “I don’t know why you always assume that I am sleeping with every woman I know. I know you and I haven’t slept with you. She may not have been blissfully in love with her husband but I wasn’t going to take advantage of an old man. We met a few times because she was interested in going in to the gym business as an obvious side-line to her health and beauty businesses and wanted my advice. I did think about going in with her as a partner but then I got this TV job so put it on the back burner”.

“And did she mention Ben at all?”.

“No” He shook his head. “I’m going to ask him outright tonight. I’m not going to pussyfoot around. We have arranged to meet for a few drinks and



something to eat in the Pebbles Rest over at Gorse bay. Gemma wanted to come but as you were not available, we decided to just make it a lad's night out. She isn't happy but..." he shrugged.

"You'll have difficulty asking him" April answered. "He has left the island".

"Gone". Isa looked surprised. "I noticed that his boat wasn't in the harbour when I opened the blinds at lunchtime, but I assumed he had gone off fishing. Wondered actually if he had persuaded you to go with him. What makes you so sure that he isn't coming back?"

"According to Eric the boat wasn't there when they set off for their fishing trip at two this morning. Did you see him at all last night?"

Isa shook his head. No, me and Gemma just came back here. I got up for a glass of water about midnight though and drank it on the balcony and I could see that his boat was still there then".

"That means he must have sailed off between midnight and two".

Isa shook his head. "If that is the case it is odd that he decided to go in the middle of the night rather than wait to the morning. It suggests that either something spooked him or he did not want to be seen".

April nodded. She was beginning to get a good idea of what it might have been. If he had gone down to the cabin to sleep and noticed that the emerald and diamond bracelet was missing, then he would have guessed that one of them had taken it. And that he might have some very awkward questions to answer. It might have made him make the rash decision to leave. She hoped that wherever he was he was safe. For all of her mistrust of him, and the

overwhelming evidence against him, she could not bring herself to believe that he had anything to do with Samantha's death. He may have been a thief but she couldn't believe he was a killer.

Isa surprised her by asking her if she wanted to join him for a late lunch at the Pebbles Rest in Gorse Bay. She was tempted, not because she wanted to spend time with Isa, he had told her all that she thought he knew, but because it was her main competitor in the area and it would have given her an opportunity to sample the food. As a tourist destination there were several restaurants in neighbouring Gorse Bay but the Pebbles Rest was the only seafood restaurant that offered a Mediterranean style menu with a local twist like the Bay Harbour Grill. Anecdotally she had heard that the food was excellent if a little expensive and she had been trying to find an excuse to go which didn't look like she was obviously sussing out the competition. There was something else that she wanted to do though that took precedence today and so she shook her head, regretfully.

"I'm sorry" she answered, "I need to see Hope urgently before I start work this evening. I haven't got time. Maybe another day?"

The scowl that had started to flit across Isa's face at the rejection stopped and his eyes widened in surprise.

"Well I never April Hart" he grinned. "Is the ice maiden actually thawing?"

It was a nickname he had given her soon after they had met, when he had discovered that unlike every other woman between the ages of 22 and 92, she seemed impervious to his charms. She didn't like it but she had often wondered to herself whether her dislike of the name was because she suspected it was rather too close to the mark. She hadn't had a boyfriend since she had arrived back on the island to take over her grandmother's café five years ago, and was uncomfortably aware that her twenties were rapidly passing her by. She kept telling herself that she was too busy to be

romantically involved with anyone, but wondered if she was being entirely truthful to herself and she was now so used to being alone that she was scared of letting anyone too close. Ben had awakened something in her that had lied dormant for a long time, but if his disappearance had proved anything it was that her heart could not be trusted. Fortunately, in dealing with Isa, she was able to think with her head.

“If you want to think I’m warming to you think again” She smiled. “It would have been a great opportunity to try out the Pebbles Rest without giving my own money to Jessica Tripp. Can I take a rain check?”

“I’ve heard more enthusiastic acceptances to a lunch date”. His tone was offhand but as he turned away to look out of the window April could just see the hint of a smile creasing the corners of his mouth. “Sure, why not? I fly to Spain tomorrow though so it will have to be when I come back”.

“I can wait”. April picked up her purse that she had put on the sofa and walked to the door. “I don’t think the Pebbles Rest is going anywhere unfortunately. And neither am I”. She opened the door and started to leave, glancing at him before she shut the door wondering why he was ignoring her. He was on his mobile staring out of the window and she left the door ajar, intrigued as to who he was phoning. She heard him cancel a lunch reservation for two. Interesting she thought. He couldn’t have known that she was going to visit him which must have meant that he was already planning to go to lunch and the news that she had given him meant that he no longer had a lunch date. Had he been planning to take Samantha, or Ben, or was there some reason that Gemma now didn’t figure in his plans? She shrugged and put it out of her mind. Her head really couldn’t hold any more questions. It was answers that she needed.

Hope answered the door before April had had chance to knock once. “I’m glad you’ve come” she said pulling her in to the cluttered front room. “What is this garbled message Holly has told me that the police suspect her of stealing a bracelet?”

April sighed, looking for somewhere to sit and moving a pile of newspapers from one of the dining chairs and placing them on another stack so that she could sit down. “The police do not suspect Holly of stealing a bracelet, they merely asked her if she had seen it”.

“Who’s bracelet is it? Holly was mumbling something about it being your bracelet?”

April shook her head. “It wasn’t mine. I found it on Ben’s boat yesterday along with a box filled with other jewellery. It was the bracelet that Samantha was wearing at lunch on Tuesday. A row of emeralds flanked with two rows of diamonds. It looked very expensive”.

Hope groaned in exasperation. “That girl, I don’t know what to do with her. She cannot seem to keep a sensible thought in her head and speaks in riddles most of the time. Spends all her time day dreaming. It is typical of her to get the wrong end of the stick and think the bracelet is missing as opposed to being found”.

April felt compelled to stand up for her, although she could empathise with Hope’s frustrations. She herself was at her wits end with Holly who couldn’t seem to complete the simplest of tasks without getting it muddled. In this case though she was partly right because the bracelet was missing.

“The bracelet is missing Hope, it went missing before I had chance to give it to the police. Although the police do not suspect Holly of taking it, or at

least I don't think they do" she added hurriedly. "I believe they wanted to ask her if she had seen it".

"Why on earth would Holly have seen it?" Hope asked in surprise staring at April. "You were the one who had it, so presumably you are the one who has lost it".

Trust Hope, April thought to put an accusatory spin on it. The bracelet had gone from going missing to being lost. A subtle difference that apportioned blame firmly on April. Although April felt she was responsible, as she was the one who had dithered over giving it to the police.

"Missing, lost, stolen, taken. It doesn't matter how, just who. The police just wanted to question Holly to see if she had seen it. It was last seen on the table with the four ladies from the Tuesday club. I had taken it out of my pocket to show them and had then left it on the table accidentally".

"You left it on the table. A prime piece of evidence." Hope glared at her in incredulity. "Honestly April, I sometimes think you are as stupid as my granddaughter. How could you have been so careless?"

April sighed, thinking that there was no point in pointing out that her carelessness was due to having to calm down a party of tourists who were frustrated that they were not being served. If Hope and Holly had been doing their jobs properly, the jobs they were paid for, then she would have had no reason to leave the four ladies from the Tuesday club alone with the bracelet.

"The café was busy" she explained patiently, "and I needed to see to a large party of people who had come in. I inadvertently left the bracelet on the table because I was distracted".

“And when you went back for it the bracelet had vanished”. Hope’s eyes gleamed. “So, the obvious suspect is one of the four ladies?”.

April stayed silent. That was the obvious conclusion to draw and one she suspected that the police had drawn, given that PC Mallet was going to talk to them all.

“It could have fallen on the floor, or another customer may have picked it up” she said eventually, although she didn’t think either option very likely.

“Hardly” Hope snapped. “The table they were sitting at was tucked away in the corner and so nobody was likely to pass it. Holly isn’t very observant but I myself helped her clear that table when the ladies had gone and there was no bracelet there then. Just a lot of mess. Crumbs and napkins all over, spoons just discarded on the tablecloth where they had dripped. Those women think they are better than everyone else, but they haven’t got the manners to leave a table looking tidy and neat. What does it take to replace a spoon on a saucer?”

April didn’t answer, there seemed no answer to give. “I can’t believe any of those ladies would take a bracelet though. Why would they, they surely don’t need the money?”.

“Appearances can be deceptive” Hope nodded. “Certainly, Margaret and Daisy wouldn’t need the money as their husbands were very wealthy, and Margaret in particular was wealthy in her own right. Madeleine gives the appearance of being wealthy but she was a teacher and her husband was a vicar and I imagine her need to buy a house when her husband died probably took most if not all of the money that she had”.

“She was the wife of a vicar” April explained. “She is hardly likely to have stolen a bracelet”.

“Just because you are religious does not mean you don’t sin. It just gives you the belief that if you repent you will be forgiven”. Hope was not religious at all and she scowled at a memory. “I remember the Reverend Sallimande, the vicar we had before Madeleine’s husband took over. There were terrible rumours about him that nobody believed were true, but he was found guilty”. She shook her head at the thought. April had no idea what she was talking about as Madeleine’s husband had been the vicar when she was born but she didn’t want to side-track her.

“So possibly Madeleine may have benefited from the money the bracelet would fetch if it was sold”. She had a hard time believing that the strait-laced Madeleine had taken the bracelet but it was missing so someone must have.

“Don’t be so hasty”, Hope snapped again. “I hadn’t finished. Penny of course is in dire straits although does not like to admit it. Her husband left her virtually penniless when he died. He had squandered all their money on bad investments and there were rumours that he lived a double life and had frittered away thousands on a succession of women. Whether they are true or not is another matter, but what is true is that Penny had to sell most of their possessions to keep the house. The cars went, the yacht was sold, all her jewellery was sold. She even set up a fake account on one of these internet sites and was selling her designer clothes. Wilma Battle who lives next door to me met her in the harbour and bought a suede jacket from her for £20. She said that she had been wearing a wig and dark glasses but she knew that it was her”.

April’s hands flew to her mouth. She had not realised that Penny was so financially compromised, but now some of her behaviours when she visited for lunch made sense. She always chose a cheaper dish, would never drink alcohol, rarely ate dessert and always ensured that she paid for her meal rather than allowing the check to be split four ways.

“It sounds to me very much like it could be Penny then” she said. “Maybe the temptation of seeing the bracelet on the table was too much for her and she took it with the intention of selling it and earning some money”.

“That is one possibility” Hope mused. “There are of course other possibilities other than money that we need to consider. The bracelet after all was Samantha’s”.

“Such as?” April couldn’t imagine what other reasons someone may have had for taking the bracelet.

“Revenge. Remember that Samantha ruined Margaret’s business. Margaret is wealthy, but may have seen the bracelet and decided that it was reasonable compensation for the money that she lost. It may have just been a spur of the moment decision as payback”.

“I guess so.” April thought about Margaret and her devil may care attitude. She was so laid back she thought it unlikely that she would have risked taking the bracelet on a whim as payback. “It just seems to me that Penny would be the most likely given that she obviously needs the money”.

“There is of course another alternative”. Hope looked at her.

“What’s that?” April looked at her. Hope had accused Holly of speaking in riddles and she now seemed to be doing the same herself.

“Perhaps it incriminated someone in her murder and they had to take it to remove the evidence”.



April looked at her in amazement. She thought Hope had taken leave of her senses. “Are you seriously suggesting that one of those four ladies had something to do with Samantha Jarvis being killed?”

“That is exactly what I am suggesting” Hope glared at her. “You think well-heeled ladies who lunch don’t commit murder? When you get to my age April you know that the one thing you can always expect is to expect the unexpected”.

## Chapter 21

April could not believe she was hearing Hope correctly. Although she didn’t like to admit it, she had suspected one of the ladies of taking the bracelet, but she had never suspected them of being involved in Samantha’s death. She had assumed that if Samantha had been killed it had been at the hands of Ben whether an accident or not.

She stared at Hope.

“Why would any of them have wanted to kill Samantha Jarvis?” She looked at her incredulously.

“There could be any number of reasons”. Hope counted on her fingers. We know that Margaret’s business was ruined by Samantha, which gives Margaret the clear motive for revenge”. She raised her hand as April was about to interrupt. “Now just wait a moment before you say what you were going to say”.

“I was only going to say...” April started.

“That it happened a few years ago, so why would Margaret decide to murder Samantha now?” Hope finished the sentence for her.

April nodded quietly. That was exactly what she was going to say.

“Perhaps something was said at lunch that made Margaret realise that Samantha had deliberately set out to ruin her”.

“What do you mean?” April looked at the old lady. “Surely the reason Samantha opened the boutiques in those areas was because Margaret’s businesses were doing well in those locations and so she thought that opening a boutique in the same areas would give her the greatest chance of success”

Hope shook her head. “No, there had to be more to it than that. When you decided to turn the Bluewater café in to a bakery you did so because there were no bakeries on this side of the island, yet you knew there was demand. When Samantha opened her beauty salons, she tended to open them in locations where there wasn’t already a beauty salon. She opened one in Gorse Bay for example but never tried to open one in Gull Bay. Why do you think that was?”

April thought about it. “Because Stacey Carpenter’s business is here”. Stacey Carpenter ran a successful nail and beauty salon just a few doors away from April. She had never been in herself, but she knew that quite a few of the ladies that lunched in her restaurant did visit the salon on a regular basis.

Hope nodded. “Exactly. Stacey Carpenter has had the salon here in Gull Bay for ten years. And has built the business up to be moderately

successful. Samantha Jarvis has run her businesses for almost twice that amount of time, if not longer, yet she has never tried to muscle in on Stacey's territory. Because it would be too much of a risk".

A thought struck April. "But maybe that is because she knew how difficult it would be to compete in Gull Bay because of the market. She already had a chain of beauty salons and so knew that Gull Bay could not support two nail salons and that the customers would be loyal to Stacey. She was just going in to ladies' fashions and maybe thought it would be safer to compete on territory that she knew was a good location".

It made sense to her, but Hope was shaking her head vigorously. "Surely if you are going in to a new business you go where you can leverage your existing business. The obvious locations would have been close to where she already has beauty salons, so that when her clients came in and her staff were talking to them when they are massaging their faces or fluffing about with their hair, they can drop in to the conversation a suggestion that they try the shop next door. Samantha was an astute businesswoman; she would have also insisted her staff wear clothes from the boutique so that her clients would want to know where to buy them".

April nodded slowly. It made sense. Both her businesses in Gull Bay benefited from each other. Quite often if a customer in the restaurant commented on the bread or the dessert that they had just eaten, April or one of the other waitresses would point out that it was made just down the road and they should pop in to get some to take home. And when someone was sitting in the bakery café Hope or Thiago would mention that they should try the Bay Harbour Grill for lunch or dinner. It was amazing how both businesses thrived being just a few hundred meters apart. For Samantha opening her ladies fashion boutiques next to or near her existing beauty salons would have made perfect sense. Only she hadn't, she had situated them close to Margaret's.

Hope was watching her carefully as she thought about it. “There must have been a reason why she targeted Margaret”, April said slowly, half to herself.

“Exactly” Hope smiled. “There may have been a reason in the past for Samantha trying to ruin Margaret which became evident when they lunched together. That realisation could have led Margaret to kill her”.

“It still seems a stretch” April protested. “All that happened a few years ago. Why would it have suddenly surfaced now?”

“It could well have been the first time they had ever been in each other’s company since it happened”.

