

Penguin



Readers

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The
Thursday
MURDER
Club

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CHAPTER ONE

The Thursday Murder Club

Joyce

*It started with Elizabeth. She lives with her husband Stephen in one of the nice three-bedroom apartments in Larkin Court. I was having lunch in our “modern **upscale** restaurant” and Elizabeth came over and said she was sorry because she could see I was eating, but could she ask me a question about knife wounds. I said, “No problem,” so she put a file on the table and I saw the edges of some old photographs. Then she asked me to imagine that someone had **stabbed** a girl with a knife maybe three or four times in the chest – in and out very quickly, but without cutting an **artery**. How long would it take the girl to die? I replied that the girl would probably die in about forty-five minutes.*

I should mention now that my name is Joyce Meadowcroft – the Meadowcroft came from my husband, Gerry (he’s dead now and I miss him a lot, but I don’t talk about him that much). I was a nurse for many years, and that’s why Elizabeth was asking me. Sorry, I’ve only just started writing this diary. I’ll get better at it, I promise.

“But what if she was helped?” replied Elizabeth. “Not by a doctor, but anyone who could cover the wound and stop the blood?”

“Well, then she wouldn’t die at all,” I replied. Elizabeth nodded and said she had said the same to Ibrahim, although I didn’t know Ibrahim at that time. This was all a couple of months ago.

I was glad to help Elizabeth and asked if there was any way I could

look at the picture of the body. Elizabeth took out a photo, passed it to me face-down, and smiled.

“Can I ask you one more question?” she said.

“Of course,” I replied.

“Are you ever free on Thursdays?”

And that was when I first got invited to the Thursday Murder Club – and decided to keep a diary about it. The club was Elizabeth, Ibrahim Arif, who lives in Wordsworth Court, and Ron Ritchie – yes, the famous Ron Ritchie from the **trade unions**. I found out that he lived in the village from a story about him in the Coopers Chase newsletter, Cut to the Chase. Ron and John Gray had found an injured **fox** and nursed it back to health. They’d called it Scargill after the famous trade union leader. As John had once been a **vet**, I **suspected** that he had done the nursing and Ron had just chosen the name.

John Gray’s wife, Penny, also used to be part of the club, but she’s in Willows now. That’s the village’s **nursing home** – where **residents** move when they are too old or ill to live in the apartments. I suppose when she moved there, it created a space, and I became the new Penny.

Elizabeth and Penny had started the club. Penny had been a Detective Inspector in the Kent Police for many years, and she had a file of **unsolved** murder cases. I’m not allowed to say what Elizabeth’s job was, but I know that murders and **investigations** would not be new to her.

Anyway, Penny, Elizabeth, Ibrahim and Ron met every Thursday in the **Jigsaw** Room and went through the files looking for anything that the police had missed. They didn’t want to think that there were guilty people still out there. The club was also good fun – a glass of wine, biscuits and a mystery.

But I must stop writing now. There’s a big **consultation** tomorrow

about a new development here at Coopers Chase. Ian Ventham, the owner, is coming to talk to us. I have to be honest – I don't like him. He's all the things that can go wrong with a man. I know that Ron is planning to cause a lot of trouble, and I'm looking forward to watching him do that.

PC Donna De Freitas would like to have a gun and be catching murderers. But as she sits down for lunch at 11:45 in the morning with four **pensioners** she has only just met, 26-year-old Donna understands that she will have to work her way up to all that. And, actually, the last hour, giving her talk on “Home Safety”, has been quite fun after so much paperwork. Fairhaven Police Station is sleepier than she is used to. Her last job was with the Metropolitan Police in London, but she had to leave it. For a moment, she wonders what her ex, Carl, is doing now – probably trying to find a girlfriend on a **dating app**. But Donna does not want to think about that.

Today, she has come to Coopers Chase **Retirement** Village, a very pleasant group of apartments that sit in a large area of woodland near Fairhaven in Kent. The village seems to have everything – Donna has seen signs to an exercise room and library, as well as the huge residents' lounge where she gave her talk. An old **convent** and its **chapel** sit in the centre of the development; its west side includes a swimming pool, a **sauna** and gym. Next to the convent is Willows, the village's nursing home. Above the buildings, the pensioners tell her, a path runs through a tunnel of trees up a hill to the metal-gated **cemetery**,

where the convent **nuns** sleep forever.

There are about 300 pensioners living here, and it is different to what Donna had expected. Because as soon as she had started her talk, a smartly-dressed woman in her eighties in the front row stood up and said, “I’m Elizabeth. No window locks please, and don’t tell us not to give our bank details to strangers over the phone. We know all that.” And lots of heads nodded.

“Well, what shall we talk about then?” asked Donna.

“I’d like to discuss police mistakes,” said a man with a West Ham United **tattoo** on his neck. “When they arrest, or shoot, the wrong people.”

“Sit down, Ron!” said the smart lady.

And so it went on, enjoyably, until the hour was finished and they had thanked Donna warmly and invited her to lunch. So here she is, eating a very tasty salad in what the menu calls a “modern upscale restaurant”. She notices the pensioners are eating huge platefuls and have also opened a bottle of red wine.

“That really was wonderful, Donna,” says Elizabeth.

“It was great,” says Ron.

“I would be a good **drug smuggler**, I think.” This was Ibrahim, who Donna had learned used to be a psychiatrist. He wore a nice suit with a handkerchief in his pocket. “They have modern machines now to count the money. Guess how old I am, PC De Freitas.”

Donna looks at Ibrahim’s hands – they always tell the truth.

“Eighty?” she says, and sees the wind leave Ibrahim’s sails.



“Yes, exactly,” he says, “but I look about seventy-four. Everyone agrees. The secret is lots of yoga.”

“And what’s your story, Joyce?” asks Donna to the fourth member of the group, a small white-haired woman in a blue blouse who smiles a lot.

“Me?” says Joyce. “No story. I was a nurse and a mother. My daughter is the interesting one in the family. She manages a **financial** company in London.”

A question has been pulling at Donna, and she decides to ask it. “So, how did you become friends?”

“Friends?” Elizabeth smiles. “Oh, we’re not friends.”

Ron laughs. “No, we’re not friends. More wine, Liz?”

Elizabeth nods and Ron pours. They are on their second bottle now. It is 12:15.

Ibrahim agrees. “We’re interested in different things. I like Ron, but, being an ex-trade union leader, he can be difficult.”

Ron nods.

“And Elizabeth can be quite cold.”

Elizabeth agrees. “That’s true. I’ve never been easy to like.”

“I think we *all* like Joyce,” says Ibrahim.

Ron and Elizabeth nod together this time.

Donna stares at them in confusion. “So, if you’re not friends, then what are you?”

Joyce looks up and laughs. “Well,” she says. “Firstly, we are friends. This lot are just a bit slow to realize it. And secondly, I’m sorry if we didn’t say it when we invited you. We’re the Thursday Murder Club.”