

IF IT QUACKS LIKE A DUCK

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) Detective Inspector David Adrian may be involved romantically with Sergeant Sylvia Hunter. 2) The story may be set in any seaside town, village or community of your choice. 3) Constables Xavier and Durable may assume a larger role in the story. 4) Instead of sleeping pills (barbiturates) Lydia Nostrum may have been killed with a very slow acting poison. 5) Mrs. Tisbury may have killed Lydia out of jealousy – thinking her husband cheated on her with his surgeon.

Part One - Rising Tension

Chapter One

CH 1/ Scene 1 – Detective Inspector David Adrian has accepted a transfer to Gorey on the Isle of Jersey. There he finds Sergeant Sylvia Hunter, who will assist him in the conduct of all eventual investigations. The two constables who work at the police station are keen to impress their new “Boss”. While David is looking for a permanent residence, he is lodged at the *White House Inn*. The guests are mostly retired folks who prefer living at the *White House* to living at the local retirement home.

CH 1/ Scene 2 – David Adrian finds the people of Jersey friendly and attentive to their wellbeing. Most of them have taken up a sport or take long walks along the island's shores. It's during one of these walks that Colonel Endicott trips over a hand protruding from a sand hill near the water's edge. He's an old army fellow who's looked at death in the face many a time. He examines the hand without disturbing it or the rest of the buried body. He soon concludes the body belongs to a woman who lived at the *White House*. He knew her as Lydia Nostrum.

CH 1/ Scene 3 – Being conscious of the fact that it's always preferable not to disturb the scene of a crime, Colonel Endicott makes his way back to the promenade where he sits on a bench, takes his cell phone out of his pocket and calls the constabulary. Constable Durable answers the phone. He listens to the colonel's description of what he found on the beach. The colonel then asks to speak to Inspector Adrian.

CH 1/ Scene 4 – Once Adrian heard the story, he tells Sylvia Hunter to call the ME and to accompany him to the beach. On the promenade, they find Colonel Endicott. The poor man is all done in. It finally dawned on him that the lady whose body is buried in the sand is the woman he wanted to marry. When asked if he had made his feelings clear to the victim before she died, Endicott shakes his head ruefully.

CH 1/ Scene 5 – Inspector Adrian tells the colonel to return to the hotel where he will join him later. Adrian also phones Constable Durable and asks him to go to the hotel to seal Ms. Lydia Nostrum's room. Durable is to explain what's happening to the hotel owners. Dr. Marcel Ross, the ME arrives on the scene and conducts a cursory examination of the body. Lydia died some three hours ago – around lunch time – and it seems that she was poisoned, judging from the trickling blood at the corner of the lady's mouth.

Chapter Two

CH 2/ Scene 1 – Once the corpse is transported to the morgue, the forensic team begins examining the area surrounding the crime scene. They're hoping to find a clue as to the person who buried the body, for one thing, and if Lydia was alive when she came to the beach or if she was already dead when she was laid down in her grave.

CH 2/ Scene 2 – Meanwhile, Inspector Adrian and Sergeant Hunter make their way to the *White House Inn*. They talk to the owner for a few minutes. Mrs. Harris heard nothing out of the ordinary when she deposited the lunch tray in front of Lydia's door. She heard Ms. Nostrum talking on the phone or on line and never entered her room. She had ordered some fish and rice for lunch – she liked it spicy. When the inspector enters Lydia's room he immediately notices that her lunch tray is still on the dresser. The dish has hardly been eaten. Inspector Adrian puts on latex gloves then takes the plate off the tray and brings it

to his nose. There is no strange smell emanating from the left-over food. He is not happy because he believes Lydia Nostrum must have ingested the poison while eating this food. However, he will have to wait for Dr. Ross's autopsy report to move the investigation forward.

CH 2/ Scene 3 – While he is at the hotel, Inspector Adrian interviews the residents, some of which he knows already. He starts with Colonel Endicott. The colonel confirms that since he retired, he has been quite lonely and was looking forward to proposing to Lydia. He has no idea who could have poisoned her. She was a lovely lady who, unfortunately, suffered from arthritis and could not accompany him on his afternoon strolls. Adrian stores that little bit of information in the “*interesting facts*” slot of his brain.