April thought back to Tuesday. None of the ladies seemed to be enthralled that Samantha was there. “I still think it is strange that the ladies invited Samantha to join them for lunch. I know that Madeleine may have thought that it was the charitable thing to do, but she seemed as unhappy that Samantha was there as everyone else. If it was going to be that painful why bother?”

“I’ve been thinking about that. I called Roberta Solent this morning, you know the lady who lives at the farm behind the church in St Agnes? She lost her husband earlier this year”.

“I don’t know her, but I’ve spoken to her a few times. She takes a delivery of bread every Saturday because she does a hog roast at the Sunday Food market”.

“That’s the one. She has lived at the farm for over thirty years and would have been one of Madeleine’s closest neighbours. I asked her if Madeleine

had phoned her at all when her husband died to invite her to one of the lunches, and she said no”.

“Maybe Madeleine didn’t like her”.

“You’re missing the point” Hope argued. “She didn’t like Samantha but she invited her, even though she could hardly have not known how Samantha had treated Margaret. It suggests that she had to invite her, that her hand was forced, that she had no choice”.

April looked at her in surprise. “You mean Samantha made her invite her?”

“Precisely. Which rather suggests that Samantha had an ulterior motive for wanting to join the ladies for lunch, doesn’t it? It gives weight to the theory that she may well have said something that alarmed one of them enough to want to kill her”.

It all seemed too unbelievable for words to April. “How could she have forced Madeleine to invite her for lunch? Madeleine doesn’t strike me as the sort of person who could be forced to do anything against her will”.

Hope looked at her closely. “You have heard the rumours of course, about Madeleine and her husband’s death?”

“Oh Hope, really, nobody believes them” April was aghast. The Reverend Arber had endured a long and painful illness for two years until he died mercifully in his sleep one night. At the post mortem tiny fibres had been found in his throat which had cast the slight suspicion that he may have been smothered, especially as Madeleine his wife had given the nursing team who cared for him the night off on the night that he died. Nothing was proven, and the man had been expected to die within weeks anyway, but

there had been an enquiry which had garnered a few paragraphs in the local paper and dominated more than one conversation over the following weeks. Fortunately for Madeleine, a scandal with one of the local politicians had soon overtaken this as the topic of conversation and the whispers soon died down but a cloud still hung over his death. Madeleine, as befitted a vicar's wife and former schoolteacher did not deign to acknowledge them.

"No, but if Samantha had suggested that she knew something then it may have been sufficient for Madeleine to try and find out what she knew and then kill her".

"Hope, you really are letting your imagination run away with you. I somehow cannot see Madeleine in the role of mass murderer, killing her husband and then her neighbour. I can't see any of the ladies doing it if I am honest".

"And yet someone has" Hope spat. "As it hardly seems likely that she stripped down to her underwear, wrapped herself in a fishing net and then threw herself overboard ensuring that she banged her head hard enough to knock herself out in the process".

April stayed quiet, much as she hated to admit it Hope had a point.

"Then of course there is Penny", Hope mused. "We know her husband was a womanising philanderer. Perhaps he had an affair with Samantha and Samantha said something at the table which confirmed this. Penny in a fit of rage could have killed her".

"That would be easy enough to find out", April said. "I could just try and talk to one of the ladies and find out if she said something about it. I don't see why Penny would have killed her because of it though, you said yourself that Penny discovered her husband's secret life when he died. I can

see why she may have been upset about him cheating so close to home, but would she really be so upset that she would resort to murder, especially as her husband is now dead?"

Hope shrugged. "Who knows? The trauma of the last couple of years may have made her mentally unhinged. But it does mean that we have three potential suspects. Who did you say the fourth person was, Daisy Robbinet?"

"Yes". April thought of the cheerful, laid back Daisy. "I didn't spend long at the table but from what I observed I seemed to recall that of all of the ladies, Samantha seemed to be goading Daisy the most".

"Really?" Hope looked at her with interest. "What sort of things was she saying?"

April thought back. "Just little things really. Comments about her weight, a comment about what she was wearing. Just digs that seemed cruel and petty at the time but perhaps there had been something else that I had missed".

"There is only one way to find out" Hope said determinedly. "You will have to try and find an excuse to talk to them, see what was said at the lunch to uncover both the motive and the opportunity".

April got up from the table. "I can try I suppose" she said without enthusiasm. Much as she didn't like the idea, she still felt that the obvious suspect was Ben, especially as he had been in possession of Samantha's jewellery, had now disappeared and was somehow, although she didn't know how, linked with the family.

If April had been unsure how she could find an excuse to meet with the ladies of the Tuesday club when she had left Hope's house, she was presented with one when she returned to the restaurant. Martha, who was laying the tables for the dinner service that evening looked up as April opened the door.

"I have just had Madeleine Arber on the phone". She pulled a face. "She is very unhappy with you and wanted me to convey how disappointed she is. She has cancelled her lunch reservation for next Tuesday and says the ladies will not be returning to the restaurant ever again".

April put her bag down on the table nearest to the door and looked at Martha. "Why, what does she think I have done?" She wondered irrationally if, as well as being religious, Madeleine was also psychic and had known about the conversation that she had just been having with Hope.

"She says that she has had a visit from the police questioning her because you have accused her of stealing an emerald and diamond bracelet".

April sighed. "I have accused her of no such thing". She thought back to what she had said to Sergeant Tozier. "The police asked me when I had last seen the bracelet and I told them that I put it down on the table when I was talking to them. I can see how that could have been presented as a suggestion that they had taken it but that was not my intention". She thought that if PC Mallet had been the one interviewing the ladies, she would no doubt have relished the opportunity to suggest that April had suggested the possibility that one of them had taken it.

"I can see how they may have thought that you had cast doubt on their honesty, but really, I would have thought they would have been more adult about it. I'm sure the police were only trying to find out if they had seen it".



Martha tutted as she straightened the knives and forks on the table that she was setting.

April wondered if perhaps Madeleine had something to hide and was worried that if the police started asking too many questions, they would uncover something bigger than a missing bracelet. Anger could easily be a result of fear. "I'll go and talk to her and the other ladies tomorrow. I will do it face to face rather than on a call. It always comes across better". She was not looking forward to going to see them but she had promised Hope that she would try and find out all she could about the conversation with Samantha, and here was an opportunity presented to her on a plate. "We have a busy night ahead of us though so for now I am just going to have a quick shower and a bite to eat and I'll be down in half an hour".

"Good, we have a full house tonight April, the Bay Harbour Grill is clearly the place to eat".

Despite herself April laughed. "There was nothing like a drama to bring people out in to the bay".

## Chapter 22

April had enlisted the help of Rachel the following day in her quest to try and get the Tuesday club to talk to her. She was not sure that any of them would be too enamoured when she turned up on their doorstep, but hoped that their natural politeness and sense of graciousness would at least mean that they opened their doors. If she arrived bearing a peace offering then she hoped that it would encourage them to let her in.

Rachel was only too happy to help when April explained the predicament that she had found herself in after misplacing the bracelet. She had made an assortment of sweet treats for each of the ladies that were now wrapped in boxes just waiting to be taken. As April carried them to her car, she placed them in the order that she would be visiting the four friends. She had thought carefully about who she would see first and had decided on Daisy. It had been a close call between her and Madeleine, Madeleine was the undisputed leader of the club who the others followed and as a former vicar's wife her sense of charity would undoubtedly have meant that she invited her in. But Madeleine was also the busiest of the four who sat on a number of charitable committees and could easily plead the attention of something urgent as an excuse for not talking. Any advantage would therefore be lost, and so it had been Daisy that she had decided would be the first and easiest of the targets. If she could encourage Daisy to phone the others after her visit it should ease the way.

Daisy was the easiest going and generous of the four women, and with the sweetest tooth also the one most likely to easily be bribed with a box of sweet goodies. Timing her visit carefully so that it was the midpoint between lunch and dinner, the time when many people's attention turned to chocolate or something sweet to give them a sugar rush, it was just after three when April turned her car in to the drive of the substantial cream coloured house that sat on the cliffs behind Gull Bay and offered distant ocean views. Selecting one of the boxes that she had placed carefully on the seat next to her she opened her car door and walking the few steps across the neat gravel drive rang the doorbell.

It pealed a jolly jingle inside the house and April waited anxiously, hoping that Daisy was home. A blue Honda car was parked in the driveway which she assumed was Daisy's, but nobody answered the door. She rang the bell again, biting her lip in frustration. It was a lovely day and Daisy may well have gone for a walk. She was just turning to leave when she heard a shout from the corner of the house.

“Oh, it’s you April”. She looked in the direction of the voice and saw Daisy walking across the driveway wearing gardening clothes and a large floppy straw hat. She had a pair of secateurs in her hand and some branches that she had clearly just cut. “I was just doing some pruning of the wisteria. What can I do for you?”

She didn’t sound upset or annoyed at the interruption, just curious, which April took as an encouraging sign. “I’ve come with an apology”. She held up the bakery box tied with yellow and white ribbon. “I’m very sorry that I have upset you, it was not my intention at all”.

Daisy smiled. “You haven’t upset me at all April, come on through to the garden. I was just about to make a pot of tea and if you have brought what I hope you have brought will be much nicer than raiding the biscuit tin to find something to have with it”.

April smiled as Daisy led the way around the side of the house to the large terrace at the front. The garden stretched out in front of them for several hundred metres and April realised that it must also border the same cliff path as Samantha Jarvis’s house. There were quite a few properties that were between the two houses, but if there was access from the garden to the path then it would have been easy for Daisy to walk to Samantha’s house relatively unseen. She scanned the hedge for a gate that would lead to the path but couldn’t see one.

“Here we are”. Daisy came out of the French windows carrying a tray with a large teapot covered in pink roses and matching china cups and plates. She placed the tray on the wrought iron table and opened the box eagerly, cooing with delight when she saw the chocolate orange cupcakes that Rachel had made.

“Chocolate and orange, my favourite” she said with delight, and April smiled knowing full well that the chocolate orange torte that she served in

the restaurant was always Daisy's dessert of choice if it happened to be served on a Tuesday. Rachel's miniature versions in cupcake form were an obvious choice to make as a peace offering for Daisy. "Would you like one?" She offered a plate to April as she poured her a cup of tea.

"No. I've brought them for you. I'm trying to diet and I'm far too easily tempted with Rachel's baking. If I have one, I will want another and within twenty minutes you will have an empty box and wonder where all the cakes went".

Daisy laughed, a high-pitched tinkling laugh. "Within twenty minutes they will be gone anyway. I lost my figure after having three children within four years and never got it back. Not that I ever wanted it back when I discovered how delightful chocolate was. I never had much willpower but since Ronald has died it has gone completely". She looked momentarily sad and picked up a chocolate orange cupcake, taking a large bite. "I've heard if you eat them quickly, they are less calories". She laughed again.

"Your husband has been dead a couple of years, hasn't he?" April asked. Daisy and her husband had never been in the restaurant but she vaguely remembered them coming in to her former café before the fire had destroyed it. He had been a thin man with a military air about him and always very well turned out, and she used to think that as a couple they were like chalk and cheese. The old adage, opposites attract, certainly seemed to apply in their case.

"Yes". Daisy nodded staring in to the distance as a plane started to descend through the sky to land in the airport to the west of the island. "He was a pilot and we bought this house when the children were little, because it not only overlooked the sea at the front but you can also see the airport to the west. I taught them to look out for daddy returning home. It gave them some sort of structure in their life as he was away so often".

“It’s a lovely house with an amazing view”. April seized her chance to try and find out if the garden led on to the cliff path. “I see the garden backs on to the cliff path. I bet your children thought it was great to go exploring the cliffs when they were younger”.

Daisy laughed. “They would have done if we had let them. There used to be a gate that led on to the path, and a small fence, but we planted the laurels and blocked up the gate so that they couldn’t get out. I was on my own with them for long periods and the last thing I needed was to be trying to round up small children from the cliffs. No, I liked to keep them prisoner, where I could see them”.

That put paid to that idea, April thought to herself. Despite the fact that the house backed on to the path there was no access and so if Daisy had wanted to visit Samantha she would have had to travel by road and risk being seen.

“You seem deep in thought”. Daisy was looking at her curiously and April realised with a start that she had been quietly thinking for a minute. She poured her a second cup of tea “Is there anything on your mind?”

“No, I was just enjoying the view, your house is in such a lovely spot. You must love it here”.

“I do” Daisy nodded. “I think the children expected me to sell up when their father died and move to somewhere smaller as I don’t need the space, but I have no real reason to. Just because I am here on my own it doesn’t mean I can’t enjoy the space and the view”.

“Do your children live on the island?” April had been surprised when she had said that she had children, she had never seen her in the bay with anyone other than Penny or latterly the ladies of the Tuesday club.

“No” Daisy shook her head and for the first time there was a trace of bitterness in her voice. “They all left the island when they went to university and have had no inclination to return. One lives in London; one lives in New York and my youngest lives in New Zealand. If I want to see them or my grandchildren then I have to get on a plane. They were here for barely 48 hours when their father died. They have their own lives to lead I suppose and we brought them up to be self-sufficient and independent so I only have myself to blame”. She gave a hollow laugh and picked up a third cupcake.

“I’m sorry” April said with a pang of guilt thinking that it had been about three weeks since she had picked up the phone to her own mother and about two months since she had seen her and she only lived four miles away. “It must be hard not seeing them”.

Daisy shrugged “It is, but we do zoom calls and facetime every week and of course I have my friends. I’m close to Penny and see her several times a week and of course I meet with Margaret and Madeleine at least once a week and sometimes more. I’m not lonely”.

This was her chance April thought to try and do the digging that she had come here to do.

“I’m glad you have mentioned them Daisy” she looked at her. “That was the main reason I came here actually, to apologise for any offence I may have caused by sending the police around. I was not at all suggesting that one of you had taken the bracelet. I think the police may have misinterpreted what I said”.

To her surprise Daisy threw back her head and roared with laughter. “I didn’t for a minute think you had. Why would any of us have taken Samantha Jarvis’s bracelet, we would have hardly wanted a keepsake of the awful woman? You were just telling the police what had happened. It

probably fell on the floor and has been swept away somewhere, it will turn up”.

April didn't think for a moment that it had fallen on the floor but decided the wisest course of action was to go along with her suggestion. “I'm sure that is the likeliest thing to have happened, but the message Martha gave me was that you had cancelled your lunch reservation for Tuesday because I had accused one of you of stealing it”.

“Really?” Daisy looked surprised. “Madeleine phoned me and said that she was cancelling the lunch at your restaurant and we were going somewhere else, and I said that under the circumstances I thought that was appropriate, but I didn't mean it was because the police had paid us a visit. I just meant that with all the police and media attention down in the bay it may be busy and the last thing you want when you have lunch is to have crowds of ghouls around you. I think wires have got crossed between Madeleine and Martha. I will give Madeleine a ring when you have gone”. She reached out her hand and touched her on her arm. “April, if you thought it was because we were upset with you, I'm sorry. Not too sorry though she said grabbing a fourth cupcake, seeing as you have brought these to make amends”. She beamed with pleasure.

“That's a relief. I am paying all the ladies a visit so I hope they are as pleased to see me as you. One thing I am puzzled about though is if you didn't like Samantha Jarvis, why did you invite her for lunch?”.

Daisy pulled a face. “I have no idea. I think it was Madeleine's idea. Probably thought it was her Christian duty to offer the hand of friendship in her hour of need. I think as the lunch progressed all of us, including Madeleine wished she hadn't bothered”. Her hand flew to her mouth. “Not that you should speak ill of the dead” she said looking contrite.

The tea was finished, as were the cupcakes and the conversation was drawing to a natural end. April thought that she had just one more opportunity to try and find something else out from Daisy. “Did Samantha say anything about where she was going, she left so quickly?”

