

# THE SECRET OF HUNTING DOWNS

## Plot Summary - Chapter by Chapter Breakdown

Notes: We have left several details of this story vague, so you can give them a personal touch. You can tailor this outline in several of the following ways to make it unique, without changing the main plot. 1) Charles Denver may be the original owner of the manor, or he inherits it. 2) The story may be set in any town, village or community of your choice. 3) Detective Carnegie may be a local bobby instead of a CID detective. 4) Instead of wine being stored in the cellar, you could have rare books or paintings. 5) Charles may end up being the guilty party as he was first suspected. 6) Change the ending – Logan is the one who uncovers the secrets of Hunting Downs Manor

### Part One - Rising Tension

#### Chapter One

CH 1/Scene 1 – Charles Denver is an older gentleman. He is a wealthy proprietor who lives near the village of Ambercot in Southern England. His house, rather his manor, is occupying a corner of the vale of his estate. Charles made his fortune in the North Sea as a foreman on drilling rigs. Instead of spending his wages on drinks, women and games, he saved his earnings until the work nearly killed him. He bought Hunting Downs some twenty years ago and renovated it. Today, the house and estate are enjoying the care and maintenance they richly deserve.

CH 1/Scene 2 – Charles is not a frivolous man. He likes to play a game of golf with some of the club members on Saturday, have a beer at the village pub with some of the locals, and take his friend, Louise out for a meal at one of the restaurants on Brighton Beach. He is an uncomplicated man, but he does not seem to have many local acquaintances or friends. No one has ever been invited to his house for dinner or for a game of cards. He does not seem to have a family; or if he has, they probably do not live in the area. Although he is not a recluse, or does not appear to be one, according to his housekeeper, Charles Denver lives a very routine (boring?) life. Some say he is probably a writer. He locks himself in his den most days and only comes out to have his meals and go to bed.

CH 1/Scene 3 – When the Ambercot postmaster receives a registered letter for Charles, he decides to phone him. Surprised, Charles makes his way to the village to get the registered missive. Curious as to its content, Charles opens the envelope in front of Mr. Alfred Logan – the postmaster. Not saying anything more than a curt “thank you” and “goodbye” to the baffled Mr. Logan, Charles leaves the post office and stuffs the envelope in his breast pocket. Walking down the street, Charles decides to have lunch at the local pub. There, he reads the letter once again and grunts his renewed displeasure.

CH 1/Scene 4 – After lunch, Charles seems to have made a decision. He talks to the publican – a young woman by the name of Janette Wilson – and asks her if she would be interested in catering a party that he intends to hold at the Hunting Downs Manor ten days later. Janette is taken aback by the request at first, but once she consulted with her uncle and pub owner, Abe Wilson, she agrees to do the catering for Charles's party.

CH 1/Scene 5 – The next day, Charles makes a list of some of the people he knows in and around the village and at the Golf Club, and sends about twenty invitations to his “scavenger hunt” to be held at the manor on the following Saturday. Of course, he invites Louise and puts her in charge of the party planning and coordination with his housekeeper, Mrs. Linda Willis. In the days that follow, Charles retreats to his den from morning to night and seems more annoyed than ever at any interruption. Louise and Mrs. Willis put Charles's attitude down to nerves. He's never hosted a party before and he's probably disturbed in his writings (or whatever he's doing all day in his den).

#### Chapter Two

CH 2/Scene 1 – Janette reaches the manor on the afternoon of the party, her van filled with the food and catering items she will need to feed twenty people before their scavenger hunt. She is curious to know where the hunt is going to take place. When she asks Louise about it, the latter tells her that Charles will

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give the scavenging hunt map and list to the guests as they arrive that night. The hunt will only start after sunset. The prize is a bottle of rare Bordeaux wine, which Charles has apparently bought at a London auction. "it's worth a year of my wages I reckon," Louise tells Janette.

