

A FIELD IN PICARDIE

CHAPTER ONE

A CURIOUS CAT STARTS IT ALL OFF

‘He usually comes back after an hour or two, wandering about in the basement, but he’s been missing since yesterday afternoon so I’m getting rather worried,’ said Mrs Sangster, our temporary neighbour. ‘He’s very curious but he’s never done this before.’ Her Edinburgh accent was unmistakable and her tweedy appearance was so stereotypical of the image of older ladies in Scotland. ‘He’s only three so still very sprightly.’ She pronounced her ‘Rs’ very shrilly, making Albert and me smile. But it was all said rather dourly.

But I should explain myself. I am Daisy Dolbear, wife of Albert, retired civil engineer. We live in Plymouth, England and we were on holiday in Edinburgh for its famous Festival. We booked a city centre flat, through this internet thing that Albert knows much more about than me. Anyway, we were only in the flat two days when the neighbour, Mrs Sangster, asked Albert for help. Her annoying black cat, Sooty, had escaped into the basement again but this time he was gone overnight. Albert, who is the soul of kindness, obliged her and he got his torch. He also found a broom handle and a facemask to protect himself from all the dust down there and thus he ventured forth.

‘My good husband used to go down there when he was alive,’ she said. I thought unkindly, ‘Well he could hardly go there when he is dead, could he?’ But said nothing. ‘The building was put up in 1800 or so, part of Edinburgh’s grand Georgian New Town. But it was built over some peasants’ cottages so there might be old foundations from even earlier. Sooty might be lost forever under the ground. The house smelled so much this morning with his uneaten fish. I’d to open the windows and what a draught...’

‘Sorry to interrupt,’ said Albert softly. ‘But if I took a piece of the fish maybe I could entice him out with it.’ How clever of Albert to have thought of that. He’s like that. Practical and brainy. Mrs Sangster looked at him oddly then agreed, going back into her flat, on the same landing as our rented place. I have to say that the idea of there being another layer of dwellings under the ground filled me with intrigue and my imagination ran away with me. Actually, one of the reasons we had picked this particular flat was the name of the street : Picardy Place. Well, I knew that Mary, Queen of Scots, had had many connections to France and Edinburgh too, so I naively imagined this area might be one of them. Had she spent the night in a cottage under our very feet? Escaping from who knows who?

She stood at the door of our flat, which was really very luxurious. (I mean Mrs Sangster stood there, of course, not Mary, Queen of Scots.) High ceilinged, Adam fireplaces and quite a bargain for the price. Mrs Sangster then said she would take Albert down. He put on an old sweater he wears when no visitors are expected. Judy, our dear white West Highland terrier, who had sniffed Mrs Sangster a couple of times on the stairs and smelt cat, stood at the door and looked blankly at her. Before the woman descended with Albert I heard her say something peculiar. I held the paneled door ajar, I am ashamed to say, and she said to him, ‘Now don’t go to the basement to the right. It’s locked. It’s empty. Nothing of interest there. It’s the one to the left where Sooty goes...’ Then they were out of earshot. Little did I understand how meaningful those words were to become.

Now, I am not a woman who believes in premonitions or intuition and things like that. But when she said there was nothing of interest in the right basement it made me more than curious. Why did she say that? A Freudian slip perhaps? I was unsure. I decided to ask Albert about it later on. He has a nice analytical mind.

It must be said that Mrs Sangster was somewhat cold and with an austere look on her face. As if she had swallowed a hard boiled sweet and it was still struggling down. She must have got used to various people renting our flat for short periods and so I imagine she might have felt a little apathetic about more visitors arriving. She'd barely greeted us the first day and the next she smiled wanly as we passed on the stairs. Albert said she'd probably be sick of guests asking questions about where to buy milk or where bus stops were and things like that. So we decided to keep our distance too. She dressed in various shades of brown and navy blue. And looked her age, if you know what I mean. Not interested in dogs as Judy noticed.

I was listening to the electric kettle slowly boil and I munched some local shortbread. I read the brochures of the Festival, the official International one and the Fringe one too. We are from the old Liberal tradition so not snobs, I hope. The Fringe Festival would also appeal to us. Aspiring students and ad hoc performances. Ranging from amateurish to amazingly slick. Just as I saw a possible play we could go to see, 'Mourning Becomes Electra', Albert came back in. His grim face said it all.