“That was the odd thing”. Daisy stood up to take the tray away, which April took as a sign that it was time for her to go. She stood up also. “One of the things she had said to me was how nice it was that she could have a rare afternoon off and she was going to make the most of it by doing nothing but eat and drink. Of course, she had said it to have a dig at me as she then went on to say that I had every afternoon off as I didn’t work, and probably spent all afternoon watching daytime television whilst eating biscuits and cakes”. She shook her head “This garden does not look after itself and I only employ a gardener for the heavy work”.

April looked around her. The garden was certainly beautiful. “It seemed to me that she made quite a few catty remarks towards you”.

Daisy nodded. “She did. I put it down to jealousy, it didn’t bother me”.

April stopped just short of her car. “Jealousy?” she turned to the older woman “What do you mean?”

Daisy smiled. “Samantha may have been rich and successful but she was not truly happy. I may be large, and spill my food down me now and again, and say inappropriate things but I don’t care how I look or what other people think about me. I’m happy being me and Samantha struck me as someone who liked being what she was but wasn’t happy being who she was. So she satisfied herself with making little remarks to try and cause me pain”. She laughed again. “Not that they did. Silly woman. Not that any of it matters now”.



April nodded as she opened her car door. Whatever the motive for Samantha's death she did not think that she had found one here.

## Chapter 23

The obvious house to visit next was Penny who lived closest to Daisy in a house overlooking the headland between Gull and Gorse bays, but April decided that she would drive past her turn off and make her way in to Gorse Bay where Madeleine lived in an apartment on the promenade. As the woman who had invited Samantha to the lunch, and the person who had made the call cancelling the lunch, she was keen to find out her views.

As wife of the vicar of St Agnes, Madeleine had for years lived in the rectory in the centre of the village of St Agnes, inland from the two bays. Although the vicar had been well liked and popular, his wife had not endeared herself to the parishioners as she had been a very untypical vicar's wife. Not that she had done anything wrong as such, although many people would have rather cruelly remarked that it was difficult to do anything wrong if you did not do anything at all. Whilst the wife of many vicars saw the marriage as a job itself, arranging the church flowers, acting as personal assistant and diary secretary, organising the church fetes and doing charitable works around the parish, for the forty years that the Reverend Arber had been vicar Madeleine had not once volunteered to do any of that. She had had a career all of her own as a teacher, and a formidable one at that. Many children and parents had found themselves on the wrong end of her sharp tongue and regretted it.

Whilst the death of the Reverend Arber had been mourned in the parish, and the parishioners accepted that Madeleine had proved herself a loving,

loyal and supportive wife through his long and painful illness, her lack of civic duty meant that they did not want her to linger in the parish vicarage for longer than necessary. A new vicar was found quickly, a local man who had grown up in the parish and deputised for the ailing vicar over the previous year. Having married a local woman and with a family of two small children and another one on the way, the parishioners were eager that the vicarage be filled with laughter and activity and once more become a place where people could meet and be welcomed. Having given her four weeks to mourn her husband the parochial church council leader was dispatched to the vicarage with a rehearsed speech that would suggest it may be appropriate for her to start to try and find somewhere else to live. He was surprised and relieved to discover, when she opened the front door that the hall was filled with packing boxes. It appeared that Madeleine was as eager to leave the vicarage as the parishioners were eager for her to leave.

The couple who had no children had lived frugally over the years and though neither a vicar nor a teacher's salary were high, their costs had been kept to a minimum and when she had left the vicarage Madeleine had been able to buy a small apartment in a purpose built complex of just four apartments on the promenade in Gorse Bay. Gorse Bay was busier than Gull Bay, less of a working port and more of a tourist destination, and April thought the ground floor apartment with its French windows opening out directly on to a small patio area which led directly to the promenade was an unusual choice for a lady who had been known to value her privacy. Houses and apartments though were in short supply and were snapped up very quickly and if money was tight, she may not have had much choice.

A small car parking area lay at the rear of the complex and April pulled her car in to one of the two visitors' spaces, noticing that Madeleine's old Volvo estate was in its allocated space. Taking a deep breath, she retrieved the box containing the strawberry cake that she knew Madeleine adored and rang the doorbell. She could hear footsteps walking quickly down the hallway and the door was opened.

“Oh, it’s you April” she said with a frown, making no attempt to step aside and allow her to enter. “What do you want? I’m very busy and you really should have phoned ahead”.

“I’m sorry Madeleine. I know that you are upset with me and so I have brought a peace offering”. April held out the basket containing the cake. She had chosen her words carefully, calling the cake a peace offering rather than a gift. Madeline could be a stern woman with a rather forbidding air about her but she was above all a Christian. And Christian’s preached forgiveness.

April was rewarded by a small tight smile. “I’m not sure why you believe I need a peace offering, but come in. I can only spare a few moments though as I have an appointment at the bank later this afternoon. It means unfortunately I cannot offer you a cup of tea, or a slice of what is I am sure a delicious cake”.

“I have brought it for you, not for me” April answered, relieved that she was not going to have to accept a cup of tea out of politeness. She had already had two cups at Daisy’s, and if each of the ladies she visited offered her a drink she would spend all evening in the bathroom. “It’s a peace offering because I understand I may have unwittingly upset you”.

“I don’t think upset is quite the word I would have used”. Madeleine pointed at a surprisingly comfortable looking cream sofa which would have had a wonderful view of the bay if the blinds that covered the window hadn’t been almost closed. Madeleine herself took one of a pair of high-backed wing chairs that flanked a marble fireplace. “I think perplexed would be more appropriate”.

“Perplexed”, April repeated. “I’m not sure I understand”.

Madeleine stared at her for a few seconds before leaning forward in her chair. When she spoke, her voice was quiet but firm. “I know that you don’t know the four of us very well April, we have only been coming in to your restaurant for lunch for the last few weeks, but have we really given you the suggestion that one of us is a thief?”

April reddened with the directness of the speech. “Of course not Madeleine. I have never suggested anything of the sort”.

Madeleine sat back in her chair and her lips tightened. “I was prepared to listen to your explanation April, and accept the gift that you cleverly described as a peace offering, but if you are just going to sit here and lie to me then you may as well go. I’m busy and I haven’t got time to listen to excuses”.

April shook her head. She was good natured and always wanted to see the best in everyone which meant that she could be seen as a pushover, but she wasn’t. Her grandmother, a plain-speaking blunt woman who always called a spade a shovel had taught her that in the face of injustice you should always stand up for yourself.

“I have not come here to make excuses” she said firmly. “I am certainly not telling lies. I understand that I have unwittingly upset you in some way and that you have cancelled your booking for lunch in the restaurant as a result of that. I have not come here to try and persuade you to change your mind, it is after all up to you where you eat, but I have come here to find out what I have said that has upset you. And to make amends if necessary”.

Madeleine nodded, smiling slightly. “I see that you speak plainly and I appreciate that. Very well. I had a visit from PC Mallet yesterday, a quite

charming woman. I taught Tina when she was a girl and she has a very clear moral idea of right and wrong. She will make an excellent police officer”.

April nodded. “Yes, I knew that she was coming to see you, Sergeant Tozier told me”.

“And so, you will know then why she came round?”

April nodded again. “Yes, she wanted to know if you knew anything about the missing bracelet that I had found”.

“That you had accused one of us of stealing. I must admit to being very surprised that you had accused us. Why on earth would one of us steal a bracelet?”

“She said that I had accused you of stealing the bracelet?” April was horrified. “I never said that”.

“She didn’t say it in so many words, but the intimation was clearly there. She said that you had told her that you showed us the bracelet and put it on the table, and then when we had left the bracelet had gone. You apparently suggested that she speak to us to find out what had happened to it”.

“I didn’t say anything at all to PC Mallet” April’s voice was firm. “I spoke to Sergeant Tozier and said that I had showed it to you all at the table and had then left to deal with customers. When I remembered it a few minutes later you had gone and the bracelet was missing. But anyone in the café who had walked past the table could have taken it, or it could have fallen on the floor. Sergeant Tozier wanted to know if you had seen anything and asked PC Mallet to speak with you all. Not to accuse any of you of taking it”

“Sergeant Tozier was involved was he, that makes sense now.” Madeleine scowled. “I taught him, and his brothers as well. I must admit I was surprised when he went in to the police force and even more surprised when he was promoted to sergeant. Not the most perceptive of people. He probably misconstrued what you said and then sent Tina to interrogate us”.

April nodded non-committedly. She was pretty sure that PC Mallet had misconstrued what he had said on purpose and seen it as an opportunity to sour relations between April and the ladies. “I can assure you there was no intention on my part to suggest that one of you had taken it”.

Madeleine smiled, a genuine smile this time. “I can see that now, April, and I am glad that you had the strength to come round and explain yourself. I admire that. We are eating lunch at the Cozy Cavern next week which has a set menu that is £5 cheaper than yours. If we do not return to your restaurant, you can be assured it is not because of this misunderstanding but because as pensioners we have to be careful with our money. Or at least I do. I cannot speak for the others but a teacher’s pension does not stretch as far as one would like”. She stood up, the conversation was clearly at a close and April had found out nothing.

“I understand that and appreciate your honesty Madeleine”. It was on the tip of her tongue to offer to match the Cozy Caverns lunchtime offer but feared it would smack of desperation and she knew that Madeleine would not take kindly to that. “I think the police think I have either lost the bracelet or taken leave of my senses. It is a mystery where it got to”.

Madeleine shook her head. “I remember you putting it on the table but we were all talking and I didn’t take much notice of it. Frillery like that really does not interest me. Holly came to present us with the check but didn’t bother to clear any of the cups, plates or napkins away. I found that irritating and would have said something but I was engrossed in a

conversation with Daisy. I know it annoyed both Penny and Margaret as well as they started to stack the plates and napkins up in the middle of the table. It is not a nice environment to have a conversation when dirty cups and plates have not been taken away”.

April sighed. She must have a word with Holly. She could only ever seem to do one thing at once. If she was asked for the check, she gave the check, if she was sent to clear a table, she would clear the table and leave the customers waiting forever for the check. If she was asked for another plate so that someone could share a dessert, she would take a plate but never think of offering another spoon. She shook her head in frustration.

Madeleine looked at her in amusement. “Holly will never change, I taught her in my final year as a teacher. She is incapable of thinking for herself and takes everything quite literally. Her essays were never descriptive, just lines of facts with no interpretation of them at all. She doesn’t see the world like we do”. She walked towards the door.

“Talking of seeing the world you have a beautiful view here Madeleine, although I imagine that it must be quite annoying in the tourist season”. She nodded towards the French windows whose blinds were closed.

“It is a small price to pay. I always angle the blinds at this time of year so that when I sit in my chair, I can see the bay but those outside can’t see in. Of course, between September and May I can have the blinds open all the time and get the most wonderful view. I love the sea”.

“So do I” April nodded. Her own apartment overlooked the harbour in Gull Bay and she never tired of the view. “We are very lucky to be able to live here”.

Madeleine nodded. “Yes, I grew up living by the sea, my father was a naval officer and we lived in Portsmouth in a lovely house overlooking the sea. As a young woman I used to always go sailing. My one and only regret married to George was that we couldn’t live in the apartment next to the church in Gull Bay and instead had to live in that big old vicarage in St Agnes. She looked wistful. Although it was a small sacrifice to pay. George was a wonderful man”.

She looked so sad and April felt sorry for her. She was so stoic that it was easy to forget that she had recently been widowed and the pain must still be so raw. “I’m sorry for your loss”, she said reaching out her hand and touching her on her arm. “It must still be very painful”.

“Madeleine seemed to pull herself together with effort, as though to show sadness was a sign of weakness. “It was, but it was a relief in the end. He had been so ill. Nobody should have to suffer like that, especially a man who had devoted his life to helping others. But maybe it was a final test. For him and for me. One that perhaps he passed and I failed”. She opened the door for April. “Thank you for coming”.

April stopped in the threshold, surprised at the tone of her voice “Why do you think you failed the test?” she asked.

Madeleine looked startled for a moment. “Oh” she seemed to cast around in her mind for something to say “Because my faith was tested, and I am not sure that it survived unscathed”.

“I see” April nodded “I can understand how seeing someone suffer can make you question God’s will”. She walked to her car frustrated, she had found out nothing about the bracelet but the visit had raised more questions than it had answers. Hope had said that there had been rumours about the suddenness in which the Reverend Arber had died. And she was pretty sure



that although Madeleine had recovered well, she had let her guard down at the end and had said something that she had not intended to say.

Did Madeleine have something to hide, and suspecting Samantha knew that, had she taken steps to ensure the secret stayed hidden?

## Chapter 24

Of all the ladies Margaret was the one that April felt she had most in common with. Whilst neither Penny nor Daisy had worked and Madeleine had been a teacher, Margaret, like April, had owned her own business.

As April drove up the small lane that led out of Gorse Bay, she reflected on what she knew about Margaret. She had been born and grown up in Jersey and had set up her own business when she was in her twenties. She had married her childhood sweetheart and had two daughters before tragedy had struck after only four years of marriage and her husband had died in a tractor accident. She had thrown herself in to her work and her shop had flourished and become so well-known and successful that she had been able to put her two children through private school and set each of them up with their own boutiques

After many years alone she had married for the second time ten years ago, a local builder and property developer who had bought and renovated the farmhouse and outbuildings that she lived in now. They had taken the main farmhouse as their own home and sold off the four other properties that they had converted on the land. With enviable views across the sea to the neighbouring Channel Islands they had commanded a high premium which

had presumably helped Margaret weather the next series of tragedies that unfolded in her life.

Samantha Jarvis had been the start. When the successful businesswoman who specialised in health and beauty businesses had decided to set up a chain of clothing boutiques it had raised a few artfully styled eyebrows but nothing more. After all, she was a successful businesswoman and so could be expected to diversify her business interests. When, however, she had decided to take over vacant shops close to, and in one case right next door to the boutiques owned by Margaret Bennet and her family it had seemed like she was deliberately targeting them. Especially when rumours began to circulate that the owner of a shop selling local jersey products that had happily operated next door to Margaret in Gorse Bay for over twenty-five years had been encouraged to retire early and been given a large incentive to do so. Samantha had stocked similar clothes to Margaret, from the same suppliers, but offered them at a substantially lower cost. Some customers were loyal to Margaret, they had been shopping with her for years, but many could not afford to remain loyal for long, especially when they could get the same outfit at a significantly lower price. Margaret had continued to operate but when her husband had died suddenly of a heart attack, it was the final nail in the coffin for her business. Grief meant that she had lost the will to fight and she closed her shops down. She must have looked on with bitterness and rage when not six months afterwards Samantha had closed the boutiques and transformed them in to additional beauty salons in her empire.

If anyone had been unhappy to have seen Samantha at the lunch it would have been Margaret she mused as she drove down the small track to the cluster of houses at the end and she wondered again why Madeleine had invited her. She must have known the history of what had happened, it had been the topic of conversation in St Agnes for weeks, and even though Madeleine was not an active vicar's wife she could not have failed to hear the gossip. The track split in to three as an impressive three storey came in to view in front of her and she assumed that this was the farmhouse for it

did not look like it had ever been an outbuilding. Her assumption proved correct as she pulled up next to a white Porsche convertible and Margaret, her long blonde hair scrunched in a pony tail opened the front door to greet her with a wave. The loss of her businesses clearly had not put much of a dent in Margaret's finances.

"April" she shouted smiling. "Daisy has been on the phone telling us that you are doing the rounds and bringing sweet treats. I hope you have brought me something fattening".