CH 2/Scene 2 – When seven o'clock chimes on the grandfather clock in the foyer, Charles emerges from his den with twenty envelopes, which he holds in the one hand. He walks through the ground floor of the house and examines the tables where the food and beverages have been displayed – ready for the guests to consume. He compliments Janette for the spread and decoration and thanks Mrs. Willis for her hard work. Louise is the first to arrive. She is wearing a cocktail dress that only enhances her curvaceous figure. With a kiss on the cheek, Charles hands her the first envelope.

CH 2/Scene 3 – The other nineteen guests soon make their appearance. Charles is the perfect host. He talks to everyone in turn while they eat and drink to their hearts' content. The guests are very happy to have been invited, so curious they are to see the inside of the manor since it has been renovated. The ladies are delighted to visit the modern kitchen and charming solarium at the back of the house, while the men are impressed by Charles's library. After dinner and when the sun is rapidly setting behind the hillside, it is time for Charles to ask his guests to open their envelopes.

CH 2/Scene 4 – In the two hours that followed, the twenty guests are sent about the manor in search of various items which they need to complete their lists. The oddity of the items makes it very difficult for people to find. Each guest has a rebus to complete and to decipher, which means that each item is the word of a sentence that the guests have to complete.

CH 2/Scene 5 – Louise feels utterly frustrated. She is the one who knows the house best – apart from Mrs. Willis and Charles who are not playing – and yet she seems to be at a loss to find some of the things she needs to complete her rebus. However, she is not alone in this. Most of the guests are half-way through their lists by the time midnight comes around.

### Chapter Three

CH 3/Scene 1 – Seemingly upset, Mr. Logan, the postmaster makes his feelings known to Charles. All of the other guests are in agreement: they have searched high and low for the items on their lists but can not find one or two items. Lydia Hilton, the haberdashery store owner and her husband, Larry, are quite vocal about it. They can not understand why they can not find a crow feather and a drop of candle wax anywhere. In such a huge manor, at least candle wax should be easy to find. As for a crow feather, the birds are everywhere in these parts of the countryside, it should be so easy to find such a feather in the hunting room for example. But, no, they have no such luck.

CH 3/Scene 2 – Since the hunt is restricted to the inside of the house, the guests give up. Some are annoyed, some are amused and some demand answers. Charles, as a good host, gives them a clue: "In an old house there are hidden panels". With renewed vigor, the guests search for the moveable panel that would lead them to the other rooms, possibly located below the manor.

CH 3/Scene 3 – Ten minutes later Mr. Logan finds the book that opens the door to a set of stairs going down to the cellar of the manor. Alerted of the find, Charles joins him and together they go down the stairs. The other guests follow. The narrow staircase seems to lead to a dungeon, so dark and damp it is. Charles lights the way with his torch light. Finally they reach the last step and the archway that opens up onto a large wine cellar.

CH 3/Scene 4 – When everyone has reached the cellar, they disperse to find the items they need to complete their rebuses. Mr. and Mrs. Hilton find their crow feather and the candle wax while others find the remaining items on their lists. However, what no one expected to find was the heap of bones that had been hidden under a pile of lumps of coal at the far back of the cellar. Mr. Hilton was the one who needed a lump of coal to complete the items listed on his scavenger list.

## Part Two - Main Action

### Chapter Four

CH 4/Scene 1 – Charles is totally baffled. The letter he has received ten days ago mentioned that he would find the “remains of times past” in the cellar. Following the instructions in the letter, he went down to the cellar and found the wine. He believed the wine was what the writer of the missive meant when *she* said that Charles “would find the remains of times past”. He never thought one of his guests would stumble upon a body.

CH 4/Scene 2 – Charles knows his guests could not have anything to do with the remains Mr. Hilton found in the cellar. Therefore, he sends them home after asking them to be ready for the police to interview them. Charles confides in Louise that he never expected such a thing to happen. He asks her to tell him a lot more about the house and its occupants: the people she knew as a young girl.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – When Sergeant Raphael of the local Ambercot Police Station arrives on the premises, he asks Charles to show him the remains. As soon as they arrive in the cellar and Raphael realizes this is a crime that will need to be investigated by the CID, he and Charles go back upstairs. Raphael urges Charles not to let anyone in the old library until the CID detective and the ME arrive on the premises.

