

The logo consists of the lowercase letters 'a' and 'b' in a white, elegant script font, positioned on a solid black rectangular background. A thin white horizontal line is drawn beneath the letters.

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The Dower House Mystery

A Case for Inspector Faro

ALANNA KNIGHT

Allison & Busby Limited
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CHAPTER ONE

Had they been on the lookout for portents, the year 1907 did not begin auspiciously for newly wedded, recently retired Chief Inspector Faro and his bride Imogen Crowe.

After visiting York, they would live in Edinburgh. Their Dublin flat presented problems regarding Imogen's travels as a writer of historical biographies and the decision had been almost instant when a suitable Edinburgh house came up, with an accessible railway station to London and thence across to the Continent and beyond.

Aided and abetted in their search they had been offered a permanent home with Rose, Jack and Meg Macmerry in Solomon's Tower at the base of Arthur's Seat. Large, ancient, romantic, its history lost in time and almost ruinous in places, neither Faro nor Imogen were homemakers. Their thoughts did not linger on domesticity or the challenge offered by those vast empty rooms with their draughty stone walls, while they regarded in dreaded silence what might be a future of living there, leaking pipes

within, decaying stonework and foul weather without. They wanted a modern house, easy to maintain, where they could just settle down.

Even if Imogen's lifestyle had included leisure enough to yearn for pretty curtains totally inadequate on those massive stone windows, Faro was not in the least tempted by golf, Scotland's national fever, with a new course opened close by, nor had he any wish to try his hand at building a flight of bookshelves and as both had succumbed to streaming winter colds, Imogen spent each day searching the newspapers for appropriate houses, while Faro remained crouched over the cheery fire in the only warm room, the Tower's massive kitchen, regardless of tapestries on walls shuddering in the wind. He watched Imogen gallantly venturing outside, under shawls and umbrella, guiltily aware that his new role as husband sadly lacked the desirable and necessary ingredients of homemaking, such matters throughout his long working life being the province and responsibility of Mrs Brook, an efficient housekeeper.

Grateful to Rose and Jack, who were relieved to see their marriage solemnised and made official at last after almost twenty years of living together, they were lured by the open aspects of the ever-expanding south side of Edinburgh, with sounds of the nearby railway line an added temptation.

The New Town constructed a century ago was solidly built with few open spaces and at a short distance from Solomon's Tower. The one-time drove road down to the borders and thence to England now transported heavier traffic than horse-drawn carriages, and renamed Dalkeith Road, sprouted a respectable vast terrace of six-storeyed houses.

The ever-expanding railway network had proved a great boon to the Faros, enabling them to visit places often difficult and almost inaccessible except by tortuous land and sea crossings taking several days. Until the turn of the century, Imogen Crowe had been classed as a non-desirable Irish woman with remote connections to the Irish Home Rule movement, before her free pardon from King Edward VII allowed her the right to settle in Britain and made living arrangements with Faro much easier.

While they were still hunting houses, by chance a suitable one came up. With Chief Inspector Jack Macmerry heavily involved in police work and Faro's daughter Rose McQuinn absent on one of her lady investigator cases, Imogen and Faro had taken their daughter, nine-year-old Meg, to visit a school friend whose grandmother had a rather pretty house near Sheridan Place, Faro's one-time home.

Imogen had been very impressed by the view from the house with one large bay window looking across to Arthur's Seat and another gazing down towards East Lothian and the coast. Facing south and west it had the advantage of sunny days and warm rooms, not to be despised in Edinburgh's somewhat chilly weather.

The owner, Mrs Mack, sighed. She was getting old, her legs bothered her and she didn't need all those now unoccupied rooms up two flights of stairs, while downstairs – once the dining room and housekeeper's domain of parlour and kitchen leading to the garden – was more than enough for her declining years.

She shook her head sadly, regarding Imogen with a gleam of hope. 'It is all too much for me, with Sandy gone now. I never needed a housekeeper, but I just hate

living alone. I'm a bit nervous these days and I just wish I could rent the upstairs to some reliable folk. But I don't fancy having strangers living in the house.' She paused and looked again at her little granddaughter's escorts. The tall handsome man who Janey whispered was once a famous policeman. His wife, who seemed a lot younger, was lovely too, such a charming sympathetic manner. A nice, strong, respectable couple with good references.

She sighed and murmured, 'Someone I could trust and who might even keep an eye on things if I was taken poorly.' She patted her chest knowingly. 'Not as fit as I once was. Getting old.'