April smiled as she picked up the date and walnut loaf from the seat next to her. Margaret's idea of fattening was completely at odds with what other people's idea of fattening was, and she was always careful to pick the least calorific foods off the menu when she ate at the Bay Harbour Grill. As April walked across to the door, she looked at the much older woman who was dressed simply in a white smock top with crocheted sleeves and faded jeans studded with diamante. Even without makeup she could have passed for someone in her late forties although April knew that her two daughters were both in their forties themselves.

"I hope Daisy explained that I did not send the police around to accuse you of stealing Samantha's bracelet" April said, following Margaret down the wide hall and in to a kitchen that was three times the size of the kitchen in the bakery. She placed the box containing the loaf on the worktop and nodded at the offer of a coffee. "I did not mean to imply that any of you had taken it, I was just asked when I had last seen it".

"To be honest I was a little surprised that you had suggested it, but that woman police officer was insistent that you believed one of us must have taken it from the table. Madeleine and Penny were most indignant at the thought".

“I’m so sorry that you thought that”. April was furious at how PC Mallet had positioned it but there was nothing that she could do now other than explain herself. At least the ladies seemed to have accepted her account. “I think it is a misunderstanding”.

“Or a misrepresentation”. Margaret studied her. “You are an attractive woman April and I know to my cost that other women are threatened by that. It is something that I am afraid you will have to put up with all your life. There are many approaches you can take; I accepted it and didn’t let it get to me and I suggest you do the same. It is much simpler that way. Other women, come out fighting and attack before they are threatened” She shrugged. “That was Samantha Jarvis’s way and look at what has happened to her”.

April could not believe her luck. She had been wondering how she could have turned the conversation round to Samantha Jarvis and Margaret had presented her with a golden opportunity. She breathed a sigh of relief.

“I must admit I don’t want to speak ill of the dead but I didn’t really get on with Samantha when she came to the restaurant. She seemed very prickly. I was surprised that she had been invited to join you all”.

“You can blame Madeleine for that” Margaret grimaced. “She may come across as a formidable severe woman but that hard mask she wears hides a soft interior. She felt that it was the charitable thing to do to invite her to lunch, given that we were all in the same situation having lost our husbands recently. I went along with the idea because I never thought for one minute that she would accept. But she did. God knows why, she must have known that we all hated her”.

“I wonder why she did accept then”. April spoke so softly that it was almost to herself. She was aware of Margaret looking at her in surprise. “Sorry”

she pulled a face “I talk to myself all the time. I was just wondering why she did accept”.

“I’m sure that she had her reasons” Margaret answered, “although I have no idea what they were. Maybe she just revelled in the knowledge that we didn’t like her and wanted to ruin our lunch. She probably hated the idea of us enjoying ourselves and wanted to spoil it. I wouldn’t put it past her, she was the sort of woman who liked to suck the joy out of other people’s life”.

“I heard that she put you out of business, it must have been hard for you to make polite conversation with her”.

Margaret looked at her in surprise. “She didn’t put me out of business”. She laughed and picked a date from the top of the loaf. “You see how rumours start, I close my business and people say that Samantha has put me out of business, you mention to the police that you last saw her bracelet when you showed it to us and the police say you believe we have stolen it”.

“I’m sorry” April looked embarrassed. “I was just repeating what other people have said”.

Margaret looked serious “And like most rumours there is some truth in it. Of course, Samantha was targeting my businesses, but there was no way that she could sustain in and I knew that. She was offering clothes virtually at cost price and would have been losing money every month. I knew that the one thing that Samantha would not be able to stand was losing money and fortunately had plenty of money to withstand her competition for a couple of years if I had to. She was a threat in the short term but if it was costing her money, she would not have continued for ever. Eventually I would have won”.

“But you closed the businesses a few months later”.

“Yes, after Stuart died. I had worked my socks off for forty years, as had Stuart. I don’t think either of us had taken more than a few days off in the few years we had been married and we were both over sixty. Even when we were on holiday we would be on the phone. When Stuart died of a heart attack at the age of 64, I asked myself what the hell I was doing working seven days a week. I decided I was going to retire and enjoy whatever years I had left. Neither of my daughters were that interested in carrying on the business so I just sold everything and closed them down”.

“Oh, so she didn’t ruin you then?” April spoke without thinking and put her hand to her face mortified at what she implied. Fortunately, Margaret laughed.

“Of course, she didn’t. Do I look like I am struggling? I didn’t like her for what she had done but it cost her a lot more than it did me”.

“Why did she do it, do you know?” April felt guilty for asking the question, it had nothing to do with her, but wanted to know. It must have been something bad for her to have hated Margaret that much.

“I don’t know for definite but I think it was probably because I married Stuart. When Samantha divorced her last husband, the one before Stanley, she dated Stuart a few times. It was nothing serious and Stuart wasn’t really interested in her, but then we started dating and he stopped answering her calls. She was such a ferocious maneater that I don’t think she could stand the rejection”.

“That must have been a few years before she started to ruin your business though”, April objected. “I would have thought if she hated you that much, she would have tried to do it before then”.

“She wasn’t married then” Margaret explained. “She was wealthy in her own right but liked the security of a rich man behind her. She would not have wanted to get in to a competition battle with me when she knew that me and Stuart were richer than her. She would have been worried that we would have retaliated and maybe started targeting her business. With the might of Jersey Freight behind her though she was virtually untouchable. I’m rich, but nowhere near as rich as Samantha Jarvis was married to Stanley”.

It made sense “Well thank you for the coffee” she said standing up, “and for being so understanding about the police. I hope Penny will be as understanding as everyone else has been”.

“I’m sure that she will be”. Margaret took the cups to the dishwasher. “Tread carefully with Penny. She has had a rough couple of years since Martin died and is a little bit fragile. If she thinks you are asking questions, she will close you down completely. Penny does not want to give too much of her private life away”.

“I hope I haven’t come across as asking lots of questions” April suddenly reddened. “I just came to reassure you that I had not accused you of stealing the bracelet and to apologise for any misunderstanding”.

Margaret smiled and tapped her long fingers on the worktop thinking. April stopped in the doorway feeling that she wanted to say something else. “Don’t take this the wrong way April because it is not said to judge. But I don’t think that was your only reason for coming here and I would not want Penny upset in anyway. She is a very dear friend who has been through a lot”.

She closed the door leaving April standing on the drive. It had been delivered with a smile and hadn’t sounded like a threat so there was no reason to feel threatened. And yet, it was almost as though she was being

warned off. It felt like all the ladies were for some reason protecting each other. But from what she had no idea.

## Chapter 25

She couldn't help thinking about what Margaret had said as she drove over to Penny's house. Despite the reassurances that she had tried to offer to Margaret, she had had an ulterior motive for visiting the ladies and was annoyed with herself that her questioning had obviously been so overt.

She would have to tread very carefully with Penny. She thought back to what Hope had told her, that Penny's comfortable life had come crashing down on her when her husband had died. A senior executive with one of the financial institutions, he had been gambling huge sums of money on the stock exchange. He had lost heavily in the weeks leading up to his death, when he had repeatedly invested higher and higher sums in a failing British airline because he thought he had inside information that they were going to be taken over. With credit cards maxed out, their savings accounts depleted and numerous loans outstanding he had died in mysterious circumstances which had left the insurance company reluctant to pay out as there had been a clause in the policy that said it would not pay out if the insured had committed suicide. Penny had eventually got a pay-out which had helped her to save the house, but she had had to sell all her jewellery and antiques to pay their debts, as well as their yacht, the Bentley that her husband had driven and the Mercedes convertible that she had owned. She had some money, but had to be cautious and April thought back to her anger when she had thought that they would have to cover Samantha Jarvis's portion of the check. The large check April thought with sudden frustration at the realisation that she herself would have to cover that.



As she turned in to the drive of the large bungalow with its views over the sea, she thought that there were no obvious signs of poverty. The grounds were well maintained and the swimming pool glistened blue in the sunshine. A Range Rover and a Porsche stood in the driveway and she wondered briefly if Penny had visitors which meant that she would need to return another day. Hesitating in the entrance, her foot on the brake, she saw Penny hurrying up a small gravel track to the right of the gate.

“Margaret phoned to say that you had just left” she panted. “Follow me”.

April followed her as she walked ahead of the car down the narrow track to a small white cabin nestled on the edge of the property, just before the wild gorse that scattered across the headland took over. It had a large terrace that looked out over the bay and April was immediately reminded of the cabin that she used to own and which had burnt down a couple of years before. She was flooded with nostalgia and thought how lovely it would be if you could turn back time. Looking at Penny’s face, red with embarrassment she wondered if Penny thought the same.

“We built this for our son when he was in his late teens and wanted some independent space. When Martin died the main house was too big for me and so I moved here and rented the house out to a couple who had just moved over here. This suits me perfectly”.

April followed Penny up the steps to the balcony thinking that the reasons Penny gave for moving here were very unlikely to have been because of the space. Her husband had worked away a lot and with their son living in London, Penny would have spent most of her time in the house alone. She didn’t say anything, just presented Penny with the same chocolate and orange cupcakes that she had given Daisy. She knew that Penny like Daisy also loved chocolate.

“A peace offering” she said using the same line that she had used with Madeleine. “I’m sure Margaret or Daisy have explained, but it was not my intention to suggest that any of you had stolen the bracelet. My words were mis...” she hesitated, unable to bring herself to blame PC Mallet however much she disliked the woman “misconstrued”.

Penny sat down at the table, indicating that April should also take one of the wooden chairs that had floral patterned cushions on them. She didn’t open the box of cupcakes, nor offer April a drink. She stared in to the distance for a few minutes until April felt compelled to say something else, although she was very wary of saying anything given Margaret’s warning.

“I’m sorry if I offended you in any way, or it came across that I was accusing you”.

“I was disappointed”. Penny didn’t look at her but kept staring at the sea. “I’ve been disappointed so many times over the last couple of years that one would imagine I can no longer be dismayed by anything that anyone says or does, and yet you had disappointed me”. She looked at April squarely in the face and April wilted under a wave of regret. “I didn’t really know you; you were the woman who served us in the restaurant and yet I trusted you. You seemed an honest person and not one that would indulge in spurious gossip”.

April felt chastised, but also felt as though she was being judged too harshly. “As I explained to the other ladies, I made no suggestion that any of you had taken the bracelet. I had just been asked where I had seen it last, and I told the police that I had last seen it when I was on the table with the four of you”.

“You say you didn’t say anything and I believe you, but you are wise enough to know that more weight is put on what is not said than what is said. You may say that you last saw it on the table we were sitting at, but the

implication is that if it wasn't there when we had left one of us must have taken it. It is the same as when people say my husband died suddenly, they imply it wasn't naturally, when I say that my house is too big for me, they believe that I cannot afford to live there". She looked at April suddenly and April blushed, that is exactly what she had thought.

Penny smiled for the first time since April had arrived. "I don't blame you April, which I why I said I was disappointed not angry. But surely you should have known that in telling the police that you had last seen the bracelet on the table when you were talking to us, the fact that it wasn't there when we had gone suggested that one of us had taken it. It is the obvious conclusion to make".

April looked at the table and twisted her fingers together. She had never really spoken to Penny for any length before, she had always been the one who was the quietest and yet it seemed that she was the one who was the most perceptive. Although April had not accused any of the ladies of taking the bracelet, and had been at pains to point that out, it was exactly what she had thought. Her reasons for coming to see them was not, as she had so carefully explained to them, to apologise, but to try and work out who had taken it. And she was uncomfortably aware that Penny knew that.

"I'm sorry if I disappointed you, it was not my intention". She pushed back her chair and stood up to leave. There was no point in prolonging the conversation, Margaret had warned her off asking questions because of Penny's fragile state, although there was nothing fragile about it as far as April could see. It also appeared that Penny would see right through any comment that April made which would mean it would be pointless talking to her. If she had anything to hide, she would make sure that it stayed hidden. It appeared though that Penny had something that she wanted to say. As she walked towards her car, Penny followed her.

“I hear that they have identified the body as Samantha Jarvis”. She shivered slightly and clasp her cardigan around her. “I didn’t like the woman but I am sorry she is dead. There has been too much death in Gull Bay recently”.

April nodded. She had not heard formally that it was Samantha but Sergeant Tozier had confirmed to her that it was and there seemed no point in denying it. In Gull Bay news travelled fast.

“Was it an accident do you think? She had had a lot to drink when we were at lunch and a woman like her will always continue drinking in the afternoon. I hear that she may have fallen off her boat”.

“Nobody knows what happened to her, other than her body was in the sea for around twenty-four hours. Did you see her at all after she left the restaurant?”

“Are you fishing again April?” April looked shocked and Penny surprised her by laughing, a tinkling little laugh that transformed her whole demeanour. April could only imagine how free and relaxed she would have been before the troubles of the last couple of years. It sounded so different from the uptight guarded Penny that she had been used to that she revised her opinion. Perhaps Margaret was right and she was fragile after all.

“No, not at all, I was just...” she cast around for a reason as to why she had asked the question. For the first time this afternoon she had not been trying to find a clue but had just been making conversation.

“Don’t worry, it was a joke. After I had just told you that there was a hidden meaning behind everything that anyone said, I did not for a minute expect you to try and imply anything. But it does go to prove, doesn’t it April that you cannot take anything that anyone says at face value. That you should always listen for what hasn’t been said rather than just hear what has been”.

She waited for April to get in the driver's seat and then gently pushed April's car door shut. As she reversed up the track, she was aware of Penny standing there watching her. That was a very cryptic and unsettling conversation she thought as she turned her car at the entrance to head back home. If she had to listen for what had not been said in her conversation with Penny then she would be awake all night. For she sensed that although it had been Penny who had done most of the talking, she had not told her anything at all.

## Chapter 26

April felt despondent as she drove in to Gull Bay and even the fact that a car pulled out of a parking space directly opposite the restaurant enabling her to slip her car in quickly before another driver spotted it did not lift her spirits. She had made her peace with the ladies, although she did not expect them to return for a leisurely lunch in the Bay Harbour Grill anytime sure. They had all been polite and pleasant, but she felt that at least one of them was holding something back. She was also convinced that one of them had taken the bracelet but again didn't know why. The two obvious suspects were Penny and Madeleine, but poverty did not make you a thief. There had to be more to the missing bracelet than that, but she could not work out what it was.

She beat her hands in frustration on the steering wheel, earning a worried glance from the young boy who was walking past with his grandfather on the way from the beach. She smiled at him to reassure him that she was alright, thinking that it was perhaps best to go in to her apartment and have a drink to calm her nerves rather than have a mental breakdown behind the wheel of her car in public. She was working tonight but could perhaps have a small glass of wine before she started, or a small gin with plenty of tonic.

One thing she did know was that she certainly did not want a cup of tea. It was unlikely that she would want another cup of tea for a day or two.

Blipping the alarm on her car to lock it, she hurried across the road to the restaurant and walked in to the cool interior. It was deserted, but she was pleased to see that the lunch service had been cleared away and all the tables were set for dinner. She could hear noise and laughter coming from the kitchen at the back and popped her head around the kitchen door before making her way upstairs to her apartment. She could do with cheering up and it sounded like her staff were having great fun as they prepared the food.

Martha was wiping her face with her apron, and Miguel was bent over double at the sink, his face red, tears streaming down his cheeks. Even the normally quiet James was shaking his head and chuckling as he transferred a pan filled with potatoes from the worktop to the oven. The sight of her staff having a good time was infectious and April grinned.

“Share the joke, please”, April begged as she looked from one to the other. “After the day I have had I need cheering up”.

“I assume that the visits did not go well”. Martha became serious. “Won’t they accept that you had no option but to tell the police about the missing bracelet?”.

