

PREQUEL TO THE ISLE OF WESBERREY SERIES
A REV. JESSAMY WARD MYSTERY

Jubilee Jinks



PENELOPE CRESS

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

JUBILEE JINKS

First edition. February 1, 2020.

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Written by Penelope Cress.

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Isle of Wesberrey - A Rev Jessamy Ward Mystery

Holy Homicide

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To my wonderful Mum and brother who made my sepia memories of 1977.

Jubilee Jinks

A Jessamy Ward Short Story

The Isle of Wesberrey Series

A Prequel

Penelope Cress

Just following orders



“So, tell me again how hard you fought against being posted back to that forsaken little island?”

“Mum, I promise you I protested as much as I could but once Bishop Marshall has an idea in his head there is no talking him out of it.”

“But surely you have some say in where you live and work? And why there? I have a very bad feeling about going back there. Nothing good on Wesberrey except your aunts. Only bad memories and feral cats!” Mum piled up my plate with more cake as if fattening me up was her secret weapon against my returning to the place of my birth.

“Go on, Aunt Jess, Tell us again how you found out,” Clara asked.

“Do I have to put on the voice?” I looked at my two nieces, both sitting like bookends on the far corners of Mum’s sofa.

“Yes. Does he really talk like that?”

“Freya, my darling girl. I’m afraid he does.” I took in a deep breath and in a melodic voice continued. “Reverend Jessamy Ward!” Only Bishop Marshall, or my mother, ever called me Jessamy. “I think it’s time for you to have your own parish. The vicar on the Isle of Wesberrey passed away a few months ago. Terrible end, pancreatic cancer, most unpleasant. Anyway, God has welcomed him home and his happy departure leaves a vacancy that, well, if I am honest, no one else is overly keen to take on.” The Bishop had the most unusual, sonorous voice that made everything he said sound like a Gregorian chant. “I understand you know that godless outpost, still have family there and such like. It will be a challenge. Mainly ageing hippies, crusty old fishermen and eccentric misfits, but I am sure you will do your best.”

“I am not sure Aunt Cynthia would like to be referred to as an ageing hippy!” My mum grumbled. “And Pamela even less. I doubt there is a

more *conservative* hippy on the planet. Do hippies buy their clothes in Marks and Spencers?"

"Maybe she's a crusty old fisherman!" Freya joked.

"Er hum, you asked me to do this. Please don't interrupt."

"Sorry, Reverend."

"Ok, where was I? Ah, yes. Then I said 'And cats, you forgot the colony of feral cats'" I returned to my sing-song impersonation. "Ah yes, the cats! Colin used to complain that they would keep him awake all night fighting in the graveyard."

"Forget the bloody cats! It's the human pests you have to worry about!" My mother had grown up on Wesberrey, as had generations of her family before her, but the sudden death of my father made her take me and my sisters away when I was a teenager. Now I was sat in her front room sharing the news of my new parish with her and two of my three nieces. The news of my return to the Island was getting a mixed reception.

"I did try, Mum. I told him, 'Your Grace, I'm not sure this is the right posting for me. I do have some family left there but I haven't seen much of them over the years. My mother took us away when I was a teenager, and I have no desire to return there.'"

"An island full of cats. It sounds perfect for sad lonely spinsters," I eyed Freya with a look that made it clear I was not happy with her little joke. "Not that you're a sad lonely spinster, Aunt Jess. You are just... fussy."

"Selective." chimed in Clara, desperate as the older sister to save her sibling for further embarrassment.

"Sensible. That's what your Aunt Jess is. Unlike your mother throwing herself at anything in trousers. Every time she swore it was forever. Where is she now? Deepest, darkest Peru saving Paddington's relatives, just because what's-his-name is the one. Again."

Clara now had to leap in to defend her absent mother. "Mum's in Brazil with Federico. She's as passionate about the plight of the buffy-headed marmosets as he is."

“Of course, dear. At least I don’t have to worry about her turning up on my door pregnant anymore. That’s something. More tea? I think we all need a top-up.”

And with that Mum collected up the mugs and took herself out to the kitchen. My older sister Zuzu (or Susannah as my parents had named her) had struggled to settle down with one man. I was not convinced that was ever her intention. She wasn’t one to be confined to one spot for long. Although, she had managed to stay put long enough to get pregnant on three separate occasions. The results were my beautiful nieces, Clara, Phoebe and Freya.

“Anyway,” I continued, keen to change the subject, “I told him that I was hoping for an inner-city parish where I can bring God’s love to troubled youths, isolated pensioners, the lost and the lonely. And as for the cats... I’m allergic!”

“Of course. I’d forgotten. Surely you could appeal on health grounds?”

“Dear Clara, always the one with the sensible head on her. That is a great idea but probably too late now.” Morphing back into a medieval monk I continued. “This is a great opportunity, Jessamy. You can bring God’s love to a community who have turned their backs on him. They are truly lost. God is calling you. You are the only man, I mean, woman for the job.” You see, my beloved nieces, at that point I knew that I had no choice. I would be returning to Wesberrey. ‘And what about the cat allergy?’ I asked. Do you know what he answered? ‘Take some antihistamines!’ ”

Freya smiled at the Bishop’s helpful suggestion. “So, when do you have to move in then?”

“Won’t be for a few months yet. I think I will be able to spend Christmas at home here and then they should set my collation and induction for the end of January. These things take time. I have to be approved by the parish council first.”

“Oh, they will love you just as much as we do.” Freya jumped out off the sofa and perched herself on the arm of my chair before giving me a hug. Because of my sister’s many adventures in pursuit of love it had fallen to my mother to be the main caregiver to her three granddaughters. When they were younger, Zuzu used to take them with her - always moving on to a new home, a new life. My sister was a very loving mother but she always needed something more. When Clara started secondary school, my mother offered to take the girls in during term time. Just to give them a little stability. Let them settle down. Make friends. Zuzu would visit between adventures and the girls went to her in the school holidays. It was an arrangement that seemed to suit everyone - especially my mother. Now the youngest, Freya was at university. The house was quiet again.

“Aunt Jess, how much do you remember of the Island? Apart from the cats, that is. We’ve only met Grandma’s sisters a few times. I don’t think Freya remembers the last time they were here.”

“All I know is that Mum says that Cynthia is away with the fairies. Thinks she’s a witch, has a gingerbread house and everything! I’ll go help Grandma.”

Freya stepped out to the kitchen and returned with my mother and even more cake. As they settled back down I racked my brain to remember the strange island I was soon to call my home for a second time.

“Well Clara, I remember it was a pain to get anywhere because there are no cars. Your mother’s first boyfriend...what was his name, Mum?”

“How am I supposed to remember that, there’s been so many!”