'We need to call the police. Mrs Sangster had said her telephone wasn't connected. She wants us to call them,' he said in a mixture of annoyance and yet still wanting to do his duty. 'The poor woman has had quite a shock. I presume. I don't really know.' He sat down heavily and fished out his mobile. His hand had a scratch and his head was dusted in dirt and his hair was swept forward. He patted it back. I saw he hadn't taken off his shoes which were a little muddy. He saw me looking at his feet and he slipped off his brogues with a sigh.

I took the shoes away and asked, testily, why it was we who were having to call the police. 'A missing cat? Somewhat over the top, is it not?' He motioned me to sit and he then said the words that I long remembered.

'It's in French. Robinson Crusoe. 12th edition it says.' Short and sweet and he then dialed for the police.

'Robinson Crusoe? It was a Scotsman who wrote it Albert. Alexander Selkirk. Everyone knows that. What are you talking about?' I said, totally baffled. Then he heard a voice answer. It was an operator and she asked which service he wanted.

In seconds another woman answered and he said the address, his name, and that he was a visitor. 'A basement in Picardy Place. Well, more of a cellar, actually. The basement is half under street level but this place, this old cellar, well underground and much older I would say by the looks of the rough stonework... sorry, yes, a skeleton...' and at this I jumped.

Albert looked at me and whispered, 'Relax dear. It'll be fine. It's nothing to do with us.' Then he spoke again on the phone. 'Yes. A few minutes? Fine. She's at home now, Mrs Sangster. It's her basement, cellar or whatever...'

Beckoning me to sit on a lumpy chesterfield Albert took my arm and said he'd tell me what happened. I spied the only just opened Drambuie bottle on the coffee table and Albert sensed what I wanted. Needed perhaps. He poured me a small one, though it was not even mid afternoon.

'Well, we went down and down and went into the left hand basement. There were a quite a few compartments and rubble, planks and wooden frames strewn everywhere. She called the cat while I wafted the fish around so he'd get the smell. I went into a corner and noticed what was an alcove but not made of stone. There had been plaster on it but it had rotted away. It was rough timber and I thought I heard a sound behind it. A small cry. There was a gap under the alcove and I poked the broom handle under it. It got caught on something and when I tried to yank it back it got stuck. I kept pulling and the alcove caved in.' I bristled in fear but knew that Albert had arrived back safely so it was silly but nonetheless it was harrowing to hear. I asked him to continue.

‘The wooden wall fell over but I was quite safe. Mrs Sangster also had a torch and we both shone it into the space and we saw there was a staircase, old stone, undressed, and narrower than this building’s Georgian dimensions

in the slightest bit afraid. Once again, quite non-plussed. Irrked more than anything. Very matter of fact. There were old packing cases, wooden and topped with dust and bits of rubble. The stairway was surprisingly clear of debris, like it had been almost swept recently. But this seemed impossible. Sooty appeared at the top of the stairs, his eyes gleaming at us. Mrs Sangster said, ‘Ah the peasants’ cottages, what’s left of them. Weavers and all that they say.’ The stair was in immaculate condition, structurally speaking, and only then did I realize there was something white and shiny down a few steps. It was a skeleton alright and I told Mrs Sangster to go back in case she got a fright. She said it was dead so there was nothing to worry about. The only thing about it she said was how it had got there in the first place. But she’d no emotion about it. As if it was impertinence. It was curled up in a corner, some rags of clothes strewn around it. Horrible and depressing.’

I started to get emotional but then the doorbell rang and Albert got up. ‘Edinburgh’s efficient police to the rescue. I’ll tell them what I know but stress we’re on holiday. It’s Mrs Sangster’s property. Nothing to do with us.’

The policewoman, 40ish and in uniform, and a young constable, appeared at the front door. They were stiff and yet polite. She asked if I were Mrs Sangster and Albert told them she lived next door. He tried to close the door but she asked him to keep it open. The constable knocked next door, pretty loudly and insistently. The policewoman was apologetic and said, ‘As there are human remains reported to be there in the basement or cellar we need the owner of the property to be present when we go down. You do understand.’ Once more the constable knocked and there was no response.

I suppose I felt sorry for them but we saw their point. Albert would have no legal right to take them and show the remains. It was all a bit awkward. Albert turned to me and asked if we could invite them in for a minute while Mrs Sangster was delaying answering the door. I have to say that I am a willing citizen who tries to do her duty so I agreed, but reluctantly. They came in and left our door ajar while the constable said he’d try knocking in a minute or so.