“They all accepted it, though one or two didn’t like the suggestion that they may have had something to do with it”. April thought back to the conversations with Madeleine and Penny which although polite had contained an undercurrent of blame. “I doubt that they will be coming back for lunch soon though, which is a shame as they were a lot of fun”.

“I think you are feeling it too closely. I’m sure that they will come to their senses. Where else are they going to get cooking like this for the price they pay? They have already fallen out with the Pebbles Rest and I can’t see them at the pub down the road somehow, can you?” Martha grinned.

“According to Madeleine they are eating in the Cozy Cavern next week. She was at great pains to point out that their set menu was £5 cheaper than ours”.

Miguel snorted. “And for their £25 they will get a choice of pate on toast, melon, or prawn cocktail for starters, something with chips and a salad garnish for the main course, and one of Rachel’s cakes for dessert with a small blob of cheap vanilla ice cream. It won’t even be Jersey ice cream. I ate there a few weeks back with Rachel so that we could assess the competition. Other than the desserts it is nowhere near the standard of food that they get here”.

April smiled. The Cozy Cavern was in the village of St Agnes itself, just opposite the church, and she knew that they took a daily delivery of Rachel’s cakes which they served as desserts. She also knew that they had reduced their order over the last few weeks and had suspected that they were not doing well. She had thought it may have been because of their location, people flocked to Gull and Gorse bay and it was only really the locals that spent any time in the village of St Agnes, but if what Miguel said was true then it may be because of their menu. The ladies liked fresh cooking and tended to go for the fish on the specials board, so she thought that maybe they would return to the Bay Harbour Grill sooner rather than later.

“We will see” she said non-committedly. “I’m just going upstairs to get showered and changed before we start serving, but before I go, please cheer me up by sharing the joke”.

“The joke” Martha looked at her quizzically. “What joke?”

“The joke that someone had just told when I popped my head around the door. I could hear you laughing from the restaurant”.

“Oh that”. Martha looked embarrassed and both Miguel and James looked away. “That wasn’t a joke, that was just...” she stopped.

“Just what?” April was intrigued and if she couldn’t solve the mystery of the missing bracelet then she was sure going to solve whatever mystery was going on in her kitchen. She had never made a distinction between herself as boss and the others as workers, and she was not going to allow them to try and make the distinction now. Whatever they had found so funny they were going to share.

Martha huffed. “It was just Hope. She came in not five minutes before you”.

April had seen her just going in through her own front door when she had just driven down the road but had been focused on the car pulling out of the parking space and so had not given her much attention. “What about her?” she asked.

“She said she was making a fish pie for her supper and wanted to know if we had a small piece of smoked haddock to give the pie more flavour. Miguel found her a piece but whilst he was looking, she also helped herself to a small piece of salmon, some cod and some prawns. We knew you wouldn’t mind but when she had gone James said it was a miracle that he had any potatoes left to roast as he was surprised that she hadn’t taken them as well”.



April grinned. Hope was well known for taking most of the food that she ate from either the bakery or the restaurant. She didn't mind at all but she could understand why the others had found it so funny, it appeared that Hope rather than taking a missing ingredient for her fish pie had taken all the ingredients that she had needed. "Well, I'm sure that we can spare the fish" she said smiling at James who looked uncomfortable that he had made the joke. Out of all of them he was the quiet one and probably knew Hope less than the others. She wanted to reassure him that she was not unhappy that he had made a joke at Hope's expense.

"She does take liberties though" James said suddenly serious. "I know that you are very generous and let us all have anything that is spare, but we gave her a tail of smoked haddock that was surplus to requirements and she then took some nice fillets of cod and salmon as well as half a dozen prawns. She was not to know that we wouldn't need them".

"I'll let you explain that to her". April grinned, she was not going to go in to battle with Hope tonight. She headed for the stairs and opened the door in to her apartment which she always kept unlocked when the restaurant was open. It was a shame that she didn't have time for a bath she thought as she pushed open her living room door, stopping in shock as she saw the sight that greeted her.

Ben Howe was sitting on her sofa looking for all the world like he lived there.

"Finally," he said looking up at her. "I thought you were never going to get home".

April found her voice eventually.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, wondering if her voice would carry to the kitchen two storeys below if she screamed. She didn’t think it would, so saved her breath in case she was going to have to make a mad dash down the stairs. “The police are looking for you”.

“I know” he said suddenly serious. “Although they won’t be for much longer. I am going to turn myself in but I wanted to see you before I did”.

“Why do you want to see me?” She was surprised, she had only known him for a couple of days and although they had got on, she didn’t think she had made such an impression on him that he would have wanted to unburden himself of all his sins before he spent a lifetime in prison.

“I wanted to explain, and to find out what you knew and what you thought?” He gestured for her to take a seat on the sofa next to him.

“I’ll stay here” she said her voice firm. “I think I’m safer here, don’t you?”.

His face crumpled and he looked like he was going to cry. He put his head in his hands. “I wouldn’t hurt you; I haven’t hurt anyone; you have got to believe that”.

She sighed and walked across to the sofa opposite the one that he was sitting on. She sat down opposite him. Whoever he was, whatever he had done, she did not believe that he had killed Samantha, even accidentally. According to Hope she was a bad judge of character, and her judgement had got her in to trouble before and could well get her in to trouble now, but in

her heart, she could not believe that Ben had had anything to do with Samantha's death.

"Why don't you tell me about it?" she said quietly.

Ben nodded. "I lied to you when I said that I had made a spur of the moment decision to visit Jersey". She nodded, this much she did already suspect.

"Why did you come here?" she asked when he hesitated. "I know your name is not Ben Howe but Ben Jarvis-Howe. Were you related to Samantha?"

He took a deep breath. "I was related to Stanley. He was my father, although I only ever met him the once, when my mother died". April watched him, unsure whether to believe him or not. As far as she knew Stanley Jarvis was childless and devoted to his first wife.

"My mum had an affair with Stanley and I was the result. Apparently, it was only brief, Stanley and his wife had found out that they couldn't have children and his wife had some sort of breakdown. Anyway, he met my mum on a business trip and they had a relationship for a few months. It was over long before I was born, and my mum never told me who my father was, but he supported me, was the one who paid my school and university fees and paid the rent on my mother's house until she died".

April thought back to the story that he had told her on the boat. So that much was true, although he had omitted to tell her who his father was.

"If you had nothing to do with him, why come here when he had died" she asked. "Did you want money?"

“I just wanted what was mine”. He sighed and shook his head before looking up. “He came to see me, just after my mother had died. I was packing up her belongings to clear out her apartment and he knocked on the door. He told me that he had heard that my mother had died, that he was sorry for my loss and then broad sided me by telling me that he was my father. He took me out for a meal and said that he had promised my mother that he would financially support me until I finished my education and then I was on my own. Said he had started out in business with nothing and once I had finished my studies it was down to me”.

“It must have been a shock”. April could only wonder at what turmoil this must have caused, to suddenly come face to face with the father you had never known, only for that man to turn round and say he wanted nothing to do with you.

“I said I understood and asked him why he had come to see me”.

“And what did he say?” April could only think how cruel he must have been and wondered what possible reason he had given.

“He said that he knew that it was too late for a relationship with me, but he did say that he had recently been widowed, had no living relatives and he would keep an eye on me from afar and if I made something of my life, I would inherit his businesses and his estate when he died”.

“That was fair of him I suppose, or as fair as he could be”. She thought that Stanley would have been a lot fairer if he had tried to build a relationship with his only son, but perhaps it would have been too painful. And someone like Stanley who had valued money so highly may have thought that providing for his son would adequately compensate him for not being part of his life.

Ben shrugged. "I threw it back in his face, said I had never had anyone growing up, that neither of my parents had really wanted me and I would make my own way in the world. And I did. I used what little was in my mother's bank account, sold her jewellery and antiques, bought the boat and decided to see the world. And then four weeks ago I got contacted on my email account by a lawyer who told me Stanley Jarvis had died and I needed to get in touch".

"He had left you his businesses after all?" April was surprised, she had assumed that he had left everything to Samantha, but if he hadn't it was clear why Samantha had been so horrified to see Ben in the restaurant.

"Not exactly". Ben smiled, a smile that did not reach his eyes. "When I contacted the lawyer, I was informed that it had been my father's intention to leave me his late wife's jewellery as he felt that it would not be appropriate for Samantha to have it. He had written a letter to that effect four years ago, just after he had remarried. The lawyer said however that he had been in touch with Samantha who informed him that all the jewellery had been sold last year as Stanley found it too painful to have them in the house".

"That seems strange" April was surprised. "If that had been the case why not just give them to you then, if that had been his intention?"

"Exactly what the lawyer felt. He thought that Samantha's response may not be entirely accurate as there had been no large sums of money paid in to Stanley's accounts that were unaccounted for last year, but told me I would struggle to prove anything to the contrary. I might be a penniless sailor but Stanley did pay for a good education. I did some research on the internet and discovered that Samantha Jarvis whilst undoubtedly a good business woman was also an unscrupulous one. I smelled a rat and so contacted her".

April nodded. Samantha Jarvis had not been known as scandalous Samantha for nothing. It would have just been like her to try and swindle Ben out of his rightful inheritance. He would have found plenty of information on the internet relating to how she had used her business acumen to crush people's livelihoods.

"Did she reply?"

"She sure did. Stuck to her story and so I said that I would be visiting Jersey to meet her. I was in a bar in St Malo when someone pointed out to me that Isa lived in Jersey and so I befriended him and he joined me on the voyage across. I paid her a visit on Tuesday morning just before I met you. That was why I needed a beer so early after my confrontation with her. She was not happy to see me, I can tell you, and threatened me with lawyers if I contacted her again".

"So, you decided to take matters in to your own hands?"

Ben nodded. "Yes. When I left the restaurant, I saw that she was on her boat. She had just sailed in from somewhere. I thought she must be planning on staying on her boat so went back to mine and got the tools I needed. I was planning to break in but when I got there, I found the back door was open and realised that she must have left her boat whilst I was getting my tools and got to her house before me. Fortunately, she must have gone in to the bathroom or something and I managed to sneak in and grab the jewellery from the bedroom. I was in a rush and didn't care which jewels were Samantha's and which had belonged to my father's first wife. I figured she was trying to swindle me so she deserved to be swindled herself. You met me as I was heading down from the house. I got in and out of the property from the garden so that nobody would see me".

"Did you really think you would get away with it?" April could only imagine what Samantha's reaction would have been when she discovered

all her jewellery was missing. “You would be the most obvious suspect”.

“I didn’t care. There would be no proof that I had taken it, and anyway she had sworn to the lawyer that Stanley’s late wife’s jewellery had already been sold. How could it have possibly been stolen if it wasn’t there? Only I discovered that you must have found the jewellery box and taken one of the bracelets and so I thought I better make my escape pretty quickly before the police came running”.

“Why did you come back, why not just continue with your plan and sail to wherever you were planning to go?” There were some questions that she had about his story although it all seemed plausible.

Ben laughed. “I wasn’t planning to, believe me. My boat got engine trouble about six miles out and I didn’t think I would make France. I turned around and put in to port in St Aubin, planning on getting it fixed but then I heard on the radio that Samantha Jarvis’s body had been found. If you had told the police, you had found her jewellery on my boat then I knew that the police would think I had killed Samantha. I came here because I wanted to tell you what had really happened”.

April believed him, but before he turned himself in to the police she needed to know if he had seen anything. Can you think Ben, was there anything in the house that suggested if Samantha was meeting someone later, or what she was planning to do?”

Ben shook his head. “No, but I wasn’t really looking. I just wanted to get what I wanted and get out again as quickly as possible. She must have been planning to get changed though because that big black hat and veil she was wearing was on the bed. I had to move it out of the way when I was looking for the jewellery boxes”.

That was very interesting thought April. If she had gone home and started to get changed straight away it rather suggested that she had a meeting with someone. And as she had not been seen since leaving the harbour then whoever it was had probably killed her. The questions were who and why, although April was pretty sure that whatever anyone else may think it was not Ben.

## Chapter 28

Acutely aware that she was harbouring a potential criminal, and that if PC Mallet had already threatened her with arrest for not turning in the bracelet as soon as she had discovered it, she would no doubt be sent straight to prison with no chance of parole for hiding Ben in her apartment, she wanted Ben to turn himself in immediately. Ben was reluctant, and asked that April would allow him to stay the night and turn himself in in the morning after a bath, a meal and a good night's sleep.

Arguing was no use, April thought after her entreaties fell on deaf ears, and she understood his reasoning behind the request even if she didn't quite trust him. He had been on the run for two days and had eaten only what he could scavenge. If the police took him in to custody now, he argued, then he would have to endure another sleepless night whilst under interrogation. He looked so down in the mouth and miserable that April felt sorry for him and agreed that he could stay, as long as he allowed her to phone the police in the morning.

She was reassured that he had no means of escape and that she would be able to take precautions overnight to ensure that he could not slip quietly away whilst she was sleeping. The only way out of the apartment was through the restaurant which would be crowded with diners this evening. She intended when she went to bed after the restaurant was empty to lock



up and sleep with the key under her pillow which meant that the only way he could get out was to break out. And the burglar alarm that was connected to the restaurant door and the police station would prevent him from doing that.

Despite all the precautions she did not want to leave him on his own though. Phoning one of her waitresses, Elena, who was only too happy for some additional hours, she showed Ben to the bathroom and told him she was popping downstairs to get some food. He looked wary for a minute, as though he expected her to return with most of the Jersey Police force but she reassured him with a smile.

“I said you could stay the night, and you can. I will be phoning the police tomorrow though and I am trusting you to keep your side of the bargain. You do know I could get in to serious trouble for this anyway, and would be in even more trouble if you disappear again?”.

He nodded, clutching the towel to him, reminding her of a small child holding on to a blanket for security. He looked so forlorn and sad that she wanted to reach out and touch him but didn't. As much as she believed that he had not harmed Samantha, and had nothing directly to do with her disappearance, she couldn't quite bring herself to trust him. Which was why she had been firm with him that he would be sleeping in the spare room. He had accepted and she knew that he would not try and persuade her to change her mind, she just needed to stay strong herself.

“I am grateful you know April” he said smiling shyly. “I know that nothing I have done so far deserves your help”.

She shrugged. “I can understand why you lied, and why you took the jewellery. It's just..”. She stopped unable to go on. What she wanted to say was that she couldn't allow herself to get too close to him for if she did, she was scared that she would never want to let go, and his life path and her life

path led in different directions. He was a free spirit; a wanderer and she could never ask him to give up that life to stay in Gull Bay with her. Deep down she knew that she could never give up what she had built here for anyone else, that her destiny whether she liked it or not was to stay in Gull Bay.

“It’s just?” he looked at her quizzically prompting her with his eyes to go on and finish the sentence.

She shook her head. “Just that I always need to be sure that I am doing the right thing, and although I am doing what I think is right for you, I’m pretty sure that the police and everyone else would take a different view”. An image of Hope came in to her mind, and she hoped that Hope never found out that she had given the fugitive a bed for the night. “You have a bath, and I’ll get some food for us both”.

She walked down the stairs and in to the kitchen. Martha and Miguel looked at her in surprise.

“I thought you had gone to get showered and changed”. Martha looked at the clock. “We have two tables coming in for an early dinner at 6.30, you will need to get a move on.”

“I changed my mind and decided to ask Elena to come in and cover for me instead”. April walked over to the fridge. “I want to make notes on the conversations that I had with the Tuesday club. I’m sure that if I write everything down something will come to me, something obvious that I am missing”.

