

**THE SUNSET YEARS OF  
AGNES SHARP**

The logo consists of the lowercase letters 'a' and 's' joined together, followed by 'b', all in a white, elegant script font. A thin white horizontal line is positioned directly beneath the 'a' and 's'.

**THE SUNSET YEARS OF  
AGNES SHARP**

**LEONIE SWANN**

Translated from the German by Amy Bojang

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*For Fyo, who left too soon*

# PROLOGUE

## COLD-BLOODED

Hettie felt hot. She had spent too much time on her sun stone and the afternoon heat had got into her shell and was incessantly buzzing around in her head. Like any responsible cold-blooded creature, she had to do something about restoring the balance, and the right place for that was traditionally the shady ravine of old plant pots behind the sky-high wooden structure where ferns grew unchecked from cracks, and snails felt their way across the damp earth.

Hettie got going, one scaly foot in front of the other. Over the gravel path, underneath and through the hydrangeas, past the big stump.

But there was something different. Where normally the wooden structure loomed, there was nothing – a big, gaping nothing, and shadows behind it. Like all tortoises, Hettie didn't have much time for curiosity, but this unknown realm of shadows attracted her. She crawled up the ramp, hesitated briefly at the sunshade border and glided on into the pleasant coolness. Her shell brushed against old wood, smoothed by time and countless Big Feet. She could smell

the Big Feet even now, near and unmistakable, salty and leathery.

In principle, Hettie had nothing against Big Feet, they had always treated her with respect and were sometimes accompanied by Lettuce-holding Hands. Emboldened, she crept on, deeper into the shadows.

Back there. Aha.

She could see straight away that something wasn't right with the Big Feet. Unlike most of their contemporaries, they weren't flat and firmly on the ground, but had their pointy end sticking upwards, up into the ether, where sunlight cut through the half-dark and dust stars danced.

Highly unusual. This little pair was strangely motionless too. Clearly unwell, Hettie had never come across an ill Big Foot before. Now a feeling a bit like curiosity came over her, or if not curiosity, then at least appetite. As an experiment, quite daringly, she bit into one of the Big Feet. The foot did not fight back, and triumphantly Hettie bit down a second time, more out of principle than enthusiasm. Leathery and hard. Not to her taste. But wherever there were Big Feet, Lettuce-holding Hands weren't far away. She decided to go looking for them, and to her amazement, discovered that on the other side of the Big Feet it went on, on and on, a whole realm of hills, valleys and humps.

And indeed back there, deeper in the dark, was a Lettuce-holding Hand. Only it wasn't holding any lettuce, but seemed bent double, not dissimilar to a dead spider. Tortoises are generally impatient folk, but Hettie was an exception. She could wait. Above all for lettuce. She found a comfy place at the foot of the hilly landscape. Not too

warm and not too cold. Cosy, but not claustrophobic. She could grow to like this place.

However, after some considerable time had passed and no lettuce had appeared, Hettie had had enough of waiting around. Apart from that, the hills next to her that had started out as pleasantly temperate, had got colder and colder, uncomfortably cold, and the flies were starting to get on her nerves. To start with it was only two or three, and Hettie had ignored them in true tortoise-style, but now there was a whole cloud of them circling overhead. Buzzing, ducking and diving, flitting around the hills and Hettie herself. When one of the flies had the audacity to land on Hettie's head and tried to drink out of her eye, the tortoise shuffled indignantly out of her place and walked through a strangely sticky, metallic-smelling puddle and out into the afternoon sun again.

# 1

## EDWINA'S BISCUITS

The doorbell rang, and Agnes Sharp abandoned the search for her false teeth, simultaneously pleased and annoyed.

Pleased that she had even heard the doorbell – her ears hadn't really been playing along recently, and sometimes all she could hear was a high-pitched, nerve-jangling ringing, accompanied by a rushing sound. So, the doorbell was a welcome change.

On the other hand, it would be quite embarrassing to open the door without the aforementioned false teeth, unclear and toothless. But the caller had to be gotten rid of before he had the idea of going snooping around in the garden – teeth or no teeth.

'I'm coming! Just a minute!' Agnes bellowed into the hall, then she sallied forth. Out of the room. Mind the threshold. And then the stairs. A step forward, a step down, then bring down the other foot. A vertigo-inducing moment without any sense of balance, a deep breath, then gather courage for the next step down. And so on. Twenty-six times.