CH 2/ Scene 4 – Next to be interviewed is a couple who has retired to the *White House* after the husband was treated for cancer by none other than Lydia Nostrum. Before retiring to the Isle of Jersey, Lydia Nostrum was a successful surgeon in London. Mr. Tisbury was her patient for a few months during which time the two developed a friendship. Mrs. Tisbury did not know about the relationship that had developed between her husband and Lydia Nostrum. Pressing him for an explanation, Mr. Tisbury tells his wife that he continued to visit Ms. Nostrum in secret because he has been notified that his cancer has come back. He wanted to have Ms. Nostrum at his side were he to go on the operating table again.

CH 2/ Scene 5 – As Sergeant Hunter and Inspector Adrian leave the Tisbury's cabin, they notice the maid taking a lunch tray from in front of Alice Dunkirk's cabin. They do not stop the maid and are soon admitted inside Alice's room. The lady is in the middle of weaving some intricate tapestry on a loom. David Adrian is altogether intrigued and impressed by the lady's work. The multicolored tapestry is already midway to being finished. Alice tells them it is destined to be a wedding gift for the son of some friends she has on the island. When Adrian asks her about her lunch, Alice said that she had some chicken and rice which she enjoyed very much.

Chapter Three

CH 3/ Scene 1 – Dr. Ross brings the autopsy report to the constabulary in person. He wants to explain the details of his findings to Inspector Adrian. Apparently, Lydia Nostrum died of an overdose of sleeping pills. Yet, the food that was on the lunch plate did not even contain a trace of barbiturates. Moreover, the food the lady ingested prior to her death was not the culprit either. Dr. Ross then concludes Lydia Nostrum may have overdosed on sleeping pills by accident. As for her arthritis; yes, it was quite severe and going for a walk on the beach would have been too painful.

CH 3/ Scene 2 – Armed of this new information, Adrian and Hunter direct their next inquiries to the kitchen staff. They want to know precisely what the lady had to eat and drink that day. She had a light breakfast – some cereal, fruit, orange juice, tea, toasts, marmalade and a boiled egg. They do not know if she ate anything before she was served her fish and rice for lunch. She ordered a glass of wine with the meal. Inspector Adrian lifts his gaze to the maid who served Lydia's lunch and asks her what she did with the wine glass.

CH 3/ Scene 3 – Angela, the maid has no idea what happened to the wine glass or its content. She has not seen the tray after serving it to Ms. Nostrum. Adrian is certain the wine glass is nowhere to be found in that room. Nevertheless, he asks the forensic team to go over the room again and to try locating a wine glass or traces of wine anywhere in the room. Before leaving the kitchen, Adrian asks if wine was served to anyone other than Ms. Nostrum. Angela tells Adrian that she served a glass of wine to Mrs. Alice Dunkirk.

CH 3/ Scene 4 – Adrian then asks if the kitchen hand still has Mrs. Dunkirk's glass. Since it's already past six in the afternoon, all lunch dishes and glasses have been washed and put away already. If the wine glass contained any barbiturates, no one would ever be able to verify the fact. The next question is to find the motive for the murder – because it is murder. It's not an accident. Inspector Adrian is convinced of it. If it quacks like a duck, walks like a duck, it's most likely a duck. So, murder it is.

Part Two - Main Action

Chapter Four

CH 4/ Scene 1 – Inspector Adrian and Sergeant Hunter return to the police station to find Constable Durable in a heated discussion with his partner, Constable Xavier. They are discussing the case. Durable is arguing that perhaps Ms. Nostrum ate her lunch and went to the beach to die. Xavier is not happy with that proposition. “Who would have buried her then, if the woman had decided to commit suicide?” Inspector Adrian intervenes and tells both constables to concentrate on the timing of the event. When was the lunch brought to Ms. Nostrum’s room? Who brought her body to the beach or who led her to come for a “painful” stroll on that beach? Those are the questions they need to answer.

CH 4/ Scene 2 – Inspector Adrian has to verify everyone’s movements on the day of the murder. There are only a handful of people who knew the victim and the motive for Ms. Nostrum’s murder (not suicide or accident) must be somewhere in these people’s past. Did they know each other before coming to Jersey? Constable Durable is put to the task of finding out as much as he can about the Tisbury’s, Alice Dunkirk and Colonel Endicott.