The policewoman came fully in and asked for Albert’s details and as she took them down he repeated we were just visiting for the Festival. She understood, she said twice. The constable hammered away.

He said kindly, ‘After the shock of finding the... remains, maybe she had to go to a certain small room in her flat. Shock can do that... so I’ve heard.’

‘Yes, Calum. It could be that.’ She turned to Albert, who beckoned them to come in to the corridor.

He said, ‘Well, I’m not judging her but I would have said her reaction to the whole thing is a little odd.’

The policewoman, instinctively, looked to Albert, slightly intensely.

‘To be honest, and please excuse me if I sound a little bit harsh, but she sounded more annoyed than worried or upset. Her cat had got lost down there, we saw him momentarily a few minutes ago. But her attitude when she told us was more of irritation than worry. Like he’d no business staying out all night and would be in trouble once he got home. ‘Woe betide him!’ I whispered to my wife, facetiously.’

The two of them looked at each other. It didn’t seem much to go on and I wondered why he had said it. But then Albert carried on. ‘And when we saw the skeleton she wasn’t actually very shocked.’

'Shock can do that to people,' said the constable, 'until it sinks in.' The policewoman was less chatty and said she'd have to radio in to the station and she left for the stairway. We heard her talking in the distance and the constable once again hammered on Mrs Sangster's door. Still no response.

Then the sound of a cat meowing could be heard and our door was pushed a little open. There stood Sooty and in a second or two on the landing we heard Mrs Sangster's voice. She had a carton of milk in her hand and a packet of rich tea biscuits. The policewoman asked her who she was and she sighed and admitted she had gone to the corner shop to get things. We tried not to listen through the slightly ajar door but not very much. She was acting oddly and we had to admit we were curious as to why. A skeleton is found in your basement and you go out to buy milk and rich tea? To offer to the police maybe? Bizarre.

The policewoman said she and the constable were here to make a cursory investigation but that someone from forensics would be here shortly. 'Could you take us down to the locus?'

'To the where?' Mrs Sangster almost barked out while Sooty pressed himself onto the policewoman's trousers.

'The place where you saw the... remains.'

'Oh, I never really saw much. Left my glasses at home. My friend next door, he was in front of me and he saw it first. Ask him to take you down.'

So, Albert was her 'Friend'. What a cheek! I am a reasonable woman but I have to say I think her gall was outrageous. 'Friend', indeed. Albert grimaced at me and rolled his eyes. But like me he believes in doing his bit. So, he opened the door and said he would take them down if that was alright. He then came back in and went to the kitchen where he took three carrier bags. He tucked them into his pocket and winked at me. Very odd but I said nothing. His pocket looked very lumpy. But I did wonder what they could be for.

There were no thanks from Mrs Sangster as she opened her heavy paneled door. To the policewoman she said, 'I can sign a docket that I give permission if you need it.' I hadn't heard the word 'docket' in a long time. The policewoman said it was alright. Verbal permission was fine.

I knew there was no danger but hoped that some undisturbed, ancient spores from previous centuries wouldn't get breathed in or something strange like that. Didn't that happen in one of the Pyramids? Albert turned to go and squeezed my arm. 'I don't suppose I'll be long. Have a Drambuie ready for me will you when I come back. I think I'll need it after all these capers.'

As the police were leaving with Albert, Mrs Sangster came out of her flat for a second and said, 'I'm not used to all this. My good husband, when he was alive, used to deal with all these sorts of things.'

I had a wicked thought. Her good husband used to deal with all these sorts of things? Skeletons in cellars? What an odd way to put it. Then, to take my mind off what was happening under the ground as it were, I thought about Albert's comment about Robinson Crusoe, in French. How was that connected to this? It certainly couldn't have belonged to Mary, Queen of Scots I thought frivolously. Wrong century.

Meanwhile, I prepared Albert's Drambuie. A little ice only, so as not to chill his stomach. He's had good health in our 42 years of marriage and the Devon climate has always suited us well but one can't be too careful. I did let my mind wander to the human remains down below and wondered how the forensic people would determine age, how long the poor person had been there and so forth. I suppose with DNA testing these days and people putting their spit apparently in a tube and sending it to these companies that do it, it would be easy to find. But the French Robinson Crusoe did puzzle me.