A minute, my foot!  
The doorbell rang again.  
Her hip grumbled.  
The doorbell rang once more.  
'Juft one moment, for God fake!'

When she reached the first landing, a real rage had built up in her, towards the stairs, the caller, the renegade false teeth, but also her housemates. Why did she always get the difficult jobs? Like scaling the stairs. Or taking out the bins. Or . . . absolutely everything.

Edwina would have made it down the stairs somewhat quicker, but she would of course have been useless at the door. Bernadette was sitting in her room crying her blind eyes out. At this time Marshall was mostly somewhere on the Internet, unreachable, connected to the computer as if by the umbilical cord. And you obviously couldn't expect Winston to attempt the descent without the stairlift.

Why had nobody repaired the stupid stairlift?

Then Agnes remembered that it had been her job to call for it to be repaired, but with her unreliable hearing and her aversion to the telephone she had kept putting it off. It was her own fault then, as so often seemed to be the case these days.

The only scapegoat left was the caller, and her rage towards him was mounting.

She had mastered the last step and was dragging herself to the front door with a calculated slowness accompanied by the doorbell's *staccato* chimes. Did they think she was deaf? What was the buffoon playing at? What did they even want at this time? And what time was it anyway?

Agnes fumbled briefly with the latch, then threw the door open. She would have liked to give the caller a piece of her mind, but nothing came to her.

‘Yef?’ she snapped. She didn’t quite carry it off and got even more annoyed.

‘Err . . . Miss Sharp?’ The caller peered rudely past her into the house. A bloody whippersnapper with officious glasses and a briefcase under his arm. This couldn’t be a good sign. Agnes crossed her thin arms, while the whippersnapper switched on a winning smile, rather too late.

‘Miss Sharp, I have wonderful news for you!’

He really shouldn’t have said that. Up to now Agnes had simply planned to get rid of the troublemaker, but now she lost it. Wonderful news? Today of all days? It was too much.

Despite her missing teeth she tried a friendly old-lady smile – with moderate success, as she gathered from the puzzled look on the sales rep’s face. ‘Oh, for me? How lovely! Come frough to the sitting room.’

He only had himself to blame!

‘Anofer bificuit?’

Where on earth were her teeth?

The whippersnapper silently shook his head. He had taken a single bite of his biscuit and since then had been sitting strangely tensely in the battered wingback chair, chewing. Agnes poured piss-yellow herbal tea into his cup and studied the brochure the intruder had pushed into her hand with feigned interest.

The visitor put the half-eaten biscuit back on the plate – a cold clatter like stone on stone. Edwina’s biscuits were

generally even spurned by the mice, but for occasions like this they were priceless.

‘Do you liff on your own?’ the whippersnapper asked with a mouth full.

He didn’t want to swallow or spit, so he was stuck.

Agnes thought about Winston and sobbing Bernadette, about Edwina, who was probably trying to find her inner balance through yoga, about Marshall, and finally, about Lillith, and sighed deeply.

The visitor nodded sympathetically.

‘What we offer if perfect for people like you. We manage your houfe, take care of renting it out. We take care of everyfing, whilft you fpend your golden funfet years at Lime Tree Court . . .’ He went quiet and fixed his gaze strangely past Agnes on the floor, where Hettie the tortoise was passing by with her usual elegance.

And on her shell – the false teeth! Presumably they’d been travelling around the house by tortoise for quite a while, a disembodied, mobile grin. Exactly the kind of thing Marshall would find funny.

Agnes leant right forward, fishing for her false teeth and grabbed them. Hurrah! She quickly put the dentures into her mouth and beamed at the whippersnapper with rows of pristine teeth.

‘Golden sunset years, you said?’

‘Wifout finanfial worrief!’ The sales rep gave in and stood up. ‘I’d freally luf to ftay and chat, but I . . .’

‘You’re going already? What a shame. Are you sure you don’t want another . . .?’

Agnes picked up another biscuit threateningly, but the whippersnapper was already on his way to the door,

and a good thing that he was too.

Because Lillith was lying out in the woodshed, a bullet in her head and a smile on her lips. It was going to be a tough day.

They held their crisis meeting in the sunroom on the first floor. It was easiest for Winston that way. Agnes had prepared tea and got Edwina to take the teapot and cups upstairs. They had real biscuits out of a packet too.