“Trevor! That was it.”

“Trevor!” both of my nieces laughed. Trevor was not the most exotic of names. Zuzu’s current beau was Frederico but there had been a Johannes, Xavier and a Vladamir.

“Yes, Trevor. Nothing funny about that. He had a new Honda scooter. That made him quite the catch. And long hair. I remember he had *very* long hair. Well, it was the seventies.”

“How old was she? Clara, remember she made us swear not to date till we were sixteen.”

“Er, she might have been a tad younger. I know she was with him during the Jubilee. What year was that?”

“1977. Zuzu was fourteen. Your grandfather was not impressed. He banished your mother to her bedroom and threatened to keep her there until she turned eighteen.”

“She got out anyway.” I giggled with the memory of my older sister sneaking out across the conservatory roof. “Yes, ‘77. That was the year I went to big school off the island in Oysterhaven. I would have been eleven and Rosie, bless her, was about eight.”

Rosie was our youngest sister. She was easily the most sensible of the three of us and had been married now to Teddy for twenty years. They had one son, Luke. There was a strange pattern in my family. One sister would have three daughters, one would have a son and the other... well, the other, like me and my aunt Cynthia were born to not have any children of our own. According to family folklore that was because the childless sister was destined to be the appointed keeper of the Well of the Triple Goddess on Wesberrey. Total nonsense, of course. I was sure it was just a coincidence but it was pretty weird.

“The Jubilee?” Freya looked confused, her freckles knotting together into small brown blobs.

“Yes, like back in 2002. The Queen had been on the throne fifty years then, well she had another jubilee twenty-five years earlier. You must remember her Golden Jubilee. Brian May on the roof of Buckingham Palace?”

Freya looked even more bewildered. “2002? I was a baby!”

I turned to Clara.

“Don’t look at me, I was only seven. Who is Brian May?”

“Who is Brian... Queen? Freddie Mercury? C’mon... Bohemian Rhapsody?” At last, they nodded in recognition. “Okay, well what about the Diamond Jubilee then, that was only eight years ago?” They finally

realised what I was talking about and I realised I was getting old. “Well, young whipper-snappers,” I said in a mock ‘old lady voice’ “Make yourselves comfortable because I remember the summer of 1977 very well. It was the year Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II visited Wesberrey and things almost went terribly, terribly wrong...”

Charlie's Angels



“Once upon a time, there were three little girls who went to the Wesberrey School. And they were each assigned some very hazardous homework...”

“It’s not that bad. I quite like fractions.”

“But that’s because you’re the smart one. Do you think we will be separated at St. Mildred’s in September?”

My best friend Sam Simmons was brilliant at everything at school. She would have been the only one of the three of us to go the girls’ grammar school in Oysterhaven, St. Mildred’s if they hadn’t changed all the schools into comprehensives that year. The upside for me and our other best friend, Karen Clark was that now we could go to ‘big’ school with her. The Wesberrey Angels could stay together.

“I’ve heard that they stream you. They put you into classes according to how clever you are. So, Jess, you and I will be in the bottom set for everything!”

“Don’t be daft you are great at English. You write such great stories.”

We made a funny trio and really didn’t look anything like the real Charlie’s Angels, though we were huge fans of the tv show. Sam was tall, slim, bespectacled with a mischievous streak. She found school work unchallenging and often alleviated her boredom by finding ways to test the rules, never fully breaking them. Karen was medium build and height. I was easily the shortest as well as the youngest. I guess there was plenty of growing yet to do, we were still only eleven (well, technically I was ten, my birthday was a whole month away). I passionately hoped there was more growth to come because I admit I was a bit fed up with being the ‘baby’ of the group. Sam was the clever one, Karen the artistic and sporty one and I was... well, I wasn’t particularly good at lessons, or sports or

art, or music. That made me Kelly Garrett. Sam was Sabrina Duncan and Karen was Jill Monroe. Karen was the only blonde one in our gang so it had to be her. She was also the most athletic. If any of us was going to look good in a white tennis outfit scratching our behinds it was going to be Karen.

“Karen, look at your arms! You have a tan already. That’s not fair. The sun’s hardly been out so far this summer.”

“Must have caught the sun when I was with the boys last weekend.”

The ‘boys’ Karen was referring to where a gang of skateboarders who used the main road down from Upper Road to Market Square, Abbey Hill Drive, as their makeshift skate park. Karen hung out with them whenever she was fed up of playing with us. Neither Sam nor I were very interested in sports or *real* boys for that matter. Not yet anyway. I preferred my boys to smile at me from the posters on my wall.

“Your sister was there, Jess with her boyfriend. He brought his scooter. Yawn. The older boys took it in turns to ride it. They were all showing off. Don’t see the point myself.”

“The point of what? Showing off or riding the scooter?” Sam asked, genuinely curious. She often challenged us with such questions, as if we were part of some sociological research. “Surely getting around the Island quicker with minimal effort is clearly advantageous. As to showing off, that’s what boys do, isn’t it? Especially when there are girls around.”

“Don’t get me wrong, It wasn’t all bad. Your sister had her new JVC radio cassette player with her so we had some music and that. Though some of it was a bit, well different.” Karen pulled in closer and whispered so that my mother couldn’t hear. “They were playing the Sex Pistols!”

It didn’t work.

“Karen Clark! Wash your mouth out, young lady! What would your parents say? You don’t use words like that in their house do you?” The serving hatch linking the dining room and the kitchen screeched open.

“No, Mrs Ward. I’m sorry. But that is the name of the group. Susannah and Trevor were playing it. I didn’t like it very much. It was just shouting.”

My mother extended her neck and head through the hatch.

“My Susannah? I knew that boy was trouble. Just wait till her father gets home. Anyway girls, it’s very nearly tea time. You must be finished that homework by now.”

“Just a few more problems, Mum. Shouldn’t take more than ten minutes. Promise.”

“Well, then you might have some time for a little treat after supper. I have some Arctic Roll in the freezer. Would you girls like a slice each?” It was always my mother’s way to ball us out and then offer cake. This one had the added benefit of an ice cream centre.

After the desserts had been passed through the hatch, the spy hole was closed. Soon the comforting sound of my mother washing up as the tunes of ‘The Manhattan Transfer’ seeped through the small crack between the wooden doors. “*Chanson D’Amour...rat-ta-tat-te-tat..*”

“Karen?” I coughed “Do you think my sister is, you know... kissing Trevor?”

Karen laughed.

“I think they are doing a lot more than that!” Karen lowered her voice and leant in. “She sat on his lap when he was stationary on the scooter. He kept putting his hand down her blouse. She was hitting it away, of course, and giggling. There was a lot of giggling. All very boring if you ask me.”