CH 4/ Scene 3 – There is one more person that might have to be added to that list – a man that arrived at the *White House* some three months ago. His name is Mr. Alberto Sagas. Not much is known about the fellow. Inspector Adrian has seen him a couple of times while he was having breakfast at the inn. Adrian decides to find out more about the man. He finds Alberto in the gardens of the *White House*, looking out to the ocean beyond the cliff. Adrian goes and sits down beside the older fellow. During their conversation, Adrian learns that Alberto lost his only son at the hands of Lydia Nostrum. The operation went horribly wrong and his son died. Alberto tells Adrian that he would have liked to kill the woman but didn’t. She wasn’t worth it! He came to Jersey to hear her say sorry for what she did, but that’s about it. He prefers working toward accomplishing his son’s dream than rotting in a prison cell for the rest of his life.

CH 4/ Scene 4 – There is something missing; something that Inspector Adrian needs to find. He feels that he’s overlooked some facts or information. Talking to Sergeant Hunter, he soon realizes that the time line is all wrong. For Lydia Nostrum to die after eating lunch, it would mean that someone would have had to transport her body from the hotel to the beach in the middle of the day – when the promenade and beaches are at their busiest. It truly doesn’t make sense for anyone to do that. On the other hand, she could have gone for a stroll on the promenade after lunch and being attacked there. It made more sense, but Adrian feels this is not the answer yet.

CH 4/ Scene 5 – He decides to talk to Dr. Ross about his dilemma. The question is: could Lydia have been killed the night before she was found on the beach? Dr. Ross is hesitant. His answer is not encouraging. He truly does not think she was killed the previous night. However, Dr. Ross will run further tests, but he’s not hopeful. Lividity, body temperature and rigor mortis are all factors that help him determine the time of death. Thus, Adrian’s problem is still unsolved: when did Lydia Nostrum die?

Chapter 5

CH 5/ Scene 1 – Returning to the station, Adrian notices someone nodding off on a bench. He stops and then smiles to himself. He believes he holds the answer to his quandary. He rushes back to the hotel and asks to see Mrs. Harris. He asks her if Ms. Nostrum had dinner at the hotel – in her room – or did she leave to have dinner somewhere else? Ms. Nostrum certainly did not have dinner at the hotel the night before her death. Mrs. Harris recalls Alice Dunkirk and Colonel Endicott talking about going out for dinner one night. Ms. Nostrum was not present during that conversation, which took place on the terrace. Mr. Sagas was there too. The Tisbury’s came to join the party a little later.

CH 5/ Scene 2 – Armed of this new information, Inspector Adrian goes back to the morgue. He needs to verify his conjecture. Once the doctor confirms the possibility of Lydia Nostrum being drugged over a period of time, Adrian’s smile returns to his face. He goes back to the station and asks if Constables Xavier or Durable have found anything in the backgrounds of their suspects, which would give any of them a motive for killing Lydia Nostrum. The only person with a plausible motive is Mr. Alberto Sagas.

The fact that his son died on Lydia's operating table gives him the strongest motive of all. The colonel may have had a motive as well. Since his retirement, he's been dabbling in real estate ventures and has lost quite a lot of money when he tried his hand at "flipping" houses. The colonel found out that this North American expensive pastime is not welcomed in and around Europe. He may have had asked Lydia to bail him out. She may have refused and he would have killed her out of spite – maybe?

CH 5/ Scene 3 – Adrian disagrees with the proposition and so does Sergeant Hunter. They saw how devastated the colonel was after discovering his friend's body. However, he may have wanted to marry the lady to get his hands on her money, which to Adrian is a more plausible scenario.

CH 5/ Scene 4 – The next on the list is Alice Dunkirk. The lady came to the island some months ago. She is a retired teacher who has made a living in weaving expensive tapestry for the London Elite and High Rollers. She is wealthy and would probably be the person who could bail the colonel out of his financial position. Was she asked to help? Adrian needs to ask the colonel.

CH 5/ Scene 5 – That evening, Inspector Adrian decides to have dinner at the inn and invites the colonel to join him. During their conversation, Adrian learns that the colonel did in fact ask Alice for a helping hand. She loaned him some forty thousand pounds earlier that month, which he already began to repay. No, he would not have asked Lydia for a cent. He didn't want his marriage proposal to be tainted with financial worries.