Agnes took an experimental bite – her dentures held firm – and looked around. Marshall was next to her, upright and sharp-eyed. Next to him Edwina was in one of her impossible yoga poses with a dreamy expression on her face. Winston just looked calm and sad in his wheelchair. Dignified, like Father Christmas. The scoundrel! How did he do it?

Unlike Winston, Bernadette almost never seemed dignified. Instead she came across like a Mafia boss, not least because of her dark glasses. She had calmed down a bit, but it was the calm before the storm – or, better put, between two storms. With a downpour.

To Agnes's right there was a gaping empty chair.

'The engineer for the stairlift is coming tomorrow,' she reported. After she had finally picked up the phone, it had been surprisingly easy to get the appointment. 'Marshall has ordered the groceries for next week online. Loo roll too.' Marshall gave her an encouraging smile. Another crisis averted.

'And as regards the problem in the shed . . .'

'She is not a problem!' interrupted Bernadette. 'She's Lillith!'

‘Not any more,’ said Agnes softly. ‘That is the problem.’ Bernadette made an unhappy sound.

‘It is *warm* for the time of year,’ Agnes continued. ‘We can’t just do nothing . . .’

‘We can put her on the stairlift!’ Edwina beamed. ‘On the stairlift, up she goes, upstairs. Into her bed. Peacefully in her sleep. Maybe she’ll even recover! And if not . . . peacefully in her sleep!’

‘She is *not* going to recover,’ said Marshall decisively. ‘And as far as peacefully in her sleep goes . . .’

‘Indeed!’ Bernadette puffed bitterly.

‘We could just call the police,’ suggested Winston. At heart, he was someone who liked order. ‘The police usually deal with such matters.’

‘We *could* do that,’ said Agnes, ‘if we knew where the gun was. Without the gun . . .’

Three pairs of eyes turned to look questioningly at Marshall.

Bernadette’s dark glasses reflected the light.

Marshall seemed confused for a moment, then sheepish. ‘The gun . . . it was in the shed. I had it . . . and then I was in the thingummy . . . in the sitting room, and . . . I must admit . . .’ He attempted a military stance, but didn’t pull it off completely.

‘We *don’t* know where the gun is,’ Agnes repeated. ‘And now if the police come and find it – shall we say, somewhere in the house – it could look suspicious.’

Edwina’s laugh rang out.

Bernadette snorted.

Winston nodded sagely.

Nobody had anything useful to say. Typical.

The high-pitched ringing started up in Agnes's ear. She used the acoustic intermezzo to think. How long could they wait before reporting Lillith's death? On the one hand, it was definitely an advantage to leave her in the shed for a while, especially in this heat. The more time that passed, the more difficult it would be for the police to make sense of it all. On the other hand, it could obviously seem suspicious if they kept Lillith's passing to themselves for too long. Sure, most of the people in the village had them down – completely unjustifiably – as a load of senile hippies, but at some point, even they had to notice that one of their housemates was missing. When exactly? After a day? Two days?

Edwina said something. It wouldn't be anything sensible. Agnes drank a mouthful of tea and waited for the high-pitched ringing to go away.

Bernadette took her sunglasses off her nose, got a tissue ready and waited for her next sobbing fit.

Winston patted her knee to comfort her.

Marshall said something to Agnes, and she acted like she understood him. An attentive look and a short but encouraging nod should do it.

Then the ringing suddenly disappeared, and Agnes heard the word 'umbrella,' as Marshall looked at her expectantly.

'Well, yes,' said Agnes unsure.

'Just an umbrella,' Marshall repeated. 'That's all. But it doesn't make much sense.'

'How could you!' hissed Bernadette. Her blind eyes stared into empty space. It had an unsettling effect. 'Just like that. Without a goodbye, without . . . anything!'

‘With a goodbye, it wouldn’t exactly have been a surprise, would it?’ Agnes responded more sharply than she’d intended. Typical Bernadette, making a drama out of the whole thing. They had all agreed! It wasn’t as if Lillith’s sudden death wouldn’t haunt her, quite the opposite, but sometimes you had to think practically.

‘We’re all going to drink our tea,’ she said decisively. ‘And take our pills. And then we’ll have a look.’

‘For Lillith?’ asked Edwina delightedly.

‘For the gun!’ said Agnes. ‘Winston and Bernadette will look here on the first floor. In Marshall’s room, obviously, but in all of the others too. Everywhere. Edwina and I will look on the ground floor, and Marshall will take care of the garden.’