I then became aware of a police car on the street. Well, actually, I looked out the large bay window onto the busy city centre street. Two people got out and the car drove off as parking is difficult here so near to Prince's Street. They didn't look up to our first floor flat and seemed serious and went down the outside stone steps to the basement. The taller of the men had a long sort of sports bag, grey and pristine looking. I guessed it was for the body bag sort of thing they would need. I sat down, avoiding the lumps in the chesterfield. No, I decided. A body is a solid object, rigor mortis, and all that. A skeleton is fragile and would move about and be impossible to carry in such a bag. But then again, they knew what they were doing, these forensics people. Maybe the bag opened up and had firm sides and base, held together by clever little catches and rods. Such banal things filled my mind as I waited for the return of Albert.

Rather selfishly I suppose, I hoped the 'affair' would not stop us gadding about and enjoying the Festival. My best friend Joy, from Plymouth was coming up in a couple of days and with her son too, to indulge ourselves in the various shows and concerts. Her son, Oliver, is adopted and from Thailand and he would certainly add something to our holiday. Lively, imaginative and good with technology. He would guide us 'oldies' through the activities and getting around the city.

Joy and her husband Bob are our best friends. Albert and Bob have been great pals for decades, both in civil engineering. We are a perfect team for when we go travelling around in our camper van, which we have dubbed Jemima. Judy complements our trips with her funny doggy antics. She's almost human and somewhat temperamental.

Albert was taking his time to return so I tidied up the kitchen a little. The ice in the Drambuie had melted. Well, I thought, the police and forensics can't rush these things, can they? I took a look out the back window of the flat onto the back gardens, called 'Back Greens' in Scotland, and tried to see if I could notice any remains of the so called 'peasants' cottages. There were old walls, true, but they were part of the rigid Georgian buildings, straight and well proportioned. She'd said this building was from 1800. The walls didn't look like cottage or garden walls. The cottages' foundations must be under the grassy gardens somewhere, lost from view forever.

I wondered about the people's lives. I wouldn't call them peasants as Mrs Sangster had. Such a snobby term. Had they been rehoused when the New Town engulfed them? What were their professions? If they predated 1800 then the skeleton down there might not even be one of them. Albert had said that there were little pieces of clothing around it. Would they not have perished over the centuries? Round and round my thoughts went. Then there was a ring on the bell. A soft, short one. It was Albert's gentle style.

As he came in, the three carrier bags laden with some things quite dusty, I heard another hard knock on Mrs Sangster's door. I peeked round and saw the constable standing on her hard hessian mat, smiling. He said that she was not answering but he needed to give back the key for the basement so could he leave it with us? I think that this was the moment that sealed our fate. We were to be inveigled into the whole business. Albert later said the key had been a symbol of that. I hesitated but Albert reached round and took it. It was cumbersome, metallic and looked like a prison key from a bygone era.

I closed the door with a sigh and asked Albert what was in the bags. He said I'd need to clear a space on the large, oak kitchen table and put down newspapers. There were some Scottish magazines lying around and it was a pity to use them as they were with beautiful views of Glen Coe and Balmoral, but that was all we had. Albert then carefully took out the items, dusty and fragile, from the bags. We both sneezed and started laughing. I thought of the Pyramid spores again so tied our faces with dish towels.

At first glance everything seemed like it belonged to a display case in a museum of antiquities. I was puzzled and asked Albert where he had found them. He was visibly quite excited and he said his tongue would reveal all if it was brushed by Drambuie. I rushed to the living room, came back and found him fondly dusting the books and items with a soft cloth.

He downed a little of his favourite tippie and we both sat down. My eyes were constantly darting from the table to Albert and back again as he spoke and I felt joy in his pleasure at relating what he had discovered.

‘Well, the police constable stood guarding the cellar door while the woman radioed again and said where they were. The forensics people arrived shortly afterwards and were totally unfazed by anything they saw. The surroundings of the cellar and the damaged vault they passed by with impatience and the constable said where the skeleton was. They were chomping at the bit.’ He sipped a little more and I cringed inside. I suppose if you see death all the time you get used to it.

‘But what about the books and things you brought up? Where were they and how are they connected to the... remains?’ I couldn’t even say the word ‘skeleton’.

‘Well, the first time I was down there I spotted a pile of dusty things in a sort of wooden case, smashed up a bit but still holding together. I spied on the top of it ‘Robinson Crusoe’ and the subtitle of it was all in French. You know how books in the olden days had long subtitles. It was volume two, as far as I could see from the light of my torch.’