“Angels, do you think we will ever be like that? With boys that is... all giggly and stuff.”

I looked at my friends. Sam sat back in her chair, pencil firmly locked between her teeth which meant she was giving the question serious consideration. Karen was more puzzled by the final sum in front of her. After a few minutes, Sam broke the silence.

“I can imagine that we will be no different from all those who have gone before us. There must be something to *it* if we, as a species, keep on, you know, doing it. However, maybe science will come up with an alternative. I mean, this love business seems very messy. All those country and western songs make it sound so painful. Who would want to experience that?”

Morning Assembly



Mr Forrest, our headmaster had gathered the whole school together for assembly. Each class lined up in alphabetical order by surname, in untidy columns facing the front and the stage. I waved at my sister Rosie from across the hall.

“Now, as you know children the Island is expecting a very special visitor here next Friday. Her most gracious Majesty, Queen Elizabeth will be passing by on the HMS Britannia and there will be a very brief stop at Stone Quay where she will disembark to receive our tribute for her Silver Jubilee.” Mr Forrest was like both Father Christmas and the child catcher from Chitty Chitty Bang Bang at the same time. As one hand delved deep into his tweed jacket to hand you a cellophane covered mint as a reward, the other prepared itself to give you a swift clip round the ear in punishment. His mood today suggested there would be free mints for all. “I will hand you over to Mr Leybourne who will tell you what we need to do to prepare.”

In all ways that mattered Mr Leybourne, the deputy head, was just a taller less hunched version of Mr Forrest. He too used rewards and punishments to control us but appeared to use more personal energy to enforce them. His face was always on the verge of turning as violently red as his temper.

As Mr Leybourne stood up to speak a surprised giggle caught fire across the hall. One disadvantage of having a surname beginning with the letter ‘W’ is that messages and gossip took a long time to reach you. There had been many times when I had embarrassingly laughed at a joke after the room had returned to silence.

“Sssshh! Pass it on... Adrian Little saw Mr Leybourne and Miss Sykes snogging in the staff room this morning.”

“Silence!” Mr Leybourne yelled.

I swallowed my surprised gasp.

“Adrian Little! I will see you in my office after assembly. Now, to her Majesty’s visit.”

It took Mr Leybourne far too long to explain the details of her majesty’s trip. Most of his seeming endless speech centred on how important it was to be on our best behaviour as we were representing not only ourselves but also him, Mr Forrest, our parents, the school and the whole of Wesberrey. The whole ceremony sounded quite boring. Lots of people standing around and a communal singing of ‘God Save the Queen’. At least it meant a day out of lessons. The most interesting part was going to be the presentation to her Majesty of a special commission created by the Island’s resident celebrity artist, Clifford Reid. Clifford Reid was an extraordinary character and the type of British eccentric type most children would taunt and run away from. That was not an option for me as he was my aunt Cynthia’s boyfriend.

I had visited his studio once. A fascinating place, full of misshapen lumps of clay that vaguely resembled people, if those people were like those plastic troll dolls with coloured hair. These objects were not dolls though they looked like famous people from the television. Clifford had told me that one of them was the Prime Minister and the other was the American President, Jimmy Carter. My aunt said that they were all political statements against the establishment. Whatever that meant. To me, they looked funny so I laughed. I remember my aunt and Clifford shaking their heads and saying something about she will understand one day. I wondered what his piece for the Queen would look like.

I awoke from my daydream to find Mr Leybourne was still talking. I think most of my fellow pupils were actually asleep.

“As Her Majesty’s visit will be very brief there will not be much time for us to see Mr Reid’s work so Reverend Weeks has offered to display it over at the church and we will also go over after our assembly on Monday

to take a look. The artist will be there to talk about what inspired him and answer any questions you may have.”

After what seemed like forever we were finally released in our lines to return to class. Miss Sykes was our class teacher. She blushed as my sniggering classmates filed past to get to our desks. I liked Miss Sykes. She was young, pretty, always wore Laura Ashley style dresses and had fresh flowers on her desk. Like almost everyone else on Wesberrey, Miss Sykes cycled around the Island. I was very envious of her pastel green bicycle with its wicker basket at the front. I completely understood why Mr Leybourne would want to kiss her.

“Now class, please get your trays. The first lesson today is maths.”

Each pupil had a coloured tray with their name on a sticker at the front. The trays contained all our educational tools: pencil cases filled with coloured pens, felt tips, Bic biros for those who had graduated up to them, and different coloured exercise books for every subject. Maths was orange and inside were pages filled with tiny squares. Maths work was always done in pencil which was just as well because I always had to rub it out and start again.

At my work table sat Sam and Karen, of course, but we were also joined by three of the ‘boys’. Jonathan Brooker, whose rodent features already had acne, poor thing. Scruffy William Brown who was the only kid in class wearing brown leather shoes. The uniform was white shirts, red ties, grey trousers or pinafores and black shoes. William said the shoes were a present from his father. His father was away somewhere so Miss Sykes let him keep them on. The final boy at our table was Adrian Little, who was probably feeling the cold rubber sole of Mr Leybourne’s ‘slipper’ on his backside as we sat down to open our books.

“Sam, Jess why don’t you ever join us after school like Karen does. We have so much fun. Your sister brought her boyfriend the other day. He is so cool. Just like the Fonz. Aaaaay!”

“Jonathan Brooker, get on with your work.”

“Sorry, Miss!”

Adrian Little sheepishly entered Miss Sykes classroom, apologised to her for being late, collected his tray and slunk into his chair. He didn't say a word for the rest of the morning but his teary eyes spoke for him. Later, at break time, the boys were gathered by the bike shed.

"I think we should go over and see if Adrian's ok?" Sam suggested.

"But I thought we were going to do some French skipping!" Karen grumbled. This game with elastics was the latest craze in the playground. Karen and Sam loved it. I think being the shortest had me at a disadvantage and I wasn't so keen.

"I'll go with you, Sam." I scuttled up behind my gangly friend and looked back at the other with my best 'come on, join us' face. "He did look really upset. D'you think Mr Leybourne was very angry?"

"Okay, you win. I'll come with you. You need three to skip anyway, so I have no choice really, do I?" With that Karen raced ahead. I think she was just pretending to not want to go over. Karen hated to be left out.

Skater boys



“We’re so going to get him back.” Adrian’s eyes were now red with anger rather than tears.

“Get who back?” I asked.

“Leybourne, of course. It’s not right.”

“So you did get the slipper then.” It wasn’t an actual slipper. That would be almost civilised. Mr Leybourne used a black gym plimsoll. For really bad offences he had been known to use his ‘trusty’ cane.

“So?” William asked, “What are we going to do?”