“I thought Ben was the chief suspect?” Miguel put down the knife that he was using to fillet the large salmon that was on the wooden board. “Surely

the Tuesday club had nothing to do with it, why would one of them kill Samantha?"

"I doubt that they had anything to do with her death, but there is still the missing bracelet and one of them must have taken it". April was beginning to think that maybe one of them did have something to do with the murder but wasn't ready to share that with anyone yet. Although Ben was the obvious suspect, she genuinely did not believe that he had had anything to do with it. And if he hadn't killed Samantha then someone else had. "I'm going to get something to eat, and make copious notes in the hope that something comes to me".

"You know, I'm sure that I saw Ben earlier". Martha paused from polishing the glass that she was cleaning and April froze, her hand on the handle of the fridge door. "The police haven't found him yet, have they?"

"I thought he had left the island. Didn't you say his boat was missing April?" Miguel had gone back to deftly filleting the salmon and wasn't looking at her as he spoke, which was fortunate she thought as her face must have looked terror stricken.

"His boat is definitely missing from the harbour, but I guess it is only an assumption that he has left the island, as I don't believe the police or the coastguard have managed to track him down yet". April decided to play it safe and confirm only what everyone had heard. "Where do you think you saw him, Martha?"

"On the path, coming down from the cliffs on the road in to Gull Bay. Saying that, it probably wasn't him. I only caught a glimpse of a good-looking guy as I drove past. I noticed as I don't get to see many good-looking guys during my day". She grinned as Miguel threw a cloth at her.

“Thanks a lot Martha” he grinned and she went back to polishing her glass. April was glad that the conversation had moved on so that she wouldn’t have to lie. Taking a large container out of the fridge she opened it to discover that it contained three portions of coq au vin.

“Is this the only coq au vin we have Miguel?” she asked turning around.

“Yes, how much do you want to eat?” Miguel looked at her in astonishment. “It is left over from the set menu this lunchtime”.

April smiled to try and divert any suspicion that she was acting oddly. “Not much, but I was just thinking if there are only three portions there is no point in having it on the menu tonight. I will take it upstairs. I can always have some tomorrow as well and freeze a portion”.

“You could always give a portion to Hope” Miguel smiled “It will save her coming in here and ferreting around for something tomorrow”.

“That’s a good idea” April said, thinking that if there was any left, which was doubtful as Ben hadn’t eaten all day, she would give it to Hope. “I’ll take some of those rolls as well”.

Miguel shrugged and she could tell that he was surprised that she was taking so much food upstairs, but she was also confident that he could not possibly guess the real reason. If he had suspected she was housing a fugitive upstairs she knew that he would not have been pleased at all.

The bathroom door was ajar when she walked back in to the apartment, her arms laden with the food that she had taken. She could just make out Ben's knees sticking out from the bubbles in the bath and she briefly thought how easy it would be to just turn left and walk in to the bathroom. But she also knew where that would probably lead and she could not, and would not, let herself get involved.

Instead, she walked straight ahead in to her large open plan living area which had the kitchen at one end. Transferring the coq au vin in to an ovenproof dish she put it in to the oven and started to make a salad. She was well aware of her limitations as a cook and that the salad would be nowhere near as good as the ones that Miguel and James prepared in the restaurant below, but it would suffice. When she heard Ben getting out of the bath, she put the rolls in the oven to warm.

He walked in to the living room a white towel wrapped around his waist and it took her all her willpower to look away from the lean, tanned almost naked man that was standing just a few feet away from her. "I couldn't find my clothes", he said gesturing at the towel.

"I put them in the machine on a turbo wash, they will be clean in twenty minutes and I can put them in the drier for you. There is a man's dressing gown behind the closet door in the guest bedroom. You can put that on while you eat".

He looked surprised, and a little unhappy. "You have a man's dressing gown here?" he repeated, the statement sounding like a question.

"Yes, my stepfather and mum stayed here for a couple of nights last year when their hot water boiler broke. Trevor left it by accident and I have never got around to giving it him back. He hasn't missed it and I don't suppose he will mind you wearing it".

Ben looked happier at the explanation. “I’ll go and get it then”.

“I’ll get the food ready; do you want wine? I couldn’t get any beers from downstairs; they would have suspected something”

“Wine will be great”. He smiled and as he went off to retrieve the dressing gown, she plated the food. Carrying it to the table she sat down as Ben joined her. The dressing gown was short and gaped at the front, exposing his toned chest and thighs covered in soft blond hairs, and she tried not to stare as he sat down opposite her. It was going to take all her willpower to not get close to him, so looking for a distraction, she picked up a notebook and pen that was on one of the dining chairs and placed it next to her. She had told Martha and Miguel that she was going to make notes on the conversations that she had had with the four ladies as an excuse as to why she was not working this evening but it was actually not a bad idea. She could use Ben as a sounding board and get her thoughts in order before she spoke to Hope tomorrow.

“What are you doing?” Ben eyed the pad, a forkful of chicken midway to his mouth.

“I met with the four ladies of the Tuesday club earlier today, the ones that you had lunch with”. She told him of her suspicions that one of them had possibly taken the bracelet that she had taken from the boat. “I thought I would write down anything that may be relevant”.

“Good idea, who did you see first?”

“Daisy”. April smiled “I’m not sure that she really told me anything relevant at all. It was all very vague and inconsequential. She talked about her children mostly, she doesn’t see them and I think she misses them. I

know that she didn't like Samantha, but I'm not sure why, and it was clear when they were having lunch here that Samantha didn't like her. Of all of the women she seemed to be making digs at Daisy more than any of the others".

Ben chewed thoughtfully. "Which was Daisy, was she the larger woman in the white top with a bright flower pattern on the front?"

"Yes, you sat down on Samantha's recently vacated seat so she would have been the woman on your right".

"I remember her. No, she didn't like Samantha from what I can remember. Someone, Margaret, I think it was, asked me if I knew Samantha as she had disappeared very quickly when I arrived and I lied and said no". He looked sheepish. "I'm sure that it was Daisy who asked Madeleine what had possessed her to invite that awful woman, and complained it had put a dampener on the whole lunch".

"What reason did Madeleine give for inviting her?" April had her pen poised over the pad. If as Hope suspected Madeleine had been forced in to inviting Samantha, this may be the proof that she needed. She had been very circumspect about it when she had spoken to her.

"She just said that it was the charitable thing to do. Thinking about it, Daisy did press the point. She said there had been a couple of ladies widowed this year that hadn't been invited and even went as far as saying that she had suggested that they invite one of them but they had all decided to keep it to the four of them. Madeleine did look very uncomfortable, but I think Margaret said something that took the conversation in a different direction and so nothing more was said".

“I think Madeleine had been forced to invite Samantha for some reason, which could have given her a motive for killing her, but I can’t imagine why she would have then taken the bracelet. It makes no sense”.

“You’re right”. Ben stopped eating. “I had taken the bracelet and so was the obvious suspect. If the ladies had just let you give it to the police, then you wouldn’t be interested in them at all. It is only because one of them has taken it, or you think that one of them has, that you are looking for a motive and the police went around to their houses”. He stopped. “If that hadn’t gone missing then you wouldn’t even be thinking one of those four ladies were involved.

April sat back in her chair. It was as though a light bulb had gone off in her head. “Maybe we are looking at this from completely the wrong angle”.

“What do you mean?” Ben looked longingly at the serving bowl in the middle of the table, and she nodded telling him to get some more. Her notes were forgotten as she started to think through the jumble of thoughts in her head, to try and sort them out.

“Maybe the bracelet is a lot more important in Samantha’s death than we think it is. You know the more I think about it the more I can’t help but think that Samantha was wearing that bracelet deliberately”.

“You’ve lost me”. Ben helped himself to two large spoonfuls of coq au vin. He looked at her and when she shook her head, he cleared the bowl by taking a final spoonful.

“From what I have heard about Samantha she was a malicious, vindictive woman who took pleasure in making other people’s lives a misery. Especially other women”.



“I don’t think it was just women, given that she was trying to stop me claiming my inheritance” Ben interrupted bitterly, “but go on”.

“Assuming that she had forced Madeleine in to inviting her to lunch, then we have to assume that there was a reason, or reasons for doing so. I doubt that it was because she wanted to be friends with them, I don’t think the woman had or wanted any friends”

Ben nodded. “That makes sense so far”.

“I’m not sure why she didn’t like Daisy, but we know for a fact that she had tried to ruin Margaret’s business because she thought Margaret had stolen and then married the man that she was seeing. We also know that she had affairs with married men, and Penny’s husband was a womaniser, so there could have been a link there if Penny’s husband was one of the men she had a relationship with. We already think she could have known something about Madeleine that Madeleine wanted to keep hidden. She would have loved the fact that she was sitting eating lunch with women that hated her but that had to be polite for the sake of appearances. It was almost as though she had decided to have some fun at their expense”.

Ben looked thoughtful. “That’s a lot of ifs and maybes April. Other than you know that she didn’t like Margaret because Margaret had married a man that she was seeing, you don’t have any concrete facts at all. And where does the bracelet come in to all of this?”.

April pulled a face, he was right, it was all circumstantial. She willed herself to think back a few days to the lunch. The questions that were forming in her mind started to take shape. “When I think back to the lunch” she started slowly, “the way Samantha was wearing the bracelet was all wrong. It was odd, it didn’t look right. It was a nice piece of jewellery and I thought at the time that she was just showing off, but as you know because you took it, she had plenty of jewellery and if she wanted to really show off, she could

have worn a lot of other pieces. Pieces that would have looked better with what she was wearing. But all that she had on was a large diamond engagement ring and the diamond and emerald bracelet that she had worn over the cuff of her dress rather than around her wrist”.

“She was in mourning; I don’t think that she had many scruples, but maybe she wanted to maintain appearances and not want to look too showy. Or maybe the bracelet had a lot of significance to her and Stanley”.

April stared at him in sudden realisation. “Or maybe it was of significance to someone else. I noticed it immediately because of how it was worn and perhaps that was the idea. Maybe she wanted it to be noticed. Maybe she was passing a message to someone. The more I think about it the more I am thinking that it was because of the bracelet that she was killed. None of the four ladies liked her, that much is clear, but they had cohabited in the bay for the last few years and not one of them had tried to kill her. I think the bracelet has far more significance than any of us realise. Was there anything unusual about the bracelet that you saw when you took it? I barely looked at it to be honest”.

Ben shook his head. The jewellery box was on the dressing table, but the emerald bracelet wasn’t in it, it was on the bed next to her hat and dress which would make sense if she had been wearing it. I nearly didn’t take it to be honest because of the engraving inside. I thought it was unlikely that it had been my father’s late wife because of the initials and the date, but I was so angry with her that she was trying to screw me out of my inheritance that I took it anyway”.

“It had an engraving inside?” April was stunned. “I didn’t notice that”.

“It was in tiny script, on the rim inside. It was SM and the numbers 4618. I remember because it seemed like a date”.

“SM stands for Samantha MacQueen, it was her maiden name. The numbers seem like they could be a date. Was it definitely 4618?”

“Absolutely. But if it is a date Samantha would have been SJ in 2018 because she was married to Stanley. Unless the M is her middle name?”

“I don’t know and I am too tired to think”. She shook her head. Nothing made sense. “Do you want anything else?” She looked across at him.

His eyes met hers intensely. “Yes, but I’m not going to ask, and as hospitable as you are in allowing me to stay here tonight, I doubt that you would grant a man his last request. I think though that the longer you think about this the less you are going to know. Why don’t I get dressed in the clothes that will be dry now and we watch a film together before going to bed, our separate beds”. He grinned.

“Sounds good to me”. She smiled tiredly. Apart from the separate beds she thought. She had not envied Samantha Jarvis at all, but it was at times like this she wished she had been more like her. She doubted that Samantha would have turned down the opportunity that was clearly being presented to her. But April, much as she longed to spend the night close to Ben, knew that she would regret it in the morning.

## Chapter 30

It was Miguel and Rachel’s day off and so April had to be up and out of the apartment by six. Even though she awoke early she could hear movement in the kitchen and the smell of freshly ground coffee assailed her nostrils. Ben

looked at her in surprise as she walked in to the living room and flopped tiredly on to a chair.

“I was leaving early” he said. “I didn’t think you would be up. I want to be out of Gull Bay before I am seen”. He looked out of the window at the harbour where only a few men were on their boats.

“You promised you would give yourself in”. April felt aggrieved that he was obviously going to make a run for it and renege on his promise.

“And I am”. He put a steaming mug of hot black liquid in front of her. “I am not as bad as you think I am April”. He grinned ruefully. “But I am going to go across the headland and call the police from Gorse Bay. I don’t want the police to think I have been anywhere near Gull Bay which could potentially lead to them asking you some awkward questions and then having to lie”.

“Thank you, and sorry for not trusting you”. It was April’s turn to look contrite. “I don’t think you are bad; I’ve just been let down a lot”.

“I guessed. And it is why I am not trying to push for what I think we could have together when all this is over. Because I can’t stay here, and I wouldn’t want to feel that you have had to give up what you have here. In another lifetime perhaps”. He looked wistful.

April nodded mutely. If anything, she was relieved. If last night had told her anything, and it hadn’t told her a lot about the killing, it had told her that despite the obvious physical attraction to each other they had very little else in common. Once they had exhausted their questions over the death of Samantha Jarvis, they had struggled to find common ground on which to have a conversation. “What is your plan then?”

“I’m going to have breakfast and then make a dash for it. I didn’t sleep much last night worrying that I may have put you at risk in coming here, and so I’ve come up with a bit of a disguise. It’s not much, but it should be sufficient if anyone sees me coming out of the restaurant”.

“What sort of disguise? I haven’t got any clothes here except mine and you only have the clothes that you arrived in yesterday. You are surely not going to try and disguise yourself as a woman?”

Ben grinned. “Hardly. I think I may be a bit tall to pull off a woman’s look, and I doubt that your clothes would fit me. I went downstairs to the restaurant in the middle of the night and found a spare white coat, some checked trousers and a chef’s cap. I would imagine that you have delivery drivers coming and going here quite regularly, so nobody is going to give me a second look. They are pretty big so I am going to put them over my own clothes. As soon as I get to the end of the road where the path leads up to the headland, I will discard them and hide them in this rucksack. You can retrieve them later”.

“Thanks.” She was grateful that he had thought to be so considerate and relieved that she would be able to get them back and not have to explain to James where his spare chef’s whites had gone. Thinking of James made her look at the clock, he would be arriving in about half an hour to set up.

“You better go” she said. “James will be starting soon and I know that Hope will be setting out on a walk before she starts work in the bakery. She will be leaving in about fifteen minutes. What are you going to tell the police?”

“The truth” he said simply, “or most of it. That I had entered Samantha’s house to take what was rightfully mine, stole her jewellery box, but that I got spooked when I realised that you must have found the jewellery on the boat and so left. I didn’t kill Samantha so I have nothing to fear. Just do me a favour though and try and find out who did. I’m sure the police will try

and pin it on me and whilst they spend all their time trying to find the evidence against me the real killer will be free. The longer it takes them to realise that I couldn't have done it, the colder the trail is going to get". He took his plate and mug to the sink and rinsed them through before putting them in the dishwasher. Watching him she thought how lucky some woman was going to be. Just not her. Turning to her he smiled sadly when he saw that she was watching him.

"Just because I'm an adventurer doesn't mean I'm not housetrained you know" he said. "I had to fend for myself from a young age".

"I know, some woman somewhere in the world is going to be very lucky to meet you". She stood up and walking across to him pecked him lightly on the cheek. "It is time for you to get changed. Good luck and I hope everything work out for you. I will do my best to find who has really done it so that you can be free to leave the island and get on with your life".