CH 5/ Scene 6 – So, Alice Dunkirk loaned forty-thousand pounds to a man she hardly knows – why? Is there something else behind the transaction? Did the colonel stoop to blackmail perhaps? Yet, Alice could not be a candidate for blackmail at this point – her past seems to be blameless. There has to be a reason for the loan, though.

CH 5/ Scene 7 – As for the opportunity and timing of the murder, since his conversation with Dr. Ross, Inspector Adrian is fairly confident that he has his answer. Adrian asks Sergeant Hunter to interview each suspect again. He needs to find out where Lydia Nostrum ate the night before her death and if she ate that "light breakfast" and lunch in her room.

Part Three - Resolution

Chapter Six

CH 6/ Scene 1 – When Sergeant Hunter comes back with the needed answers, Inspector Adrian is ready to arrest the culprit – if the person confesses to the crime. He has absolutely no evidence of what he is about to advance. He asks Sergeant Hunter to gather the suspects on the terrace of the hotel and invite them for afternoon tea.

CH 6/ Scene 2 – When everyone is sitting at their "usual" tables on the terrace and they have been served tea and scones, in a typical Agatha Christie's fashion, Inspector Adrian makes his appearance. He asks the guests to turn their attention to him for a moment. He says that he believes he has the solution to the murder of Ms. Lydia Nostrum.

CH 6/ Scene 3 – He then begins to describe the series of occurrences that led to the lady's ultimate death and burial on the beach. On the night before her death, Lydia Nostrum is invited to dinner by Alice Dunkirk. The ladies join the group of friends: Colonel Endicott, the Tisbury's and Alberto Sagas at the restaurant where they are waiting for them. They have a meal and during dessert, Lydia Nostrum complains of sudden fatigue, which she puts down to the pain killers she takes for her arthritis. Alice Dunkirk drives the lady home to the hotel and puts her to bed.

CH 6/ Scene 4 – At this point of the proceedings, Alice Dunkirk wants to leave the terrace, saying she needs to use the restrooms. Sergeant Hunter accompanies her. Meanwhile, Inspector Adrian continues to narrate the events that must have preceded Lydia's death. When the ladies arrive at the hotel, Alice helps Lydia to bed. She gives her another dose of sleeping pills and leaves for her own cabin. In the morning, she goes back to Lydia's room. The woman is still asleep. Alice orders a breakfast for Lydia and has it

delivered to the room. She grabs the tray from the maid and tells her that she'll look after Ms. Nostrum herself.

CH 6/ Scene 5 – After consuming Lydia's breakfast, Alice helps her to her car and drives her to the beach. It's early in the morning yet. There is hardly anyone around. Alice then gives Lydia her last dose of barbiturates. She digs a shallow grave for her victim and rolls her into it. She covers the body (dead or alive, she does not really care) with sand and returns to the hotel in her car. She goes to her cabin and orders her breakfast, which she does not eat but dumps in the toilet.

CH 6/ Scene 6 – At lunch, Alice Dunkirk orders a tray for Lydia and then one for herself – same as she did for breakfast. She eats a little of Lydia's fish and rice, slips out of her room unnoticed and returns to her own cabin to eat her chicken and rice. The only mistake Alice makes at this point is to take Lydia's glass of wine with her. She drinks its content in her cabin and probably discards it somewhere in the garden or throws it over the cliff that afternoon. What Mrs. Harris heard – Lydia talking on the phone or on line may have been Alice chatting with an imaginary person.

CH 6/ Scene 7 – “For what reason could I have committed such a cold-blooded murder?” Alice Dunkirk asks the inspector as she rejoins the guests on the terrace. The inspector explains that Alice Dunkirk has been acquainted with Colonel Endicott for a few years prior to coming to the island. Alice wanted to marry the colonel. She tried enticing him into a proposal by helping him out financially when his real estate venture fell through. However, Colonel Endicott was in love with Lydia Nostrum. He wanted to marry her. He had told Alice of his intention.

CH 6/ Scene 8 – Alice Dunkirk could not accept the union nor could she accept to vie the colonel's affection when he had already made up his mind to marry Lydia Nostrum. Instead, Alice decided to do away with her. She could not have been suspected, since she was nowhere near the beach when Lydia died. Visibly disgusted with Alice, the colonel gets to his feet and is about to leave the terrace when Alice runs to him and tells him: “I did it all for you. I killed her for you....” That's all Inspector Adrian needed to hear. Alice Dunkirk is arrested.

(###)