“Well, I have been thinking. We need to hit him where it hurts. Cause him so much embarrassment that he’ll be forced to quit. Leave the school and the Island and never return!”

“How, exactly, do you plan to do that Adrian Little, eh? Do you have any bright ideas in that gossipy head of yours?” Sam was a little too interested in where this conversation was going for my liking.

“I have as it happens, Miss Brainy Box. We are going to mess up the Queen’s visit.”

“And how, Mr Red Backside, do you suggest we do that?”

Sam and Adrian were now standing toe to toe. Eyes fixed. Hands on hips.

Miss Sykes blew her whistle.

Break time was over.

Well-drilled boys, who seconds before were running around in hot pursuit of their quarry with hands for guns, or playing football, joined equally obedient girls who slowly crossed the concrete playground to line up in rows to go back inside. Girls, who seconds before had been looking at music magazines, or singing rhymes and throwing balls against the school walls.

The school yard fell silent. Miss Sykes nodded and we walked back to our room.

Back in class, Adrian was given the task of handing out the round edge scissors. We were going to make red, white and blue paper chains.

“Meet me in the churchyard tonight at five o’clock. I have a plan.”



“I DON’T THINK THEY are coming. They must have chickened out. All talk and no action. That’s boys for you.”

Karen kicked her shoes against one of the headstones. Nothing happens on Wesberrey and I think we were all looking forward to a little bit of adventure, still that didn’t mean we had to misbehave.

“Stop that! Have you no respect. What if Reverend Weeks catches you or worse his boss!”

“What Him, you know God?” Karen suddenly stood very still and slowly moved her head to look over her right shoulder.

“No, you silly sausage, Reverend Cheeseman,” I whispered “I hear that he once locked a boy in the bell tower for three days because he caught him folding down a corner of one of the prayer books to hold his place.”

“What utter rubbish!” Sam lifted herself up onto one of the raised stone tombs and crossed her legs. “Though that boy thoroughly deserved to be punished for abusing a book like that.”

The graveyard was a really creepy place to be. Very few funerals took place there anymore because my mother said it was full-up of bodies and if they dug any more holes for new ones, the old ones would rise up. Many of the headstones had collapsed into the ground. As there were few new inhabitants there were also hardly any mourners to maintain the graves. The most frequent visitors were the island’s famous feral cats.

Every child is taught that the cats were brought in to protect the island’s precious grain store in times of famine. With the local fisherman’s bountiful catches and passing trade from merchant ships, this meant that

the local community were historically able to weather any mainland food shortages. The cats were well cared for and prospered along with the island. When the plague hit the mainland, Wesberrey escaped death. That may have been because there were no rats or because we are an island cut off from the outside world but every child on the island knows that to harm a cat is to hurt your own family. Their population increased over the centuries and now outnumber the human population. Many of them live in and around the churchyard. In the morning they saunter down to the harbour to eat the spoils of the morning's catch and then they return to the tombs to bask in the midday sun. Visitors and tourists leave donations of cat food at the church but they don't really need it. They are well-fed moggies. They would be a very cute distraction as we wait but I can't go near them as they make me sneeze and my eyes steam like Niagra Falls.

Karen picked up a slinky black version and started to walk towards me.

"They say these fellas are unlucky. But this little one is so beautiful. Aren't you puss, eh? You are bootiful." Karen nuzzled her forehead against the cat. It was love at first sight.

"Just keep your new friend away from me. You know I'm allergic. Do you think the boys will come?"

Sam leant back on her cold platform and looked up at the sky.

"I knew that Adrian Little was all mouth and no trousers. Such a shame. I was beginning to have a bit of respect for him."

"More like you were being to have the hots for him." Karen went over to where Sam lay and pushed her new feline friend into her face. "Sam and Adrian sitting in a tree. K.I.S.S..."

"Don't be gross! Ugh!" Sam bolted up pushing the poor cat out of Karen's hand and into the air. Luckily he was a cat, and with a dramatic twist, he landed safely on his four paws - a little shaken but not stirred. Karen ran after him.

“I think we should go. Whatever silly plans they are cooking up it’s best we have nothing to do with them.” I agreed and we all headed back to the main road.

Home Sweet Home



I turned the latch in my front door only to have my arm almost yanked off as my older sister pulled it open as she stormed out. My father followed close behind.

“I am warning you, Susannah Ward. If you see that boy again I will get the police onto him. He is trouble. Mark my words young lady. Come back in here right now!”

Susannah paused at the end of the path by the gate and turned defiantly.

“That’s rich coming from you! How dare you tell me how to live my life when all the island knows what you get up to at the manor with your *friends*.”

I had no idea what Susannah was talking about but my father softened slightly.

“Princess, please come back to the house. We can talk.”

“I don’t want to talk. I want to feel. I want to know joy. I want to make love. I want Trevor. And you can’t stop me.”

My father walked slowly down the path. His arms outstretched. When he reached my now hysterically sobbing sister he pulled her towards him. They held each other. Then he pulled back and his face darkened.

“Did that little bastard make you do stuff with him? That’s illegal, baby.”

Susannah broke free.

“Is that what you think of me? I’m not stupid and he respects me which, it seems, is a lot more than you do. Don’t follow me.”

She walked off.

My father turned back to the house.

“What are you looking at? Haven’t you got any homework? Get inside this minute!”

His voice wasn't angry though. It quivered. I rarely saw my father cry. My mother, though, was often sad at bedtime.

Rosie was waiting for me at the bottom of the hall stairs.

“Will you play dolls with me?”

“Of course.”

We went into the lounge and I closed the door to try to block off my parents raised voices. Their row didn’t last long. There was a bang, which sounded like one of them had hit the kitchen table and then the front door slammed. Heavy footsteps crunched their way down the pebble path. The metal gate creaked open. Then silence.

“I like Daisy best. Her hair is so pretty. You have her friend, Havoc, she’s like a boy. She has short red hair and a catsuit and guns. She is really cool but I like Daisy best. Look Mummy bought her a new dress. It’s all sparkly like a rainbow. Is Zuzu in trouble?”

Rosie was never able to say Susannah’s name properly.

“No, little sis. She will be okay. She just wants to play with the boys, like Havoc. She wants adventure.”

“Boys are nasty. Bobby McGuire pulled my pigtails at school today. I don’t like Bobby McGuire.

“Well, in that case. I don’t like him either.”

The Unveiling



“Pssst! Where were you guys Friday after school? We waited at the graveyard for ages.”

“Friday at five o’clock. What and miss Crackerjack?” Jonathan replied in an overly exaggerated mocking voice. “Gotcha!” The boys laughed.

“Brooker, Little and Ward! Silence. We are in the house of God. There will be no more talking in the aisles. Have I made myself clear?”