She looked at a row of long faces. ‘Just like Easter!’ she cried cheerily.

‘Work smarter, not harder.’ Winston said, and grinned.

First, they looked in the kitchen, then in the sitting room. Agnes let Edwina climb ladders and peer under sofas and tried to keep a cool head. Together they looked in the vases on the cabinet, behind the books on the shelf, in pots and boxes and jars, behind cushions and under blankets and even in plant pots – and brought a whole host of useful things to light. Three of Edwina’s biscuits, hard and firm like the day they were made, eight pairs of reading glasses, a hearing aid, a blood pressure monitor (that’s where it went!) and pills aplenty, craftily hidden in nooks and crannies. Someone in the house wasn’t taking their medication as prescribed. Agnes would follow up on that later. They just had to . . .

For the second time that day, the doorbell rang.

Terrible timing.

Edwina was already at the door and opened it.

‘Cooey!’ she said.

Agnes rushed after her, as fast as she could. Edwina answering the door was rarely a good idea.

From the other side of the door came a serious male voice. ‘The police!’ cried Edwina excitedly. ‘It’s the police, Agnes! Look, how handy!’

Agnes rushed. The police? Already? It was too early, much too early! They didn’t have a plan yet! Maybe Bernadette had . . . ? No. As far as she knew Bernadette didn’t think much of the police . . .

‘Do come in, Inspector,’ Edwina blathered excitedly. ‘We were just looking for—’

‘The tortoise!’ gasped Agnes, who had finally made it to the door. ‘We’ve lost our tortoise.’

The policeman made a strange face and stepped inside hesitantly. He was in uniform. So far, so bad. ‘Miss Sharp? Agnes Sharp?’

‘I’m Edwina,’ corrected Edwina, but the policeman didn’t allow himself to be distracted and looked Agnes in the eye with, to her mind, a much too critical look. She felt herself getting hot. ‘Are you the homeowner? Miss Sharp, I need to talk to you briefly. Regarding a very serious matter.’

Serious! Oh God. What to say? As little as possible! She would have preferred to deal with the policeman straight away in the hall, but Edwina had already taken him by the arm and led him into the sitting room, where following their hunt it was full of vases, pots and jars standing everywhere.

Incredulously, the policeman looked at the pile of pills and the mountain of reading glasses.



‘We—’ said Edwina, and Agnes hastily interrupted her. ‘Just ran away, the cheeky thing. We’ve looked everywhere!’

‘In pots?’ asked the policeman.

‘She likes to play hide and seek,’ Agnes explained, without batting an eyelid.

‘Please take a seat,’ murmured the policeman in an official tone and motioned to the sofa, where the biscuits were lying. ‘What I have to tell you might be quite a shock for you both.’

‘We’re not made of sugar,’ snapped Edwina.

But what the policeman had to tell them really was quite a shock.

‘Mildred Puck?’ Agnes asked for the third time. She was sitting uncomfortably on the rock-hard biscuits. ‘Dead?’ Her head was swimming. Mildred? Why was the man talking about Mildred? Something wasn’t right!

‘Shot dead,’ said the policeman. ‘On her own terrace. In her deck chair.’

‘What a coincidence!’ cried Edwina and clapped her hands together.

‘It’s not really a coincidence,’ responded the policeman. ‘We suspect that the perpetrator broke in through the garden and Mildred surprised him. I have to ask you if you noticed anything unusual today? Did you see – or hear – anything?’

‘But . . .’ mumbled Agnes shaking her head. The Mildred she knew hadn’t been capable of surprising anyone for years. Total . . . invalid. She felt dizzy. Mildred *too*? It didn’t make any sense!

‘I don’t want to worry you unduly,’ murmured the

policeman and looked awkwardly at the pills in front of him. ‘But, if there really is someone trying to rob vulnerable senior citizens . . . we would ask you all to be cautious, make sure doors and windows are locked. And if you notice anything unusual, please don’t hesitate to . . .’

He gave Agnes his card.

Agnes hesitated.

‘But Mildred is . . . Mildred *was* an invalid. We, on the other hand . . .’

She fell silent. It was pointless trying to explain the difference between a torpid vegetable like Mildred and her little community of active senior citizens. She took the card, sighing. Of course. The print was far too small. Their chances of correctly reading the number in an emergency and dialling it on the phone were about as good as Hettie the tortoise’s.