CH 4/ Scene 4 – The next day, most of the villagers are assembled in the pub. They all wonder whose bones are buried in Charles’s cellar. Moreover, the guests are none too pleased to have been imposed upon in such a fashion. Mr. Logan tells everyone about the letter that Charles received. Janette wonders why Charles organized a scavenger hunt. Did he know a body was lying down there?

CH 4/ Scene 5 – Inspector Darryl Carnegie asks Charles the same question when he arrives at the Hunting Downs Manor. Charles tells him that he did not know anything about a body. He shows him the letter. It came from someone in Australia. It seems that the party who wrote the letter was the former housekeeper at the manor. She says that she needed to tell Charles that he “would find the remains of times past” in the cellar of Hunting Downs Manor. Charles tells Carnegie that he taught the wine bottles were the “remains of times past” that the lady was describing. He never thought to find a body down there.

### Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – When the ME, Dr. Wilkinson arrives at the manor, he is impressed with what Charles has done to the place. He remembers the manor being abandoned after one of the owners died of TB several years ago. No one wanted to buy the place after that. Charles agrees that he was able to purchase the property from the council quite cheap with the promise to renovate it and have it then listed as a heritage home.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – As soon as Dr. Wilkinson sees the bones protruding from under the coals, he recognizes the ring on the hand. It is a signet ring. With the help of his assistant the two of them remove the lumps of coal from around the bones and finally have the remains in the open. The ME believes that the bones belong to Jerome Emillion, the former owner of Hunting Downs Manor. When Inspector Carnegie returns to the manor he begins his investigation. There is not much Charles could tell him. He didn’t know Jerome Emillion and was not aware of his being buried in the cellar.

CH 5/ Scene 3 – Two days later Dr. Wilkinson confirms that Jerome Emillion died from a blow to the back of the head and was buried under the coal at least fifteen to twenty years ago. The case is baffling. That evening, Charles wants to examine the wines that are stored in the cellar to send the inventory to his insurance agent. There is a fortune (literally) in that cave-like room and he wants it insured. When he reaches the last step, he feels uneasy. He goes directly to the corner where they found Jerome Emillion, only to find another body. Charles cannot comprehend it. He saw Louise last night and she was happy, fit and well.

CH 5/ Scene 4 – This time Inspector Carnegie is more than unhappy. He is furious. Charles does not know what happened. The door to the library had remained locked since the bones of Jerome Emillion

were removed from the cellar. No, he did not see Louise after she left the previous night. No, he did not invite her to the manor today. There must be another explanation for this intrusion and for Louise's murder. Dr. Wilkinson soon determines the cause of death to be another blow to the head – this time delivered by a shovel, it appears.

CH 5/Scene 5 – The cellar is now closed to all parties except for the forensic team. The SOCO men and women invade the manor and practically close off the ground floor to Charles and Mrs. Willis. Even Charles's den is barred. The chief of forensic officer investigates the scene of the crime himself. He concludes that there must be another access to the cellar. He urges his team to examine every brick, crack, shelf and even bottle in the cellar. If anything seems to have been disturbed in any way, he wants to know. A few hours of painstaking work lead one of the men to find a bottle that has been moved on a lower shelf. He calls the chief over to examine the bottle. The chief turns the bottle slightly which provokes a rumbling noise at their backs. The wall slides open onto a narrow passage. The chief and two of his men walk down the passage for a minute or so until they come to a culver grate. They open it and find themselves in the middle of the nearby moor.

CH 5/Scene 6 – Charles is avid to learn what they found. He listens to the SOCO chief explaining how the murderer must have come in the cellar. He further tells Charles that Inspector Carnegie has obtained some information about Louise. Inspector Carnegie turns up at Hunting Downs Manor an hour after the forensic team has left and reveals what he found out to Charles.