The Faros exchanged a glance. The first floor with its magnificent views would be perfect, and what had been the maid's room and the nursery on the top floor would provide extra space for the vast storage of all their books. It was an instant decision, the rent agreed and there was general jubilation from Mrs Mack, as well as the wee girls Janey and Meg, in particular delighted at the prospect of her adored Imogen staying in Edinburgh. They had become great friends and the regard was mutual. Imogen had lots of time and hugs for Rose's wee stepdaughter, who was Jack's image.

A very excited Meg held both their hands skipping homeward along the one-time Coffin Lane. Once the end of the town and the last earthly sight of Edinburgh for condemned criminals, it had lost all sinister connotations and become just a pretty country road with hedgerows overflowing with colourful wildflowers.

Home up the hill to Samson's Ribs and Solomon's Tower, gasping to be first out with the news for Rose, Meg called: 'Isn't it wonderful, Ma? They'll be living so near. Fancy

Imo and Grandpa living just as far away as the Crowe flies, eh?’ she added as they all laughed at the pun on Imogen’s name. ‘Isn’t that great!’

And so matters were speedily arranged, and as the upstairs rooms of No. 2 Preston Drove were fairly empty, what furniture remained was purchased from Mrs Mack, with additions provided from the Tower and local auction rooms.

Preparing to move in, Imogen had no doubts. She had a feeling about houses and the moment she had stepped across the threshold knew this was a good place. ‘My Celtic blood with its dash of Romany from my grandmother,’ she told Faro.

Imogen had loved their tiny flat in Dublin, easily accessible from Glasgow, as long as one was a good sailor across the notorious Irish Sea to Rossclare. Before the decision to settle in Edinburgh, it had been convenient as long as their travels across Europe permitted, and as long as Imogen produced books that retained their popularity. This always surprised her, expecting that each new one would somehow not reach the mark. But, so far, the source had not dried up, the stories still came and as long as Faro accompanied her she would continue writing. Research intrigued her even more than the writing, she often said, and Faro laughed:

‘You should have been a detective, like Rose, if that’s what you enjoy so much. After all it’s just searching for clues, isn’t it?’

They were content together now that Faro had retired. During their first years, meeting intermittently when he was between cases, Imogen was always fearful. Fearful for

his safety, that the bullet or the knife would bring their life together to a cruel end. She wished that their age difference was less than twenty years, aware always that in the scheme of mortality she would outlive Faro and she thought with anguish of those years alone.

Faro was well aware of their shadow too. He constantly wanted to put the ring on her finger, have her respectably married so that he could provide for the rest of her lifetime. Until last year, she had continuously refused, saying she did not need a certificate or a wedding ring or to repeat after the priest, ‘until death do us part’, followed by a nuptial Mass to bind her to the love of her life.

Faro forgot sometimes that she was still a Roman Catholic and occasionally when they were staying near a church she would take her rosary and disappear to Mass. In foreign cities, he was surprised. How did she understand it all?

She had laughed. ‘It is in Latin, of course. The same for all Christians.’

Except for Presbyterian Scots, in the religion he had been born and bred in Orkney, although his appearances in St Giles in Edinburgh were limited to occasions such as official police visits, weddings and funerals.

Daughter Rose had married an Irish Catholic, Sergeant Danny McQuinn, brought up by the nuns in an Edinburgh orphanage, but neither Rose nor her second husband Inspector Jack Macmerry were keen churchgoers, although Jack’s wee Meg was also being educated by the nuns in the convent at the Pleasance, chiefly because of its convenience as the nearest school to Solomon’s Tower.

When Faro had tried over the years to persuade Imogen

into marriage, she had laughed. ‘You have a wife already, Faro. Sure now, it would be bigamy and you married to the Edinburgh City Police.’

And he realised then that she spoke the truth. The police, his dedication, had always been first in his life, even before his family. He had long ago known that he had neglected his first wife Lizzie, who had died in childbirth with their third child, a longed-for son. Rose and Emily had been shipped off to Orkney to live with his mother in Kirkwall and were rarely seen by their father, even on those dutiful summer holidays in Sheridan Place in Edinburgh – a father who was always too busy chasing criminals to spend an afternoon picnic with his two little daughters. He still carried guiltily the image of their upturned faces, their sad disappointed expressions as Mrs Brook, his loyal and dependable housekeeper, was allocated the task of deputising for this neglectful parent.