‘Biscuits?’ asked Edwina and fished a specimen from under her joggers.

‘Not while I’m on duty,’ said the policeman with a hint of a smile. Edwina lost interest and slid from the sofa into one of her yoga poses. The cobra if Agnes wasn’t mistaken.

The policeman’s smile quickly vanished.

‘There is no need to panic,’ he said. ‘But you should be vigilant. And we would be grateful of any information.’

‘Of course. That’s very thoughtful of you.’ Agnes noticed her heart was pounding wildly. Maybe the whole Mildred thing wasn’t a catastrophe at all. Maybe it was an *opportunity*! Edwina had finished her cobra and wandered through to the hall.

‘Did she . . . die instantly?’ asked Agnes.

The policeman looked at the pills again with seeming

fascination, and the way he said nothing told Agnes that it hadn't been a quick death. Not at all.

She shuddered.

'Were you close?' The policeman tore his gaze from the pills and looked at Agnes. His eyes were red and tired and somehow *shocked*, and for the first time Agnes felt that he wasn't just a policeman, but a human being too with floppy, sand-coloured hair and a beer belly. He even looked a bit familiar to her. These days, with some people, she felt like she had already met them, as if there were a finite number of faces in the world and at some point, when you'd lived for long enough, you had seen them all.

'We had known each other for a long, long time,' she said quietly.

The policeman opened his mouth, presumably to say something sympathetic, when a little triumphant cry came from the hall.

'Gotcha!' cheered Edwina.

The gun! Agnes's heart leapt about in her chest like a tormented frog.

*Edwina! No!*

*Not now!*

The high-pitched ringing was back, and Agnes clung to the arm of the sofa. She watched helplessly as the policeman jumped out of his chair and rushed to the door. She couldn't do anything, say anything, and the wonderful opportunity that had just presented itself was slipping through her fingers. Like sand. Like peas and pastry forks and coffee beans. Like quite a few things these days.

Then Edwina was back again and was blabbering

excitedly and inaudibly into her ear, and then the policeman appeared, beaming, with Hettie the tortoise in his big policeman hands.

Agnes woke up, squinted and could see four quite blurry but clearly concerned faces above her. She made sense of the colours and shapes as well as she could and tried to concentrate.

Edwina.

Marshall.

Hettie the tortoise.

And the policeman.

Somebody was holding her hand.

Agnes groaned. The policeman had to go!

She opened her mouth, but no sound came out. She rolled her eyes towards Marshall, then back to the policeman. Once. Twice.

‘I think she’s having a fit,’ said the policeman.

Marshall seemed to have understood what Agnes wanted. ‘Pah, fit. The old girl was just a bit hot. These things happen!’ Agnes sighed gratefully.

‘I think she wants a glass of water,’ said Marshall.

The policeman laid Hettie on Agnes’s rib cage and rushed out of the room. ‘Where’s the kitchen?’

‘Back left,’ called Marshall, being deliberately vague. Agnes could hear the policeman pulling open doors in the hall. She found her voice again.

‘He’s got to go!’ she hiss-whispered. ‘Right now. It . . . it’s an opportunity!’

Hettie the tortoise tried to eat one of her mother-of-pearl buttons.

‘And if I hear the words “old girl” again, there’ll be trouble!’ Marshall grinned and let go of her hand.

The law enforcement official returned with a red face and a glass of water.

‘I really didn’t want to shock her like this. At first, she seemed to take the news quite well. I mean . . . we thought it would be best if the neighbours . . . it really is a bit remote here, you must be careful . . . are you sure we shouldn’t call the doctor?’

Strange that nobody really spoke to you any more, just because you were lying on your back – or on your stomach in Hettie’s case. They all talked over you, literally. Agnes looked up, as words were sailing over her, like she wasn’t there at all. She had a drink of water and watched as, in a rare moment of unity, Marshall, Edwina and Hettie tried to get rid of the policeman. It was probably Hettie who made the final call with her impatient snarl.

The policeman distributed a few more of his cards and bits of advice, then Marshall and Edwina manoeuvred him towards the door.

Hettie and Agnes looked at each other. ‘That was close!’ Agnes exhaled.

Hettie hissed in agreement.

And then . . .

Agnes was a girl with thin, sun-tanned limbs, white socks and pigtails reaching down to her bottom. Agnes didn’t like her pigtails. The boys pulled them. The girls teased her.