CH 5/Scene 7 – Apparently, Louise Default was Jerome Emillion's illegitimate daughter. She tried to claim her inheritance of the manor when Jerome disappeared. She may have known the existence of the cellar. She was probably trying to steal some of the wine when the murderer surprised her and killed her. Carnegie believes Charles had motive, opportunity and means to kill Louise. Suspected of the murder, Charles is arrested.

### Part Three - Resolution

#### Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – When Carnegie interviews Mr. Logan, the latter says that he does not see why Louise would have to steal any of the wine in the cellar of the man who was probably going to marry her anyway. He does not see any reason for Charles murdering his girlfriend over a couple of bottles of red. Mr. Logan is a retired detective. He has lived in Ambercot all of his life. He knew Jerome Emillion by sight only. He was a boy at the time. He never went to the manor until Charles invited him to the scavenger hunt. But he knew Louise fairly well. She was not a gold-digger. She genuinely believed the manor should have been hers in the first place.

CH 6/Scene 2 – Inspector Carnegie interviews every "Person of Interest" and comes up empty. Charles is still the best candidate to stand trial for the murder of Louise Default. He cannot find anyone who knows about the second entry to the cellar. He cannot find the shovel – the murder weapon – that was used to kill Louise. He is in the dark until Mr. Logan comes to his office in Brighton. Logan wants to help the young detective by pointing out a few items he may have omitted to notice.

CH 6/Scene 3 – Why was the body of Jerome Emillion buried in the cellar? Why was Louise in the cellar, if she did not want to steal the wine? Why would Charles want to kill his lady friend? The signet ring on Jerome's finger – what is its significance? Where are the other Emillion family members? These are the questions Mr. Logan would like Carnegie to answer.

CH 6/Scene 4 – After days of investigative work, Inspector Carnegie is finally able to answer most of Mr. Logan's questions. Jerome Emillion was buried in the cellar since apparently no one knew of its existence – except for the murderer. Louise's roommate tells the inspector that she received a note from Charles asking her to meet him in the cellar. Louise tried phoning him about the strange request. He didn't answer. The signet ring is the one that has been used by the Emillion family for centuries. There are no surviving members of the family. Louise was the last one. When Mr. Logan receives these answers during a phone conversation with Carnegie, he decides to have it out with Charles.

CH 6/Scene 5 – Charles is out on bail. Mr. Logan meets him at the manor. After a decent if not rather cold conversation between the two men, Mr. Logan tells Charles that he is willing to be a character witness at his trial. Charles maintains his innocence. Although the evidence points to him, there is no murder weapon. Charles swears he's never gone back to the cellar after it was locked up. He did not know the existence of the second passage. Mr. Logan tells him that the court will understand his position and perhaps will only charge him with manslaughter.

CH 6/Scene 6 – When Logan leaves the manor, Charles phones Carnegie and asks him to check the postmaster's car – especially the boot. He believes Mr. Logan is Louise's killer. As for the motive, Charles tells Carnegie that he researched Mr. Logan's background and found out that he has been suspected to have contributed to Jerome Emillion's disappearance. Alfred Logan was extremely upset, years ago, when Jerome Emillion refused to let him have a bottle of wine for his graduation party. Charles also believes that the man is quite insane. He is fixated on the wine stored in the cellar. He won't let anyone touch it. When Logan found Louise examining the bottles on the day after the party, he went berserk and killed her.

CH 6/Scene 7 – Charles was right. Carnegie finds the shovel in Logan's car. He also finds some coal dust beneath the carpet in the boot. Mr. Logan knew that Charles would find the cellar eventually. As far as he was concerned, the cellar and the wine it contains was his. He had killed Jerome for it. When the manor was abandoned, Logan made sure that no one knew about the second entrance, but Louise found it as a child. When Charles invited Logan to the scavenger hunt, the latter knew the cellar would be discovered. On the day of Louise's murder, Logan was in the cellar. When Louise came through the second passage, he killed her.

CH6/Scene 8 – Logan is charged with both murders soon afterward and found guilty. He is sentenced to life imprisonment. Charles sells the wine and transforms the cellar in a modern entertainment room.

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