She turned away quickly so that he couldn't see the tears in her eyes, lest that he thought they were for him. For they weren't, they were for her grandmother who had set her on the life path she was not going to change and who she missed dreadfully.

## Chapter 31

The day passed in a whirlwind of activity and April was relieved when eleven o'clock came and the last of the restaurant diners had left. She was just clearing the last of the glasses away when she heard the internal door from the stairs open, and Rachel and Miguel came through. She could sense immediately that they had brought with them some news.

“I thought that people were never going to leave” Miguel said. “We’ve been sitting on the stairs for the last twenty minutes as we didn’t want to miss you”.

“It’s been a very busy day; we have been rushed off our feet”. She cursed herself for her comments as soon as the words were out of her mouth when she saw the anxious look on Miguel’s face. She could understand how he may feel bad about it as they normally took Monday off which was a lot quieter but had wanted Saturday this week as they had an appointment in town they wanted to keep. “Don’t you dare start feeling guilty the pair of you, you are entitled to a day off you know”.

“I know, but it was good of you to let us swap Monday for Saturday this week. Especially as Saturday’s are so busy. I was relieved when I saw James get here extra early to start the preparations”.

“What were you doing up at seven on your day off?” April asked laughing “If I get a day off, I try and stay in bed until at least nine, otherwise I don’t feel as though I get the full benefit”. An entire day off would be nice she thought, but unrealistic until the autumn. For the next few months, she would have to make do with the few hours that she managed to get each afternoon.

“I was up at six” Miguel answered proudly. “I got up to go for a swim in the sea and he was walking past the bakery when I stopped. I yelled at him but he didn’t look around, probably too far away to hear me. Don’t know why he was heading that way though, unless he was fetching something”.

April stayed quiet. She knew that it must have been Ben that Miguel had seen but could not understand how he could have mistaken the Ben for James even though he was wearing James’ clothes. Although they were the

same height, James had to be about 220 lbs whilst Ben couldn't weigh more than 170. It just showed she thought how people saw what they thought they saw.

"Anyway", Miguel shrugged. "It's not important and that is not what we wanted to tell you. We have some news that you may be very interested in".

"About the murder?" April forgot all about how Miguel could have mistaken Ben for James and looked at the two of them with interest.

"Almost. About the diamond and emerald bracelet". Rachel interrupted. "We have seen it, or at least we think we have seen it. One that looks very much like the one that you described anyway".

"Where?" April was all ears. Could the missing bracelet have turned up again?

"In Pettits the jewellers. We were in there looking at jewellery, that is why we needed to swap...". She went suddenly very pink and stopped talking.

April took one look at their embarrassed faces and hoped that they had been in the jewellers looking at engagement rings. She knew that they would tell her when they were ready to make an announcement and was not going to push them to share the information. Instead, she just focused on the bracelet that they thought they had seen.

"You think the bracelet that you saw in the jewellers was the same bracelet that I lost?" It seemed incredible she thought that having taken the bracelet someone would be so brazen as to sell it to the jewellers in town.



“Yes, it was in one of the cabinets near the back. We asked to have a look at it and it seemed just like you described, a row of emeralds in the centre and two rows of diamonds on either side. I suppose there may be a lot of bracelets like that so it would be difficult to prove that it was the same bracelet, but it definitely looked like it”.

“Did it have an engraving inside?” April held her breath. If it did then it must be the same one and all that they would need to do would be to find out from the jewellers who had sold it to them.

“I think so, it had some letters and numbers but I can’t remember exactly what they were”.

“SM4618?” April asked excitedly, willing them to remember. “That was what the bracelet I took from Ben’s boat had inside it?”

Rachel shook her head in frustration. “I remember looking at it and thinking that it may be Samantha’s because of the initials but I can’t remember the numbers. Can you remember at all Miguel?”

Miguel looked frustrated. “No, stupidly I didn’t pay much attention. The man who showed us didn’t really say much because I think he realised we couldn’t afford it. It was for sale for £28,000”.

April whistled. It wasn’t a motive for murder, but the amount was certainly justification for theft. Whoever had stolen it could have sold it to the jewellers for a decent amount of money. If it had been purely stolen for financial reasons though, then it suggested that it may not have had anything to do with the murder after all. She squealed in frustration; she was just going around in circles. One thing she did know though was that she was going to have to go to the jewellers herself when it opened on Monday. She wanted to see for herself if it was the same bracelet, and just

as importantly find out who had sold it. One way or another she would get some answers, if not all of them.

## Chapter 32

Pettits hadn't changed very much since the first Frederick Pettit had opened a jeweller on the main trading street in St Helier in the late nineteenth century. A traditional jeweller that had remained family owned for the last one hundred and fifty years, it specialised in high end jewellery both new and second hand, and April thought it would have been the obvious choice for anyone trying to sell an expensive piece.

Hope had insisted on coming to the jewellers with her because she knew Frederick Pettit, the elder. It was a Pettit family tradition that the first-born son was not only christened Frederick but went to work in the jewellers. There was currently three Fredericks working there, and according to Hope they had recently been joined by Freda, the eighteen-year-old daughter of Frederick Pettit, the younger. He had clearly decided that the Pettits would, in the twenty first century, follow the law of primogeniture. Judging by the unhappy look on the face of the young woman who greeted them, it was a law that Freda was not particularly enamoured with.

Hope had dressed up for her annual visit to Jersey's main town, and instead of the plaid skirt and woollen cardigan that she habitually wore regardless of the weather, had put on a light wool jacket in cream and a dress in a dark red and beige floral pattern. She had teamed this ensemble with some low heeled dark brown shoes and looked very much like a wealthy elderly Jersey resident who could easily afford any piece of jewellery that she may desire. April hoped that the Pettits would be very keen to show her the bracelet that Miguel and Rachel had seen.

“We would like to see Frederick, the elder please”. Freda put down the tray of rings that she was sorting and turned her head to one side. Hope tutted with annoyance at the disinterested look on the girl’s face.

“I’m Frederick Pettit, how can I help you?”. A grey-haired man in a grey suit emerged from the shadows behind the young lady. He looked as disinterested as the girl even though there were no other customers in the shop. April was beginning to get the feeling that this lack of charm could be the reason why they were the only people there, the atmosphere was hardly conducive to the purchase of an expensive piece of jewellery. Sneaking a look at Freda she thought that any offspring that she may have would have to find themselves a different career as the jewellers was hardly likely to survive many more years.

“I said I would like to speak to your father”. Hope snapped. “Could you let him know that Hope Marchant is here?”

The man looked at her curiously, but made no effort to find his father. “My father does not serve in the shop; he merely attends occasionally in an advisory capacity. I am the owner of the shop and will be able to assist you with any request you have”.

Any misgivings that April had had of attending the shop with Hope were evaporating quickly. Looking at Frederick Pettit she knew that she would not have been able to get any information out of him at all, and could well have been threatened with the police if she had tried to push it. Hope however was not so easily thwarted, and rapped her knuckles on the glass counter in front of her.

“Look Frederick” she glowered at him. “I dealt with your father when you were a snot nosed baby and if I say I want to see him, I will see him. Now

are you going to get your father, or do I have to come round this counter and find him myself?"

Whatever Frederick's answer was they did not find out, as an elderly man entered the shop from a doorway at the back. "That won't be necessary Hope" he said quietly. Turning to his son he murmured, "Frederick, I will deal with this customer. Why don't you and Freda check my valuations of the diamonds that the client brought in on Saturday. I will call you in the unlikely event that a customer should walk in".

Frederick didn't answer, but just motioned with his arm to Freda, and they both drifted in to the back room, shutting the door not too quietly behind them. Frederick, the elder, settled himself on a stool and placing the cane that he had held in his hand on the counter top, sighed deeply.

"My son and my great granddaughter do not understand the need for old fashioned customer service. They appear to think that the customer should be grateful that we deign to serve them rather than the other way around. If it was not for my grandson, I would fear for the survival of the business, but he appears to have got not only my genes, but the business acumen of my grandfather as well. I only hope his second marriage produces more children, as my great granddaughter appears to take after her grandfather.

"I take it he does not work today" Hope looked around at the deserted shop.

"No, Monday is his day off which is why it is so quiet. I still work here on a Monday on the off chance that an unwitting customer may walk in. Such as yourself" he looked at Hope with interest. "It is many years since you have visited. I assume you are selling rather than buying".

"You assume wrong Frederick". Hope launched in to the story that they had agreed they would use in order to obtain information. "April is my god

daughter and it is her thirtieth birthday shortly. I wish to buy her a piece of jewellery”.

“You are honoured young lady to have such a generous godmother”.

Frederick looked at her with a twinkle in his eye. “Although I imagine that you have not always felt so fortunate. Hope can be very forthright and I am sure that you have not been spared her views”.

Despite herself April grinned, a grin that she tried to hide as Hope turned to her with a glare.

“It is my duty to protect my godchildren, and god knows she needs protecting from herself sometimes” Hope snapped. “Now are you going to show us some jewellery or are you just going to make snide remarks about me. You were always the same, even as a child”.

“You do not appear to have changed very much either Hope”. Frederick got down from his stool carefully. “What are you thinking of April? Diamonds are the stones that represent April, although if your birthday is soon then your birthstone could well be Ruby. How appropriate if it was, I am assuming as you are Hope’s goddaughter that you could be Ruby’s granddaughter”.

“You knew my grandmother?” April did not know why she was so surprised. Her late grandmother was Hope’s best friend and if Hope knew Frederick when he was a young man then it was probable that her grandmother had also known him.

“I did, very well. And your grandfather. Back in the day. The world seemed a better place back then”. He looked wistful.

“That it did Frederick, but neither of us are getting any younger and at our age we haven’t got time to waste reminiscing. Now are you going to show us some jewellery or not. April has her thoughts set on something with emerald and diamonds”.

“Emeralds, an interesting choice. I assume that is because you have green eyes”. He peered at her closely “Yes I have some lovely emerald and diamond earrings which will match your eyes perfectly, let me find the tray”.

“Have you got any emerald and diamond bracelets?” April interrupted quickly, thinking as he shuffled off to find a tray of earrings that it would take him all day. “I really have my heart set on a bracelet”.

“How peculiar that you should say that” He stopped and looked at them both intently. “As it happens, I do have an emerald and diamond bracelet. It is very expensive and I have had it for a couple of years”.

“That can’t be the one I am looking for, have you any others?” April spoke without thinking, clasping her hand to her mouth as Hope looked at her sharply and she realised what she had said. Any thoughts that Frederick may not have noticed her slip were faint, his body was weak, his mind was still razor sharp.

“What do you mean by that?” He glared at Hope. “What is all this about Hope, are you trying to deceive an old friend?”

“Hope sighed “Not at all Frederick”, she said soothingly. “April just meant that she didn’t want an expensive one”

“Frederick looked at them both sadly. “I didn’t think you would ever lie to me Hope, but I’m afraid I don’t believe you. I may have done, if it hadn’t been for the fact that this particular emerald and diamond bracelet is suddenly attracting an awful lot of attention. It has sat in one of our cabinets for the last two years, largely ignored and yet over the last two days both a woman and a young couple have asked to see it. And now you are telling me some story about wanting to buy an emerald and diamond bracelet. This seems too much of a coincidence. What is this all about?”

Hope pulled up a chair and sat down. “Forgive me Frederick. I should have been honest with you and trusted you.” She twisted her hands, uncharacteristically lost for words. “I did not want to put you in the position of having to betray a client’s trust. And it seemed easier to tell a small lie in order to look at the bracelet than to put you in a difficult position”. She bowed her head. “I apologise”.

Frederick seemed slightly mollified “I never thought I’d see the day when Hope Marchant apologised for anything. Life is too short at our age though to hold a grudge and seeing as it appears important, I will fetch the bracelet for you to look at.”

He shuffled around the corner of the counter towards a tall wooden cabinet in the furthest recesses of the room.

“It can’t be the right one” April whispered, “Frederick says it has been here for a couple of years”.

“Just keep your mouth shut. If it, isn’t we can ask him about it anyway and try and find out where he got it from? But let me do the talking, you can’t be trusted” she hissed.

April gasped in surprise when Frederick brought the bracelet out and placed it on a dark red velvet cloth on the counter in front of her. She looked at him, her hands hovering above the bracelet.

“May I?” she asked.

He nodded and she picked it up. It looked identical to the one that she had taken from the boat. Turning it over and looking at the inside of the band, she examined the inscription. SM 4618. It had the same inscription that Ben had told her it had.

She looked across at Hope, nodding slightly. Frederick mistook her nod for interest and spoke.

“It is a very fine bracelet. It contains 96 diamonds and 24 emeralds set on a platinum band. It would have been very expensive when it was new. We are selling it now for £28,000. It would be worth more, but for the inscription which is very personal and unfortunately devalues the piece. Of course, the diamonds and emeralds can be reset in a different band and we could always do that”.

“I don’t understand, this looks very much like a piece of jewellery that I lost on Thursday last week” She spoke carefully. “I don’t know how it ended up here?”.

“Impossible”. Frederick reached out and took the piece from her, clearly alarmed that she was going to try and stake a claim to it. “We have had the piece for over two years. It will be recorded in the book when we took possession of it, we make a record of everything”.



“Then I don’t understand.” April was perplexed. “Could there be two identical pieces?”

Frederick thought. “It is of course possible, even though a piece of this quality would not have been mass produced. We did not supply the pieces originally, I would say actually that they are European, Swiss possibly or French. The inscription could have been personal and meant something to two people I suppose, although it is unmistakeably a lady’s bracelet. Sisters perhaps”.

“I don’t know if Samantha had a sister” April turned to Hope who shrugged her shoulders. “I assumed SM stood for Samantha MacQueen, but it is possible the M stands for something else.”

“SM” It was now Frederick’s turn to look confused. “The inscription is PM”.

April shook her head. “No, SM”. She gently took the bracelet from his hands and turned it over again, squinting at the inscription on the inside. She traced the engraving with her finger. “SM4618”. She handed him the bracelet again.

“This can’t be right”. Frederick sounded distressed and took the bracelet with shaking fingers. He got a magnifying glass and looked at the inscription. “Freda” he shouted urgently. “Freda, bring me the record book for 2018”.

Freda hurried through, a large blue binder in her hands which she placed on the counter in front of her great grandfather. “Here” he said, his finger tracing down the page. “7<sup>th</sup> December 2018. Platinum bracelet with 96 diamonds and 24 emeralds. Inscription PM 7718. Look”. He turned the binder round so that April could look at the entry.

It was amongst over twenty pieces that had been brought in by Penny Mondel. April noticed with interest that they had paid her £10,000 for the piece that they were now retailing at £28,000. “I don’t understand” she started, stopping when a thought struck her.

“You said a lady looked at the bracelet last week. Who served her?”

“I did.” said Freda. “She wasn’t really very interested; she just took it over to the window so that she could see it in the light and said that it wasn’t really what she was looking for”.

“Can you describe her?” April asked.

“Not really” Freda shrugged her shoulders. “She was short, with short dark brown hair. Old looking, probably about the same age as my grandfather”.

“It sounds very much like Penny”. April looked at Hope, who nodded thoughtfully.

“Why are you so interested in what she looked like?” Frederick asked, looking from April to Hope and back again.

“Because I think there were two identical bracelets with similar inscriptions. And I believe Penny switched them when she was here last week. It is the only thing that makes sense”.

“Explain to me again why we didn’t call the police”.

April had stopped her car at the entrance to the track that led down to Penny’s small cabin. She turned to Hope who was sitting in the passenger seat.