But her mother wouldn’t hear of it.

When she skipped, her pigtails skipped too.

But now they were hanging limply.

Agnes was standing beneath a cloudless summer sky watching someone squash firebugs on a stone. The bugs were running back and forth, but they didn't stand a chance.

'Why are you doing that?' asked Agnes.

The sun was warming her neck. A bird was singing. Agnes wanted to go home.

'Because it's easy,' answered the someone.

Agnes opened her eyes wide and stared into Hettie's wise tortoise face. Hettie was the youngest member of the household, but also the most sensible. That sometimes gave Agnes food for thought.

She was still lying on the sofa with her feet on a cushion. Her pigtails were long gone. Agnes had other problems now. She tried to sit up. Hettie snarled disapprovingly. 'Could someone possibly take the tortoise . . . ?'

Edwina picked up Hettie and gave her a sloppy kiss on her shell. Agnes got hold of the arm of the sofa and heaved. Somebody pushed from behind and then finally she was sitting upright, if a little askew.

She patted her hair (ravaged of course), sighed and looked at everyone. Bernadette had joined them in the meantime and was listening with her head tilted to one side looking in the direction of the sofa. Marshall had pulled up a chair; Edwina was sitting cross-legged on the rug, and Hettie, who finally had solid ground beneath her claws again, made off with dignity.

Agnes gathered herself.

'There's good news and there's bad news,' she said. 'Mildred Puck is dead.'

‘Is that the good news?’ Bernadette asked drily. She had got herself a plate of fondant creams and was Hoovering them up, one after the other, like a confectionary vampire. The question stung Agnes. She and Mildred had been friends, best friends. But obviously that was a long time ago, and since then Mildred had spent a considerable amount of time making herself thoroughly unpopular with everyone.

‘The bad news is that some burglar is going around bumping off old people,’ Agnes corrected. ‘And the good news is that he’s using a gun to do it!’

‘Ah!’ said Marshall.

‘Poor Mildred,’ said Edwina. ‘Why is that good?’

‘We can pin Lillith on him!’ Agnes explained excitedly. ‘Don’t you understand? It’s ideal! Two old ladies shot in the garden, practically at the same time! Everyone will think that this burglar is responsible for Lillith too. Now we’ll go to the shed and find her. We can cause a bit of a ruckus and run about all over the place. And then we’ll call the police!’

‘The police again,’ Edwina said, bored.

‘Good plan!’ echoed from above where Winston was sitting on the landing listening.

‘Why should I be a part of this?’ snarled Bernadette not quite as skilfully as Hettie, but venomously nevertheless. ‘When nobody ever . . .’

‘Because there are no fondant creams in prison,’ said Agnes. ‘That’s why.’

Things turned out to be rather more complicated than she had expected. The police didn’t just come and pick

Lillith up, but put up yellow and black plastic tape, striped like hornets, took photos, took samples and searched the garden. Agnes was worried about her hydrangeas.

And the flies! All of the flies! Agnes hadn't reckoned on those, that Lillith would attract so many flies in such a short space of time. It had been a shock for them all. Now Agnes was standing befuddled in the hall wanting nothing more than a nap. Police officials hurried past her. Edwina and Hettie had disappeared, Marshall was being questioned in the garden, and Winston was looking down from the landing with curiosity. Bernadette had used up the house supply of tissues and was now sobbing into toilet paper in the sitting room. A policewoman was helping her.

Agnes didn't have anything more to do, other than get in the way. She leant on the doorframe exhausted, when a shadow fell over her.

'Hello there,' said an unfamiliar voice.

Agnes squinted into the light and looked into two sparkling green eyes, the brim of an antiquated feather hat hovering over them.

'I'm Charlie,' said the feather hat. 'The newbie! Fabulous house!'

Agnes groaned. The newbie. In the excitement about Lillith and Mildred she had completely forgotten.

At that very moment two police officers carried a stretcher past. On it a big white plastic bag, still surrounded by hopeful flies.

'Oh,' said Charlie with the feather hat. 'I've come at a bad time.'

Agnes remembered her manners.



‘No, not at all. I’m Agnes,’ she said and offered her hand. ‘And, err, that was Lillith.’

‘Ha!’ Charlie took her hand and shook it enthusiastically. ‘Good timing then, huh? Fabulous!’

Agnes attempted a smile. ‘Welcome to Sunset Hall!’