

*Missing in St Ives*

*By Deborah Fowler*

A St Ives Christmas Mystery

Secrets in St Ives

Missing in St Ives

Escape to St Ives



*Missing in St Ives*

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Love Mum.*



# PROLOGUE

Bristol, 31st March

Emily Faulkner lay on her bed in the foetal position. At only sixteen, she was well used to being told she was very pretty, but she was not feeling at all pretty right now.

Her head throbbed, her eyes stung, her throat was sore and her hair, her lovely hair, normally smooth and silky, felt stringy and damp down one side of her face. All these symptoms were the result of her crying, actually sobbing mostly, for what seemed like hours, and not a single member of her family had come to see if she was alright.

Tears spent at last, she rolled over and lay on her back. The last two days seemed unreal. She couldn't believe such appalling things could all be heaped upon her in so short a space of time. She tried to clear her mind and put what had happened into degrees of awfulness – beginning with the least awful.

Firstly, yesterday morning, her best friend Grace had left the country with her family. It was to be a permanent move to Toronto, where her father had landed a new job. Emily couldn't imagine when she would be able to

see Grace again, or how she could bear life without her – particularly now.

Secondly, after lunch today, her parents had sat down with her and her younger brothers and told their children that they were getting a divorce. There were a lot of reassurances – home and school would be unchanged, and Daddy would come and visit them often. But it was such a shock and clearly her mother was desperately upset, although she tried valiantly to hide it.

Thirdly, there was the other thing that had happened, which she couldn't let her mind dwell upon – not for more than a second without wanting to be sick with the terror of it all.

# CHAPTER ONE

St Ives, 1st April

Very reluctantly, Merrin McKenzie stepped down onto Bamaluz Beach. Moments before, the sun had been shining, the sea and sky melding together in two delightful and complementary shades of blue. Now, apparently out of nowhere, thick clouds were amassing, turning everything – sky, sea and beach – a very unappealing grey. A spiteful little wind was getting up to complete the sudden decline. Merrin’s bare feet, sinking into the sand, were already unacceptably cold and even though she was still wearing her beach robe, she was shivering.

It was over two years now since Merrin had returned to her home town of St Ives, following the murder of her husband, Adam. Growing up so close to the sea, she had always loved swimming, but during her childhood it had been considered a summer pastime. This year, however, she had decided to start her daily swim in April in a bid to get fit, and today was the first of the month.

‘I really am an April Fool, aren’t I?’ she said to her companion, William, a small dog who was not, bless him,

a thing of beauty and tended to be somewhat grumpy and argumentative. Today, however, he completely agreed with her, and to demonstrate the point, he tentatively put his front paws into the sea and then leapt back, theatrically, as if he'd been stung. Agree he might, but he was not being particularly tactful.

Taking a deep breath, Merrin threw her robe onto a rock and, without hesitation, walked into the sea, jumping over the waves until the water was waist-high. Then she plunged forwards and began to swim. It was always the same. For the first five strokes, she thought she might die; for the second five strokes, she hoped she would . . . and then miraculously, a feeling of energy and exhilaration took over. It was wonderful!

Under the disapproving gaze of William, Merrin emerged from the sea a few minutes later. Her skin was lobster-coloured and she had absolutely no feeling in any of her extremities. Nonetheless, she experienced a gratifying sense of triumph. She picked up her robe, climbed up the steps and headed back to her cottage, which was only five minutes' walk away. After a hot shower, she put on a pair of jeans and a baggy multicoloured jumper, the recent purchase of which pleased her very much. She felt she had to make a bit of an effort, as she was having lunch with Chief Inspector Louis Peppiatt. She was looking forward to seeing him – apparently, he had a job for her.

Merrin made breakfast for herself, William and her African Grey parrot, Horatio. She and Horatio shared a piece of toast, while William had his favourite dog food, topped with a small sprinkle of cheese, which he had

trained Merrin to recognise was essential. She had just poured herself a second mug of coffee when there was a call on her mobile.

‘Hello, Merrin,’ said an unfamiliar voice, ‘it’s Jane.’

Merrin’s mind went completely blank – *Jane, Jane who?* she thought.

The owner of the voice obviously picked up on Merrin’s silence. ‘Jane Faulkner, Merrin, your barrister friend from Bristol. Come on, it hasn’t been that long, you must remember who I am!’

‘Jane, I’m so sorry,’ said Merrin. ‘I’ve just been swimming and I think the sea was sufficiently cold that it’s frozen my brain. How are you and Edmund and the children?’

‘Swimming in the sea in April, you’re mad!’ Jane paused. ‘Actually, things aren’t great. Edmund and I are getting a divorce.’

‘Oh, I’m so sorry, Jane. Tell me to mind my own business, but why? I always imagined you two had a great marriage. And how are the children taking it?’

‘Edmund’s fallen for his secretary, who’s about half my age, of course. What a cliché! The boys seem to have taken it fairly well, but Emily is really upset. To be honest, I don’t think it will make much difference to our lives. Edmund’s hardly been home in the last few months – pressure of work, we were told. Honestly, Merrin, I’m such a fool not to have realised what was going on before now. I was totally shocked when he told me, absolutely unprepared. What an idiot!’

Merrin could hear the hurt in her voice. ‘I do feel for you, Jane – it must be really tough, especially having to

keep the children on track. I wish I could do something to help.'

'Actually, Merrin, you can, which is why I'm calling. Would you consider having Emily to stay for the Easter holidays? She'll be no trouble, I promise.'

'Well . . .' Merrin began.

'She's going to be revising for her GCSEs, which she's taking next term,' Jane persisted. 'She reminds me very much of your lovely daughter, Isla. Emily's also bright and very ambitious. She'll be studying most of the time, you'll hardly know she's there, and I'll send her with enough dosh to pay for her keep.'

'Why do you want her to come here?' Merrin asked. 'She and I don't know each other very well, hardly at all really. Wouldn't she do better studying from home?'

'She's angry with me and she's angry with Edmund. She said she just wanted to get right away and then she remembered you'd moved to St Ives. We had a holiday down there about five years ago, and she absolutely loved it. Please, Merrin.'

'She'll have to share a room with Isla for part of the time. Isla will definitely be back home for Easter,' Merrin heard herself saying.

'Emily will love that. She's always idolised Isla,' said Jane.

'Alright,' said Merrin, 'when's she coming?'

'She's on study leave now, so we thought on Monday, the day after tomorrow,' said Jane. 'I'll text you the train times and her mobile number. Thank you so much, Merrin.'