“Yes, Mr Leybourne.” We answered in unison.

“Right. Well, we are all gathered here today for a very special assembly. I will hand you over to Reverend Weeks.” Mr Leybourne scowled at us all as he took his seat on the altar.

Reverend Weeks, an unremarkable man, was a new curate in the parish. I only saw him at school events like this as my family were not churchgoers. In fact, it felt quite strange sitting here. The pews were cold and hard. Everything was. The walls. The stone-flagged floor. Behind the altar though was a beautiful stained glass window with the image of St. Bridget holding a book and a staff topped with a lamp of fire. An everlasting flame. Wisdom and light, I thought. The light from June’s rising sun shone through the coloured glass. I found it quite... magical.

Next up after Reverend Weeks was Clifford Reid. He smiled broadly at someone behind us so I turned to see my aunt Cynthia standing right at the back of the church, leaning casually against a pillar. I caught her eye and she smiled and waved her hand indicating that I should keep my eyes facing front. Clifford was explaining his inspiration for the piece, still covered in a blue sheet beside him.

“I wanted to capture something uniquely British. Harking to the past, not of our distant empire of jingoism and colonialism but more

of middle England. Cricket on the village green. Fish and chips walking along the pier of a seaside town. 'Kiss-me-quick' hats and saucy postcards. Tamed rose bushes and afternoon tea. Not Shakespeare or Jane Austen but Coronation Street and Carry-on. Not fox hunting but whip-pet racing. The Queen is the queen of us all. She may have her large estates with Inigo Jones landscapes but we, the common man, or woman, have our neatly manicured lawns and ornamental fish ponds. These are our castles and our guardsmen!"

With a flourish, Clifford pinched the pointed corner of the sheet and pulled it off to reveal a three-foot-high garden gnome!

There was a gasp from everyone present.

A gnome! A garden gnome. A garden gnome wearing Union Jack trousers and a white t-shirt saying I?QEII. On his head a black bowler hat and in his hand a pint of beer.

There was an awkward silence until one solitary clap began from the back of the church. I knew it was my aunt but I was too embarrassed to look around. My friends went to join in but I pushed their hands down. Couldn't they read a room?

The school secretary and parish organist, Mrs Cummings stood up and turned to Reverend Weeks and Clifford Reid.

"You cannot be serious! This ... thing... is an abomination. We cannot present this to her gracious majesty. We will be a national laughing stock. What do you think we are? Those awful punk rockers! Boys, cover that monstrosity up at once." She pointed at two pupils sitting on the front pew and waved them to the altar. "Mr Leybourne dismiss the school at once. I shall speak to Reverend Cheeseman and Mr Forrest directly." And with that, she spun on her heels and marched out to the vestry.

I noticed that Clifford Reid was smirking, clearly amused by her outburst.

Adrian Little was smiling too. Mr Leybourne was hugely embarrassed and we hadn't had to do a thing.

The Plot Thickens



“Oh, Beverley! You should have seen her face! I thought old Alice Cummings was going to lay an egg. She has no sense of humour. A total killjoy. She’s the Mary Whitehouse of Wesberrey. Thinks she’s something because her daughter Rosemary married the Reynolds boy. Off on some oil rig in the North Sea. All she talks about is their lovely big house in Aberdeen. But he’s still just an overpaid fisherman at the end of the day.”

“Well, I think she has a point. Never before has a monarch of this land visited our island and you and your ridiculous boyfriend want to publicly humiliate us all.”

Aunt Pamela had popped over to our house for afternoon tea and Cynthia was obviously catching her sisters up on the events of the morning.

“Here, Jess, darling. You tell them how funny it was. It put pompous Reverend Weeks in his place and that Mr Leybourne. Man, we really do have a lot of starched shirts around here.”

I joined my mother and aunts at the kitchen table. They were very close in age with barely three years between them. Mother always said she never understood how my grandmother had coped with three girls under three. My sisters and I, by comparison, were evenly spaced out three years apart. The upside for my mother though was that she and her siblings were extremely close though they couldn’t have been more different in looks and temperament. Pamela was the eldest, solid, dependable with soft brown eyes and short brown hair which I now realised was styled in a similar way to the Queen’s. My mother was the green-eyed middle child with a burnished auburn bob smoothly caught up in a pink headscarf. Cynthia wore her blonde locks in a soft beehive, the

gentle fringe and loose strands framing her pale, blue eyes. Their looks were mirrored by me and my sisters. I took after Pamela, Susannah was a teenaged replica of Cynthia and Rosie, beautiful Rosie, was a lovely little miniature doll version of my mother.

“I think the gnome is quite funny. Maybe the Queen will laugh too.”

“You see,” said Pamela, “even a child understands how inappropriate this is! Oh, and to think that everyone knows you and he are...”

“Are what? What, Pam, darling. Lovers? Go on say it! You know for a keeper of the Wells you have some pretty conservative, dare I even say Christian, views.”

“Cynthia, how dare you question my allegiance. You know well how much I wanted to be the Godmother.”

“Well, then darling, you shouldn’t have married a cardigan and produced a male heir to inherit his model railway then.”

“Take that back! Byron is a good man. He never says anything bad about you and heaven knows you give him plenty of ammunition...”

“Sisters! Stop this now.” My mother stood up and glared at her fighting siblings. “I think we all need to calm down. Cynthia, you are out of order. You both are. Apologise now and I will put on a fresh pot.” I think I spotted that Mum was crying as she took the kettle to the sink. “So, let’s hope all the other plans for the Queen’s visit go more smoothly. I hear we are going to have a brass band and they are rigging up a huge PA system down on Stone Quay to play the National Anthem through when she arrives. Michael is using the one from the Somerstone estate. You know the one they use for the Bridewell Manor garden parties. Geoffrey has kindly agreed to let him use it. Michael has asked Susannah to help him. He thinks it will help.”

The frustrating and equally wonderful thing about being a child is that adults forget you are there, especially if you appear to be busy with something else. On this occasion, I pulled out the latest copy of ‘Look-In’ magazine with DJ Ed Stewpot and a picture of Concorde on the cover. There was a poster of the Tavares inside I thought Susannah might like.

I had heard her listening to their music in her room. As I pretended to read about the latest episodes of 'The Tomorrow People' I was free to listen in on my aunts' conversation.

"Darling, Michael can't keep her locked in her room. I was the same. Do you remember, Pam, how Father used to stand guard outside my room all night listening out for any sign of movement? There were plenty of hours during the day when I could sneak off to see... Bev, help here, what was his name..."

"How do you expect either of us to remember? Poor Father. He tried so hard to keep us all safe after Mother died. It can't have been easy with three young girls."