I was fascinated and wondered how it could have got there. And how it had been left behind when the cottages were built over by the Georgian dwellings. But the question of who it had belonged to was uppermost in my mind. I had images of a poor Scottish maid, dressed in linen and a blue striped blouse, reading by candlelight, this French version, to ‘improve’ her mind as people termed it in those days. In her few free hours. Or maybe the girl was French. It was not impossible. But why was she living in these simple cottages? I had to stop Albert and ask him to go back and repeat his last few sentences. So distracted I had been by these musings.

‘So, Daisy, the second volume and the other books you can see here.’ He pointed to the words ‘Catéchisme Français’. A French Catechism’. So, obviously the owner was Roman Catholic. In French, a dictionary. ‘Boyer’s’. This biggish volume is ‘Dialogues Rustiques et Plays’.

‘I know I only have schoolgirl French but that could be ‘Country Conversations’. What do you think?’ Albert mumbled a sort of agreement as he dusted the crimson coloured tome lovingly.

‘Les Marquardes Françaises’. No idea what that is. Must look it up. Pale green and looks like it has faded quite a bit and has a crimsonish mark on the back cover.’ Then a volume appeared, battered and the unevenly edged paper was browning. In a rough condition. ‘Principes de la Religion Chrétienne’. A rather pious individual,’ he said pompously and we both chortled. ‘Either that or a cretin... ha, ha.’ Albert has always been a rather skeptical Methodist and pokes fun at them sometimes. Anyway, then there was Volume Two of Robinson Crusoe which was in really good condition. I dried my fingertips and looked carefully inside. I saw that the ‘Traducion’, translation, was done in Amsterdam. It was the 12th printing. Daniel Defoe’s book had been written about 1720 as far as I recall. But I could see no date for this one. ‘But clearly quite an early version, maybe even 300 years old.’

His saying that filled both of us with such a thrill. History in our very hands. We looked fondly at each other and he squeezed my slightly dusty hand. I wondered about those who had read them, who had last held them in their hands.

‘Now, Miss Daisy Marple. What can we deduce from these books? The time frame must be what?’

‘I am not sure. Do tell what you have deduced.’ I reached for a damp cloth to wipe away centuries of accumulated specks of dust.

'She, and I think it is a she, can only have brought the book over from France. First half of the 18th century. It is in good condition so she may not have read it much and she may have died within a short time after that. Mrs Sangster said the cottages were demolished in 1800. It fits.'

'What about the other books which are in much worse condition? Inherited from relatives and printed decades before, it would seem.' I thought that quite clever and Albert nodded. Then he said that there were other things to look at and indeed I only now noticed them. There was a pair of what looked like cotton bobbins. Then a spindle, quite ornate. There were a number of reed-like instruments, fine and delicate. Then a piece of tan leather with a fleur-de-lys engraved on it. A small hole at the top indicated it had been worn as a necklace. As we looked at it I remembered the same design was on the Catechism and the other religious books. Albert was stumped as to what that meant. I said there was a nagging thought on the tip of my tongue, if such a mix of metaphors was permissible. But I couldn't say what it was. I was vexed.

'Leave the thought alone and it'll be like Little Bo Peeps's sheep,' said Albert.

'Bo Peep's sheep?' I said a little too sharply.

'They came home by themselves, didn't they? So, leave the thought and it'll come to you. By itself in the next hour or two.'

He was right, of course. Albert's good that way. Always the practical one. So I left it alone for the moment.

Then I spied a leather bound briefcase, plain and yet expensive looking. In good condition and with thick stitching. As Albert wiped it with a cloth some yellowing papers slipped out. Some looked like legal documents, handwritten, with flourishing fountain pen. Some had rudimentary stamps on them with browning ink and a bit of wax still clinging on to two seals. Then a pretty blue, green folded map came out. It was in amazingly good condition. The folds were crisp, the colours, though faded, were still clear. It was a map of what seemed to be a small village, with a stream winding its way around. Three small woods could be seen in darker green. Fields were marked and a bridge or two also. Everything was in French, as expected, and the name of the village or the area was clearly marked at the side : St. Quivox, Valliage de Vermandoise. The words, 'Sebastian Beaupre' were also on the top of the page. And the date was Janvier 23, 1737. All very thrilling. What did it all mean? We felt so inadequate with our poor French. We laid it aside carefully and replaced it in the file. There would be time enough to analyse it later.

'Of course, it's not our property. It will have to be returned to Mrs Sangster. The police had no interest. But until she asks us for it... well...'

said Albert, raising his eyebrows. I agreed. Let her stew in her own juice until she was ready to ask for the key to the cellar.

