

Chapter 14

Hamish

When the people from the camp joined the people on the hill and the people in Grampa's boat, there was a lot of explaining to do. And a lot of congratulating of Beth and Duff.

"How's that for an astute bear!" Duff said more than once. He was rather full of himself, but he could certainly be forgiven that in the circumstances. "I call that astuteness of Waverley Bear proportions!" They all agreed.

Then there was a problem: how to get everyone back across the loch. The three conservationists were in too bad a state to be left on their own on the island, and Grampa insisted they should come to stay at the Den. Grampa's fishing boat could not safely take everyone at once, while the conservationists' boat was too big to navigate the narrow channels between the islands.

So Grampa's boat would have to make two trips. On the first he took those in need of care and attention: the conservationists, Tosh, and Grizzlette. The others - Wompy, PC Bobby, Duff and Beth - would have to wait on the island until Grampa returned.

As the boat was about to set off, Wompy, standing on the shore, shouted: "So, Tosh, do you still think it would be more exciting in the looking glass world?"

Then he added: "This has been really something happening, Grampa my old friend, don't you think?"

"Oh, jigger off, will you!" shouted Grampa. It was as well the boat left then.

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Although Bobby-on-the-Beat was pleased for his friends about the happy outcome of events, he was downhearted on his own account. Fortunately, when he boarded the conservationists' boat, with Duff and Beth, looking for food, he also found a bottle of whisky.

There was plenty of good food and the three of them sat down with Wompy in the conservationists' camp to enjoy a good meal while they waited for Grampa to return.

It was the sort of occasion when Wompy would often help to pass the time by telling a story. He was a little hesitant to do so now. The story they had just lived through was better than any story of his could seem just now.

But Wompy was aware that Bobby was finding it hard to share the general joy. So he decided he should tell, not just any story, but one in particular.

"This," he said, "is a story about the famous Scottish detective Hamish MacPoirot.

Hamish MacPoirot's friends thought he needed a holiday. It wasn't that he never took a holiday. Quite the opposite, he did so frequently. But whenever he went to a hotel in the south of France or on a cruise down the Nile, he would only have been on the holiday a few days before a murder took place and, of course, he had to solve the murder mystery.

In this way all his trips turned into busmen's holidays. His friends used to joke that MacPoirot couldn't go anywhere without murders happening.

So they thought he needed a proper holiday, one where he would not end up working on a case. They persuaded him to go and stay with his cousins in a little village in a remote part of Scotland where there had not been a single crime in living memory.

MacPoirot's cousins did their best to make sure he had a really good time. They took him walking in the hills. They took him fishing in the sea. They took him to play golf on the links. They took him to the pub where he played darts with the village policeman and his mates.

MacPoirot enjoyed all these things. But his cousins noticed that he never seemed entirely happy. It was as though he was enjoying himself up to a point, but there was always something missing.

They began to realise that what he was missing was having a murder case to solve. He couldn't enjoy himself thoroughly without that.

So one day they sent him off walking in the hills on his own, and while he was gone they got together with the village policeman and some of the villagers to make a plan.

They decided to fake a murder case. Of course, they knew that MacPoirot would discover it was a hoax. He was much too good a detective for them to hope to fool him. But he would enjoy working on the case before realising it was only a hoax.

So one of the villagers, an elderly lady, went to stay with her sister in the next village, and took her valuable jewelry with her. They made her house look as though there had been a violent struggle and someone had stolen her jewelry.

The old lady even pricked her finger so that they could put some of her blood on a murder weapon - a hammer - that they left at the scene of the supposed

crime. They did all they could to fake a murder - short of providing a corpse. They briefed some witnesses with plausible stories.

You might think Hamish MacPoirot would have been overjoyed to be presented with a murder case to solve. In fact he was horrified, though at first he didn't say so.

He thought, "So it really is true! Wherever I go a murder happens. Even in this place where there hasn't been a crime for as long as anyone can remember. It must be that I actually cause murders to happen. Somehow or other it must be that because I'm hoping I'll get the chance to solve a murder case a murder actually happens."

He was, naturally, appalled at this idea. He felt very guilty. It was as if he himself was the murderer.

Of course, he had no choice but to get to work on the case. It wasn't long before he uncovered the hoax. He had never in his life felt so relieved as he did when he realised there hadn't really been a murder in the village.

Immediately he resolved never again to go on holiday anywhere where a murder might happen. In future he would take his holidays in this village where he could be sure there would not even be a petty theft.

But Hamish MacPoirot still had a problem. It seemed he couldn't entirely enjoy a holiday without a murder case to solve. Was he doomed to find every holiday a disappointment?

The next day in the pub he was talking to the village policeman.

"It's a wonderful job you have," said Hamish MacPoirot. "All this peace and quiet, such a beautiful place to live and work, no stress or aggravation. But don't you find it just a little bit dull? Don't you need some mental stimulation?"

"Oh, I get plenty of that," said the policeman. "I read murder mysteries. You know, they're really much better than real murder cases. I've read plenty of true crime stories too. But they're not so good. The mystery is never quite so difficult to solve, the solution is never quite so surprising, sometimes they don't even solve the case at all. The made-up ones are much better."

This gave MacPoirot an idea. That very evening he started writing a murder mystery. And that was the beginning of the famous series of murder mystery books by Hamish MacPoirot, published under his pen name of Agatha Monty Christo.

From then on, whenever MacPoirot took a holiday, he went to the quiet village where his cousins lived, he went walking and fishing and played golf and darts, and every day he wrote a chapter of his latest detective story. It was the perfect combination. He had never been happier than he was on these holidays.

It wasn't long before he took early retirement from detective work and moved permanently to the village where he went on writing his hugely popular murder mysteries. I'm sure you've read many of them, PC Bobby."

"Thanks, Wompy," said Bobby-on-the-Beat.