"And you worried him sick. Always late, always in trouble. Then the boyfriends. That's why I married Byron. He reminded me of our father. Stoic, strong, dependable, caring. What you see as boring and dull is solid and virtuous."

"And Michael? Beverley, he has no right to judge Susannah, unless he is worried he is too much like him."

I lifted my eyes up slightly from my magazine. I didn't want them to notice I was listening. I failed.

"Sssh now, this isn't a conversation for tea time. What we need is cake to wash down all these sandwiches. Or, I got some of those 'Fudge' fingers Rosie is always singing the advert for. Jess, dear will you go and get her and call out to Susannah. I believe she's in her room."

Gone Gnome



“**D**id you take it? Answer me, Little. Did you take the gnome?”
“I swear, Sir. I don’t know anything about it. We had footie practice at Scouts straight after school and then I was home. You can ask anyone, Sir.”

Mr Leybourne released his grip from Adrian’s collar and nudged him back to his seat. Straightening up, he adjusted his tie and turned to Miss Sykes.

“Mr Forrest has asked the police to interview the boys this afternoon. It has to be a stupid prank. We will get to the bottom of it. Make sure they are all outside his office at 2.30 pm sharp.”

Miss Sykes almost curtsied in response. It seems that Clifford Reid’s gnome had wandered off last night and was nowhere to be found. This was obviously a very serious matter if the police were involved.

“Children, erm, just take out the art things I will be back in a few minutes.”

“Where is Miss Sykes going? She looks very upset. It’s only a garden gnome!” Karen whispered, as we both half-filled the jam jars with water to put out on the tables. “And why are they only interviewing the boys. Don’t they think a girl could steal a stupid gnome? So much for Women’s Lib, eh?”

We settled back at our table. I quite enjoyed ‘free’ art time. I hated being made to draw anything because it never looked right but just putting blobs of watercolour paint on absorbent paper and mixing the colours, that I enjoyed. My other favourite art lesson had been just before Christmas. We covered a sheet of paper with coloured crayons and covered it all again with black crayon. Then we scratched through to the colours beneath with the end of a compass. My drawing was very simple,

a house with a door, windows, a chimney but it still looked beautiful as the colours shone through the dark. It reminded me of the stained glass window in St. Bridget's Abbey.

"I wish I had taken their bleeding gnome now. I'll get blamed for it anyway. The local cops hate us skater boys. It's not like we mess with traffic. There isn't any! Just a few horses and a couple of scooters. We don't cause any harm."

"Maybe that Clifford guy took it out to the cliff's edge, like Kunte Kinte and offered it up to the gods." Jonathan grabbed a doll from the dress-up area and stood on a chair with one foot on the table he raised the doll into the air, recreating a famous scene from the television series 'Roots'.

"And then he dropped it. Dashing its cement brains out on the rocks beneath." William grabbed the doll and tossed it across the room.

"Both of you sit down, Do you want me to get in more trouble?"

"Miss Sykes is taking her time. Maybe she isn't feeling well. Some of us should check on her. Make sure she's okay." Sam suggested. Karen and I nodded. "You boys stay here and keep the class in order. Adrian if you are caught out in the corridors you will get the slipper again for sure."

As we snuck out into the hallway, Sam pulled Karen and me aside to share her idea about who had taken the gnome.

"Blaming the boys is too easy. It's too obvious. We were all ushered out of the church after Mrs Cummings left. The only people left with the gnome were Reverend Weeks, Mr Leybourne and Clifford Reid. Miss Sykes came back with us so it had to be one of them. Clifford Reid was proud of his work so it wouldn't be him, but both Reverend Weeks and Mr Leybourne were humiliated. Better to not present anything to the Queen than to give her something so offensive."

"It's just a gnome. I thought it was quite funny."

"Maybe, but what if the Queen wasn't amused. Can she still cut off people's heads?" I wondered.

“We don’t even kill people for murder anymore. But I think their reputations would be badly hurt and both are ambitious men. Saying that, theft is a sin so I think that rules out the vicar so...”

“It must be Mr Leybourne. But why accuse Adrian Little and get the police involved?”

“Jess, you are stupid sometimes. Adrian is just a patsy; a fall guy. Someone to take the rap for Mr Leybourne.”

“Karen, you have been watching too much ‘Starsky and Hutch.’”

“No, Jess. I think Karen is right. Either Miss Sykes knows about it or she too has worked it out. She could be confronting him right now. She could be in real danger!”

“Over a gnome! He’s not going to kill her. I think we should get back to class. You two have gone quite mad.” I turned to go back to class.

Just then Miss Sykes emerged from the ladies’ toilets. She looked very pale.

“What are you girls doing out of class, Come on with you. Let’s get back.”

“Are you okay Miss Sykes, you look a little peaky?”

“I will be fine, Sam. Thank you for asking. The milk in my cereal must have been a little off.”

“Miss, we think it was Mr Leybourne who took the gnome and is setting Adrian Little up, Miss.”

“Karen, don’t be silly. There is no way Mr Leybourne did it. He was with me all evening.”

Cummings and goings



The boys had spent the lunch hour ‘getting their stories’ straight, which seemed a strange thing to do if they were innocent of kidnapping the gnome. Their story ran that after school they went straight to the church hall for scouts and football practice and then all went home. I felt that that alibi was fundamentally flawed as the hall had a door that led directly into the abbey and anyone of them could have snuck through to take the gnome.

“Yes, but even if they did manage to go back how did they get it past the scoutmaster and everyone else without being seen?”

Sam made a good point. Karen looked pensive, she was brewing a brilliant idea.

“What if they didn’t take it out? What if the gnome is just hidden somewhere else? No one would look elsewhere in the abbey. I mean you don’t expect the gnome to wander off and hide, do you? You would assume it was stolen.”

My head was full of thoughts, all falling over each other in a jumbled mess. Like Pooh, sat between my two friends I felt like a bear of very little brain. Who would hide it? Where could they hide it? Why would they hide it?

“Who discovered it was missing?” I asked.

“Mrs Cummings, I think. Then she told Mr Leybourne and he spoke to Mr Forrest who called the police. That’s what I heard him telling Miss Sykes before he grabbed Adrian.” Karen had been collecting the register off Miss Sykes to take to the office so she was closest to the conversation.

“So did any of them check the Abbey to see if it had been moved?” I asked. Karen shrugged her shoulders. Sam looked excited, she had an idea.

“I think we need to interrogate Mrs Cummings more. What was she doing in the Abbey? Why did she tell Mr Leybourne and not Reverend Weeks? Seems suspicious to me. I say one of us takes the afternoon’s register to the office and gets some answers.”

“But it’s William’s turn!” I protested.