We changed focus. After all, there was still the forensics people to hear about and Albert looked sagely at me as he began to tell me about them.

'Talk about flippant and irreverent. They went down, with a large light on a stand and the whole vault lit up. On seeing the humped up skeleton one said, 'Gone to meet his maker. Maybe was a Quaker. Or a button maker. He was no faker.' He turned to me as the constable grinned and said, 'It keeps me sane.' The skeleton was really badly bent over and the pieces of cloth were highlighted. Crimson, cheap rayon scarf I would say. Dark blue cardigan. The bobble buttons still pristine. Shreds of grey hair strewn about. The shoes were missing. 'A shoeless old sod. How very odd. Now gone to God,' said the other of the forensics. There was a fairly large crucifix which had fallen down to the floor but it was stuck around the bottom of the neck bone.' I began to feel queezy.

Once I had composed myself I said, 'There's the Roman Catholic and French connection. The crucifix. A French person, male or female. But no shoes.'

'Yes, the forensics repeated that. The shreds of trousers, woolen, were lying around so it would seem to be a man but the lack of shoes was mentioned again by the men. A trouser belt dropped off when they started to lift the skeleton into their container. It was a large coffin sized thing, compact until they folded up the sides and made them stiff and rigid.'

'I guessed that,' I said rather proudly. But felt a little uneasy. A human being, being moved about like this.

'Good lass Daisy. Then the men said, 'Poor sod,' as they zipped up the container.

'They passed us on the stairs with the fairly light load which moved around a bit...' And once again I got a shiver down my spine.

'The constable asked them, 'The prognosis?' They looked at each other and one said, 'I would say, if pushed, 'Dead'.' And the other nodded agreement and said, 'He met his end by dying, in my considered opinion.' The other said, 'Should we get a second opinion? Constable, what would you say?' 'Oh, I would say dead. Very dead indeed,' the constable said, stroking his chin.'

'As they went out onto the street with their burden I couldn't resist saying to them, 'Shall I sign a docket? For the removal of the remains?' I was slightly shocked at Albert's irreverence.

'They paused for a second and one said to me, 'There's a smart retort to that but I can't quite think of it. I'll post it to you...' and as they made their way to a little black van the other one said, 'Mike, you're slipping.'

'Morbid but I suppose...' and then I felt a sudden flash in my brain. 'The sheep have come home. Bo Peep's I mean.'

Albert was delighted and looked at me in anticipation. 'Well?'

'That pattern on the leather patch. Repeated on the religious books,' I said, trying to draw out my revelation.

'Yes dear?'

'I know where I've seen it before.' He was all agog. 'Remember when I joined that Plymouth genealogy class last year? I remember now what that pattern is. It wasn't a fleur-de-lys. It was a Huguenot cross. Dating back to the 16th century. Later, literally tens of thousands of Huguenots flooded England and several thousand ended up in Devon. And dear Albert...'

'Yes, I remember now, and you discovered you have Huguenot ancestry. This is amazing. And one thing they certainly were not was Roman Catholic.' He looked at the Catechism. 'How do you explain this Catechism then?'

'One doesn't want to show up one's dear husband but I think you'll find the answer if you open up the Catechism and look at the first page.'

Looking puzzled Albert opened it up, rubbing his fingers softly. 'What does it say?' I asked him.

'"Le Catechism de Jean Calvin'. Aha! A Protestant, a rabid one at that. The Huguenots were all, by definition, Protestants. And this 'Principles of the Christian Religion'? Hm, I'll look inside. Aha! More scribbles from the pen of good old Jean himself. A best seller in his day, no doubt.' There was a pause

as we digested all this. 'So the skeleton with the other type of crucifix can't be the owner of these books and artifacts. And it would seem to belong to another age, more than likely much more recent.'

With rising pride and, to be honest, some tongue in cheek I said, 'And the owner of these books was certainly Huguenot. And ended up in Scotland, by some twist of fate. And I am a 7th or 8th generation Huguenot, am I not?' Sebastian

'You most certainly are, m'dear. The nonconformist in you has a genetic basis I am convinced.' After placing his hand on his heart, he winked at me. 'I think it moves us, nay, it behooves us, as our Methodist vicar often says, to action. To investigation. To identify who the owner was. And what it all means. The map especially.' Then raising his eyebrows and his voice facetiously he said, 'Does this call for a Drambuie, Daisy? With ice?'

'No dear. Let's be daring and have it on the rocks!'