“Because there is no proof that Penny killed Samantha and the police will bungle it. All they will be able to prove is that Penny took the bracelet in the café and substituted it for the one that used to be hers in the jewellers. She will be arrested for theft although a smart lawyer will be able to get her off on a technicality. All she would have to say is that she found the bracelet. After all you had been careless enough to leave it lying around”.

April didn’t reply, there was no reply that she could give that wouldn’t have sounded like an excuse, and she doubted that Hope expected one anyway. She looked at the bracelet glinting on her wrist which Frederick the Elder had loaned them for the plan they had in mind. It really was a beautiful piece and if Penny had had one just like it, she could well understand how badly she would have wanted to get it back.

“What is the plan?” she asked.

“We phone the police now and tell them that we believe that Penny has got some information relating to the murder. By the time they get here we will hopefully have managed to persuade her to confess”.

Hope had explained this to her already on the journey to Penny’s and it seemed as unrealistic a plan now as it had the first time that she had heard it. “And how exactly are we going to get her to confess? We have no proof that she killed Samantha and Penny will know that it is just guesswork on our part”.

Hope smiled. “We are just going to let her talk. And she will when she sees the bracelet on your wrist. I don’t think this murder was premeditated at all; I don’t even think Penny meant to kill Samantha. I think she will be relieved that it is coming to an end”. Hope looked around her. “The woman has lost almost everything, I guess she probably thought she had no more to lose”. She sighed sadly.

April called the police station and left a message for Sergeant Tozier, before putting the car in to gear and driving slowly down the track. Despite Hope’s confidence that they would easily be able to extract a confession out of Penny, April wasn’t so sure. In the conversation that she had had with her a few days ago she had been very guarded, quite wary and not at all welcoming. She knew that she had very little left to lose, but to her mind it was when you had almost nothing that you came out fighting.

Penny was sitting on the terrace of her cabin, peeling apples. She stood up in surprise when April’s car pulled up, and April saw her eyes widen when they walked towards her and she caught a glimpse of the bracelet on April’s wrist.

“You found the bracelet after all”. She recovered well and sat back down at the table without acknowledging Hope. She gave a tight smile and peeled an apple carefully.

“That’s the odd thing really Mrs Mondel”. Hope spoke just as April opened her own mouth. “I have just bought this for April in Pettit’s the jewellers. It looks remarkably similar to the one that April had misplaced the other day”.

Penny shrugged and carried on peeling the apple that she was holding. “Perhaps there were two. Or maybe several. I don’t know. If you are planning on interrogating me again about this bracelet you can just leave. I

told you last time that I knew nothing about it and I still know nothing about it”.

“That isn’t true”. Hope persisted. “Mr Pettit told us that you had been in the jewellers on Friday and were looking at this bracelet. Even if you thought that it was a duplicate, knowing that it was remarkably similar to the one that Samantha had been wearing, the one that April had and which was missing, it is extraordinary that you wouldn’t have said something. If not to April to the police. When April came to see you, it must only have been a few hours since you had been in to the jewellers. But you didn’t say a word”.

“It was not my business to” Penny snapped. “April had already accused one of us of stealing the bracelet just because we happened to be at the table when she lost it. Imagine if I had opened my mouth and said I thought that I had seen a similar one in a jewellers. I would be the obvious one on who suspicion would fall. I’ve been through enough the last couple of years”.

“Poppcock” Hope fired back. “You are lying Mrs Mondel, and I can’t help thinking that you have been telling a lot of lies recently”.

Time seemed to stop. April watched Penny as she stared in to the far distance, through the gorse and brambles that were scattered over the headland at the far end of the property to the sea beyond. She turned the knife over and over in her hand as though contemplating whether or not to use it and then slowly put it down on the table and pushed it away. April recognised the look in her eyes. It was the look of defeat. She had seen that same look as a child when she had witnessed her mum pleading with her father just before he had left home for the final time.

“I just wanted to talk to her”. Penny’s voice was little more than a whisper. “She was a vindictive, vicious woman who never did anything without a reason and I wanted to know why she had bought my bracelet. I knew that

there had to be a reason. She could afford the finest jewels money could buy and would never have bought something second hand unless she had had a very good reason to”.

“Only you discovered it wasn’t your old bracelet” April interrupted.

Penny looked at her in surprise and nodded. “I was going to telephone her later that day, but as I left the restaurant that afternoon, I saw that she was on her boat so I hopped aboard. I thought there was no time like the present and given that she had had quite a lot to drink at lunchtime she might have been more forthcoming. Not that she needed any encouragement to talk”.

“I’m guessing that she told you that your husband had bought the bracelet for her?”

Penny bit her lip and nodded. “She called me a naïve stupid cow who couldn’t accept that my husband preferred the company of other women than me. She said that they had been having an affair and he had bought the bracelet in Switzerland to commemorate their first-year anniversary. He had obviously bought one for me as well to commemorate our thirtieth anniversary”. Penny laughed without humour. “He could have placed a bulk order for all I know”.

“I can understand how that must have made you angry”. April said thoughtfully. “It must have been hard to hear that your husband had been having an affair”.

Penny looked at her in surprise and then burst out laughing. A genuine laugh this time. “I knew that my husband had affairs, I always knew. He was even having an affair when I was pregnant with our son. People thought I couldn’t see it but of course I did. I’m not sure if I accepted it, but I certainly tolerated it. I loved him you see and he always came back to me.

I was the one he had truly loved for thirty years. The others were just...” She stopped. “It was Samantha who couldn’t accept that she wasn’t the one, even though she already had a husband”.

“I don’t understand” April stuttered. “If you knew about his affairs, why did you kill Samantha. Was it because she confirmed it?”

“Of course not. I didn’t care about that. It was because of what she had done. He had left her you see; he always left the other women in his life. He liked the passion and the excitement but he got easily bored and when it became routine, he always discarded them. She told me that he had been a fool, that they could have had something special but that he had run back to wifey. She actually called me that to my face, can you believe it?” Her eyes sparkled with anger. “And then she said that she had made him pay and I suddenly realised what she had done and I couldn’t help myself. I just lost control”.

“What had she done?” April was bewildered. She couldn’t think anything was worse than having an affair and throwing it in the spurned wife’s face.

Hope interrupted. “If she couldn’t have your husband, she made sure that she took everything else, didn’t she?” She looked across at the large house next door where two children splashed happily in the swimming pool.

Penny nodded, her eyes sparkling with tears. “When Martin died, they called him a gambler, a speculator, a risk taker. But he was none of those things. My husband was one of the best financiers on the island. Every risk he took was calculated, every investment he made was meticulously worked out. It was women who were his Achilles heel and it was one woman who brought him down”.

“Meridien Aviation” Hope said, and Penny nodded.

“Meridien Aviation were in trouble, bad trouble, but Jarvis Freight were going to take them over. Samantha told him and he had invested heavily. I don’t know what made him use money that he didn’t have, it was so out of character, but he was getting older and I think he believed that this was one last deal, his last chance to make a huge amount of money. When he left Samantha, she must somehow have persuaded Stanley to pull out of the deal. Martin lost everything and he couldn’t bear that. I don’t know whether he meant to take his own life or whether it was an accident but she killed him and so I killed her. And I’m glad I did”. She raised her chin defiantly.

“And so, you went back later that day and killed her?” April looked at her in horror. She could understand how in a moment of anger Penny may have lashed out, but to leave and then go back and execute Samantha in cold blood just seemed horrible. She edged her chair further away from the table. If she was capable of that then she was capable of anything.

“No, I killed her there and then. There was a marble statue on the table and I just picked it up and lashed out at her. I caught her right on the side of the head. I knew before she had hit the floor that she was dead”.

“But...” April stammered. “It can’t have happened like that because Samantha had gone home.” Samantha had been seen leaving the bay later that afternoon, she had returned home because Ben had stolen the bracelet from her house. Penny was lying and April could not work out why. Had she thought she had killed her but had only injured her, and it was someone else who had killed her later that day? Her mind wandered to Ben. Had he been telling her the truth?

Penny shook her head. “No, that was me. I knew that I couldn’t leave her there, that someone may have seen me get on the boat so I started the engine and sailed out to sea. I didn’t go far”. She laughed bitterly.

“Certainly not far enough as her body washed in with virtually the first tide.



I stripped her, wrapped her in a fishing net that I found, weighed it down with the statue and dumped her over the side about two miles out to sea. I then got dressed in her outfit, put that ridiculously large hat and veil she was wearing on and when I returned to the harbour took the path up to the house. My plan was to leave her clothes there so that the police would think that she had returned home before going missing. Only I was interrupted”.

April thought back to Saturday when Miguel had mistaken Ben for James because he had been wearing James’ chef clothes. So, it was Penny dressed as Samantha that Eric had seen. It would be the most obvious thing in the world to assume that a woman dressed as Samantha, getting off Samantha’s boat was Samantha.

“Ben came to Samantha’s house looking for her, didn’t he?” April asked.

Penny nodded. “I couldn’t believe my bad luck. I had just got changed when I heard Ben shouting from downstairs. I quickly hid in the dressing room. He didn’t come in there, but he did take the bracelet. When I saw that you had it a couple of days later, I just couldn’t resist taking it so that I could substitute it for mine at the jewellers. I didn’t think the jeweller would notice”. She started and looked around as a police car drove in to the parking area. “If I hadn’t done that nobody would have guessed, but I just couldn’t resist having my bracelet back. It doesn’t really matter though, I’ve lost everything else, I may as well lose my freedom”.

“I’m sorry” April said looking at her and she truly was. Samantha had been a horrible vindictive woman and although she hadn’t deserved to die, she felt for Penny who had lost so much. She couldn’t understand how she could have killed her but she didn’t blame her for her moment of madness.

“You may as well ask these two what has happened officer”. Penny bent her head as PC Mallet placed her in the back of the police car. “I really hate repeating myself and these two have pretty much worked it out”.

## Epilogue

Four weeks later

April looked across at the tanned body of Ben stretched out next to her on the towel. The last four weeks had been some of the happiest and most carefree she had ever known. In the six hours each day that she had free between her bakery deliveries and the evening service in the restaurant, the pair of them had explored the whole island on foot and on bike, had sailed to quiet little bays and coves, had sunbathed and snorkelled before eating barbecued fish that they had caught with salads that she had prepared. And in the evenings after she had finished in the restaurant she had slept on the boat under the stars, or Ben had joined her in her apartment where they had watched old films and talked and laughed before going to bed. It had been a blissful few weeks and now it was over and although she was a little bit sad, she was not as sad as she thought she would have been. It had always felt that their romance, like a holiday romance, had a short lifespan which had made them make the most of every second they had with each other.

“You will take care, won’t you?” she asked looking across at him. “How long will it take you to get to Sweden?”

“I’m allowing two weeks. I’ll hug the coast of France and pop in to port a few times. I could do it in a week but I’m going to take it easy. There is no rush”. He hadn’t asked her to join him since the first few days they had met and she thought that he probably felt the same as her, that theirs was a love like a shooting star that burned brightly but couldn’t last. She would always remember him; he would always hold a special place in her heart, but he hadn’t captured it.

“You’re planning to come back next summer?”.

“Probably”. He didn’t look very sure and she knew that as a wanderer he would hate to make plans that far in advance. “The lawyers say it will take years to unravel the estate but I will probably spend next summer here. I don’t expect you to wait for me”.

He smiled and rubbed her cheek with his hand to take the sting out of his words. The police had released him the same day that they had arrested Penny, there was no charge as he had not broken in to the house and he had only technically removed what was rightfully his. They had overlooked the emerald and diamond bracelet as he could not have reasonably known that was Samantha’s. Samantha had died intestate as her will had left everything to Stanley who had pre-deceased her. With no close relatives of her own her estate was passing to a distant cousin who lived in the UK, but lawyers acting for Jarvis Freight felt that they had a reasonable case for ensuring that Jarvis Freight at least passed to Ben as Stanley’s son. With millions at stake the company were keen for Jarvis Freight to remain in the hands of a Jarvis. Hope had suggested that it was probably because it was easier to manipulate a free spirit who did not care about the corporate world than an unknown in a foreign land, but then she would always see the worst in everything.

“I’m too busy to wait for anyone” April battered back. “It will be good to see you again though”.

Ben shielded his eyes from the sun as he looked along the harbour wall at a man walking towards them. “It looks like Isa is back from abroad”.

Sure enough, as April looked in the same direction, a tanned muscular man was striding along the harbour wall dressed in a pale blue shirt unbuttoned

to the waist, and tight navy-blue shorts. He was oblivious to the admiring glances he was getting from every woman he passed.

“Permission to come aboard”. He paused on top of the steps leading to the boat.

“Permission granted. Good to see you buddy”. Ben leapt to his feet and grabbed Isa in a man hug. “I thought I was going to miss you”.

April looked behind him as she too got to her feet, wrapping a sarong around her. Isa turned around in confusion wondering what she was looking at.

“I was just looking for a young woman, there is normally one with you”, she said innocently, although she couldn’t quite keep the smile off her face.

“Give me a chance April”. He rolled his eyes at Ben and grinned. “I’ve only just flown in this morning. I came here as I knew that Ben was leaving first thing tomorrow. I wanted to grab a beer with him but I see that he has grabbed something else whilst I have been away”. He looked at April with interest.

“You two go and grab a beer”. April looked at her watch. “I have to go and get ready for the dinner service. I’ll say goodbye to you now, I know that you are leaving early tomorrow”. She planted a kiss on Ben’s cheek and turned away hurriedly, so neither man would see the tears that had sprung to her eyes. They had said their proper goodbyes earlier where they had exchanged presents and she was wearing the diamond pendant in the shape of a heart around her neck. “Phone me when you get to Sweden so that I know that you are alright”.

“I will, and I will definitely be back at some time, if not next year the year after. Give me half an hour to change, Isa, and I’ll meet you in the pub”. He disappeared in to the cabin and as April walked towards the harbour road, she felt a presence behind her and turned to see Isa hurrying to catch her up.

“How was Europe?” she asked.

“Not as great as Jersey” he answered shortly. “Are you alright, you look upset?”

“Of course I’m alright” she lied. She knew that the feelings of loneliness would pass, that she would throw herself in to work and would soon forget all about Ben, but at the moment she felt raw. The last thing she wanted was a sparring match with Isa and so she hurried towards the restaurant, keen to get inside so that she could have a brief cry, pull herself together and get on with running her business.

“April”. Isa stopped walking as he started to speak, forcing April to stop as well. She turned around to look at him.

“He will come back you know. And I don’t mean just to claim the business. I know that there is another reason he will want to return to Gull Bay, one that is much more important than money”.

April shrugged. “I know” she said simply, “but there is also something that means he will never stay for long. And that is more important to him than anything.”

“What is that?” Isa looked puzzled.

“Freedom. Ben is a free spirit, I’m not. My life is here, in Gull Bay. There is nowhere I would rather be”. She looked around her as if seeing the pretty little bay and harbour for the first time. It was the first time she had ever given voice to her feelings that Gull Bay was the most important place in the world to her.

Isa nodded. “I can understand how you feel. I never thought I’d say this but there is nowhere else I would rather be either. I can finally understand why my uncle stayed here, and why my grandfather misses it so much”.

“Looks like the two of us are stuck with each other then”. She laughed jokingly.

“It certainly looks that way” he answered, with a smile that totally transformed his face. A smile which almost took her breath away.

I hope that you have enjoyed this book, the third in the Gull Bay Mystery Series. The fourth book; A Bottle Of Wills will be available in July 2021. All the names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents in my books are either the product of my imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to people, businesses, or events is purely coincidental.

Ashley Cain, Jersey, May 2021