“And all the boys are soon to be hauled up in front of the coppers so I think he will be waiting to avoid other authority figures, don’t you?” Karen looked at me and folded her arms across her chest. “I think you should ask William if you can take his place. You have that innocent look. You can trick Mrs Cummings into squealing.”

“Squealing?” I laughed “I’m not Kojak! But, I am willing to ask Mrs Cummings a few questions. She’s a nice old lady. She looks like my grandmother with those huge glasses!”

“All old ladies look the same. Big-rimmed specs, tweed skirts and crew neck sweaters. How *old* do you think she is? Mum says she is due to retire later this year.”

“Don’t let the little old lady look fool you. I think she’s a criminal mastermind. Dad says many of these old ladies were in the army and stuff during the war. Maybe she was part of the French Resistance. She could easily dispose of a gnome if she took out Nazi soldiers with a piece of cheese wire.” Karen moved her hand across her neck mimicking a knife blade.

“Karen, you have the most vivid imagination. But I will take the register and see what I can find out. Okay? Wesberrey Angels, we can solve this!” They nodded. I suddenly felt as green as Miss Sykes looked.

I took the register and made my way to the school office. It’s a strange experience walking through the school corridors when everyone else is in class. Each class has a ‘register’, a large green book with the teacher’s name written in black on the front cover. The cover itself is made of thick cardboard with a shiny plastic coating. Inside there is a column where all the pupils’ names are written and then there are pages of boxes where our attendance is ticked off to cries of ‘present’ when the teacher calls out our

names. If you don't answer a zero is marked against your name. The register is taken twice a day and afterwards, a nominated member of the class returns it to the school secretary. I really liked this job. The younger sets are sent out in pairs but I was now allowed to go out by myself. It was one of those duties that made me feel really grown up. I much preferred it to bringing in the milk for morning break (there was always pigeon poop on the silver bottle tops) or ringing the bell at the end of break time. I knew there would be a queue at the office so I took my time. I stopped to admire another class's noticeboard display of paper plate pictures of the Queen. Some of them were really good, though one had given her Majesty a lilac face and a blue crown. My delay to appreciate their art worked as there was no one else returning their registers when I got to the office.

“Come along Miss Ward, you're the last one.”

“I'm sorry Mrs Cummings. Miss Sykes took a bit longer doing the register this afternoon. I don't think she's very well.” I have no idea why I lied.

“Yes, well. Don't you go spreading rumours, Jessamy Ward. It takes two to tango.”

I had no idea why Mrs Cummings was talking about dancing but I needed to get on with my mission.

“Terrible news about the gnome. Who discovered it was missing?”

“I suppose it was myself and Reverend Cheeseman. I was with him when he opened up this morning. He had been on the mainland till late and I wanted him to see the monstrosity that uncle of yours had created.” I protested that Clifford Reid wasn't officially my uncle as he and my aunt were unmarried. “Ah, living in sin, eh? Well, no surprise there. We never see any of your family in church, do we?”

My family had always taught me that there were many ways to worship. Some did it at church and found God through hymns and statues but we were more inclined to observe our faith through marking the seasons and holding hands. I didn't think it was a problem. I understood

the idea of 'sin'. It meant to do a bad thing. Though it was a phrase I had heard before, I couldn't see how my aunt was actively 'living in sin'. That would be a very silly thing to do.

"Mrs Cummings, may I ask? Did you look anywhere else for the gnome?"

"What a stupid question! It was left in front of the altar and then it was gone. It can't go for a walk by itself. Though, I'd like to thank whoever took the ugly thing. Maybe now we can forget the whole idea and get a little one from the Reception class to hand her Majesty a pretty posy instead."

I updated my friends when I got back to class. They were at the corner table doing French word puzzles.

"So it does sound like it was one of the boys, it certainly wasn't Mrs Cummings." Karen laid out a picture of a house, a mouse, a cat and a dog in front of me.

"Or Reverend Cheeseman, he was with her when they discovered it was gone and, according to Mrs Cummings, he hadn't been to see it in the evening." I looked bewildered at the French words before me.

"Right, and we know Mr Leybourne was with Miss Sykes. We have already ruled out Reverend Weeks." Karen impatiently took the card marked 'chien' and put it under the dog picture. Sam's mind was back on the boys.

"As the scouts were there playing football till dark, surely they would have spotted anyone acting suspiciously. Taking it out would have been very risky. And it's not dark until nine o'clock these days, so if the boys took it afterwards they would have been home really late. I think Adrian would have bragged to us about it by now. Or William would have fessed up. I think we need to get into the Abbey and take a good look. Karen is right. I think the gnome is still there."

Sam had the most curious look on her face. Forget French nouns, this was a puzzle she was very keen to crack, especially if it proved Adrian's innocence. I took a beat to consider my best friend's recently discovered

interest in Adrian Little. Maybe Karen was right and Sam *fancied* him. I looked across the room. All three boys were sat on a separate table working on a Meccano set but were clearly nervous about seeing the headmaster. I suppose Adrian had a cheeky charm. If he was innocent, we had a duty to help him prove it.

“I agree.” I placed the word card ‘chat’ under a picture of a cat. “I don’t think the boys know anything. But, how are we going to get a look inside the Abbey?”

“Ah, well that’s easy. Mum cleans the church. We’ll just offer to help her.”

I had forgotten that Karen’s mother was a cleaner. She worked in a number of the larger buildings on the island, including Bridewell Manor and the school. It was why Karen was often at mine for supper as her Mum was working. Sam joined us for company as she had no siblings.

The police took hours interviewing the boys and, though we were concerned to hear how they got on, we needed to leave to help Mrs Clark at the abbey. Fortunately, Miss Sykes told us not to worry, that she would look after their satchels and make sure they were alright. So, as soon as the school bell rang, the Wesberrey Angels dashed off on our first assignment.

Karen’s Mum was quite a character. A chain-smoking peroxide blonde with her hair dragged up high on her head in a large ponytail. I was amazed that her bright red nail polish was largely unchipped given her occupation. She still had a trim figure, which was hidden beneath a pale blue polyester work coat with navy cuffs and collar. For comfort, she wore pink slippers on her stockinged feet. It was unusual for married women to work. Most of our mothers stayed at home during the day doing their own cleaning. Some had small little part-time jobs but Mrs Clark worked several jobs. Her husband had had a bad accident on a trawler shortly after Karen was born and lived off the ‘dole’. I guessed Mrs Clark and my mother were about the same age but Karen’s Mum looked much older. Her face wrinkled prematurely by the cigarettes and con-

stant exposure to the sun. My Mum shied away from the fashion for sun-worshipping, I think she burned easily. Karen's Mum, in contrast, was always as brown as leather.

"It's so nice of you girls to help me this evening. With your assistance, I should get back in plenty of time to catch 'Crossroads'. But we must be quick. Here, I gave the place a thorough once over a few days ago, just needs a little dusting." Mrs Clark handed us each a shocking pink feather duster.

Sam gave Karen and me clear instructions to not leave any space unchecked and off we set to a different corner of the nave. We each worked our way up and down the aisles but there were very few places where you could hide a toddler-sized gnome in a bowler hat.

"It was last seen in front of the altar. It's three foot of concrete, right? They couldn't have moved it far?" Karen got down on her hands and knees and started to crawl around the chancel.

"What in the heavens are you doing, young lady!"

Karen found herself looking at the polished black shoes of Reverend Weeks. She tried to pick herself up and grabbed at his trouser legs to steady herself. Mrs Clark flew in to save her daughter, and herself, any further embarrassment.

"Vicar, I am terribly sorry. The girls offered to help me tonight. They have been very respectful. Well, up until now. Karen, what were you doing down there?"

Recovering her composure Karen took a deep breath.

"We were looking for the gnome!"

"Yes," offered Sam, "We figured that it is too heavy to have been moved far so it must still be here... somewhere."

Reverend Weeks slumped to the floor and sat with his head in his hands on the altar steps.

"It's under the altar cloth."

"It's what?" Mrs Clark walked over to the altar and carefully lifted up the green fabric by one of the gold tassels that edged the bottom. A pair

of painted Union Jack trousers appeared. “Oh my!” Mrs Clark dropped the cloth. “Will someone explain to me what is going on here?”

Sam went full Sabrina Duncan on us and explained how Reverend Weeks had been so mortified by the idea of presenting the Queen with the disrespectful gnome he hid it so that he could get rid of it permanently later on.

“Technically, it’s not stealing,” she added, “As the gnome is still here. And I suspect it is not classified as lying unless you deliberately mislead inquirers about its whereabouts. The moment we challenged you your conscious gave it up.”

Reverend Weeks nodded and said he was sorry but there was no way he could allow the Queen to receive such a tasteless gift. He told us how he had wanted to take it to the vestry but it was much heavier than expected, so he left it under the altar cloth for safekeeping until he could come back with a wheelbarrow. In fact, the wheelbarrow was waiting at the north transept but when he saw Karen on the floor snooping around he got nervous.

“And I’d have gotten away with it, too, if it weren’t for those meddling kids!” he laughed.

A vicar who watches 'Scooby-doo' can't be all bad, I thought.

They think it's all over...



The day of the Queen's visit arrived. Union Jacks and red, white and blue bunting fluttered from every window and post. Flower boxes and lawn beds were filled with matching blooms. Children of all ages waved their homemade flags. The stage was set for the historic royal event. No reigning monarch had ever stepped foot on the Isle of Wesberrey and, though the royal yacht would spend longer docking safely into the harbour than her Majesty would actually spend on her walkabout, it was still very exciting.

Since the case of the missing gnome had been solved the parish council had met to discuss what to do with the artwork and, unsurprisingly, it was agreed to not present the gnome to the Queen. Instead, Mrs Cummings was given the honour of escorting a boy and a girl from the Reception class as they each presented her majesty with a bunch of local flowers and a stuffed toy cat in honour of our famous feline colony. She had picked their names out of a hat in front of the whole school at assembly the day before. As I glanced over to the makeshift dais where the presentation was due to take place I could just make out a resplendent Mrs Cummings, dressed immaculately in peacock blue with a hat to match. She stood as proud as the bird whose colours she wore.

I was positioned with the rest of Miss Sykes's class at the end of the walkabout path nearest to the speakers. My father had borrowed the PA system from Lord Somerstone and, as promised, had roped in my eldest sister to help. They both sat behind us on a raised platform under a cover of white tarpaulin to keep the equipment safe should the weather turn. The rest of us were exposed to the elements but so far the sky had stayed clear and the sun appeared to be cooperating.

Some of the locals had been queuing for hours. The wiser ones had brought folding garden chairs with them and tartan flasks of tea were being passed around. The local brass band was saving itself for the Queen's arrival so, to pass the time, recordings of classical records were being played over the loudspeaker. Roaring patriotic tunes like 'Land of Hope and Glory' and 'Jerusalem' filled the air.

The rows of school children were becoming more and more restless as time wore on so Mr Forrest agreed to my father playing some pop music to 'calm the troops' as we waited. An eclectic mix of songs by Abba, the Muppets and Stevie Wonder soon had the crowd singing along as the sun danced in and out from behind ever-darkening clouds.

Finally, HMS Britannia sailed into view. The brass band readied itself on the opposite end of the quay for their signal and everyone raised their flags. The yacht's gangplank slowly lowered itself down onto the stone jetty. Everyone took a deep breath.

Silence.

Then over the loudspeaker, the unmistakable sound of 'God Save The Queen'... by the Sex Pistols!

The signal went up. The brass band started playing and drowned out the loudspeaker just in time to see Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II set a dainty court shoe out of the yacht to begin her descent.

Behind me, I could hear the angry voice of my father chastising my sister. Boy, Oh boy was she in trouble this time!

Grounded for life



“Oh, I remember your father was so angry!” Mum laughed “But he soon saw the funny side of it. I think he was very lenient.”

“C’mon, Grandma. Did he ground her for life?”

“Well, Freya, if he did that it obviously didn’t work, as you are both a testimony to. No, he got her a job at the manor house, mucking out the horses. She had to be up there at dawn every day for a month. He wanted to make sure she learnt a valuable lesson. Every action has consequences.”

I looked at my mother and back at my nieces. “Mum, I don’t think that is a lesson Zuzu has ever learnt.”

My mother smiled. “Hmm, well maybe you can know something is wrong but still do it. Maybe you decide that the possible consequences are worth it?”

“So,” asked Freya, “What happened to the gnome?”

“I believe he went back to Clifford’s workshop. I think it featured in some retrospective show a few years later when Clifford was diagnosed with cancer. Sad end. Cynthia really loved him. He was a great talent.”

“Well,” said Clara popping a final slice of cake on her plate, “I think Wesberrey sounds a wonderful place and I can’t wait to visit once you are firmly installed.”

“I’ll help you move in, Aunt Jess,” offered Freya “Someone needs to protect you from all those cats.”

Yes, I thought. Mental note to self. Stock up on antihistamines.

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About the Author

Penelope lives on an island off the coast of the county of Kent in England with her four children and elderly Jack Russell Terrier. A lover of murder mystery and cups of tea with a stack of digestive biscuits, she writes quaint cosy mysteries, usually in the vintage tea room on the local high street. Penelope loves nostalgia and all things retro. Her taste in music is also very last century.

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