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This is a work of fiction. All characters, organizations, and events
portrayed in this novel are either products of the author's
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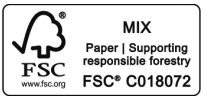
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Dedicated to my editor Bethan Jones,
whose enthusiasm for this book has been so motivating.

The Players in the Game

Visitors to Midwinter

Harry Crystal
Carys Neville
Baz Frederick
Poppy de Lisle
Zack Jardine
Grace Kinsella

Midwinter Trust

Jeremy Vandervell
Bernadette Corrigan
Chandra Masood
Daisy Wu
Ethan Swift
Frankie Rowland

And YOU?

Rules of the Game

Nature of the Game – Miss Winter in the Library with a Knife is a game within a murder mystery. Take nothing for granted. Are people simply making polite conversation – or giving you vital clues?

Aim of the Game – The aim is to solve the mysteries of Midwinter, a village unique in the United Kingdom.

Game Set-up – Six players are already on their way to Midwinter to play a mystery game. The winner will qualify for membership of the Midwinter Trust. You are invited to take part in the game remotely.

Game Play – Remote players may, either from the outset or at any time subsequently, retire from active gameplay and follow the story as external observers ('readers') or analysts ('reviewers'). Someone at Midwinter is playing a deadlier game than the one that the six guests have been invited to play. Remote players are invited to use their detective skills to deduce what is going on. Clues may be found throughout the text, including the supplementary materials (such as the official Midwinter website and the unofficial history of Midwinter), and these are set out in a Cluefinder at the end.

Looking at the Cluefinder before you reach the end will disqualify you from winning.

The six guests will be given 'warm-up' puzzles to develop and test their problem-solving skills, and solutions are supplied as the game progresses. However, these puzzles do not contribute to the solution of the mystery game or of the other mysteries of Midwinter.

In addition to the main text, there are supplementary materials, some of which are relevant to the mystery game and some of which cast light on the mysteries of Midwinter itself. Remote players may wish to consider these materials – for instance, comparing information on the Midwinter Trust's website with the unofficial history of Midwinter – as well as studying the main text for clues to the over-arching mystery that may be found in the Cluefinder. Puzzles and other elements of the game that are *not* related to the over-arching mystery and the clues to be found in the Cluefinder are on the pages marked with a border.

Winning – For the six guests, winning entails solving the mystery game. For remote players, the target is to spot as many of the clues in the Cluefinder as possible.

Less than 10 clues spotted: maybe concentrate on enjoying your reading?

10 to 30 clues spotted: well done – you are a good detective in the making.

30–39 clues spotted: move over, Poirot.

40 or more clues spotted: perhaps you should expect an invitation to Midwinter…

Strategy Tips – Trust no one.

Disclaimer – The creators of *Miss Winter in the Library with a Knife* accept no legal liability in relation to people who play the game including personal injury or death.

Invitation

The Midwinter Trust requests the pleasure of your company as our guest at a unique all-expenses-paid Christmas break.

Arrival: 23 December – Midwinter Halt, North Pennines

Departure: 27 December – Midwinter Village

Transport will be provided to and from the station

Dress code: smart casual.
There will be a Christmas-themed fancy dress dinner party on Christmas Day and your participation is cordially requested

You are invited to play a mystery game created especially for the occasion. A special prize is on offer to the winner

λ η ρ ρ υ η μ σ γ π η μ
σ ζ γ κ η ω π ψ π χ
υ η σ ζ ψ ι μ η δ γ

if it's all greek to you,
then just clear your head
go two letters forward
and forget about z

RSVP: Chandra Masood, Head of People,
The Midwinter Trust, North Pennines

Email: chandra.masood@midwinter.org.uk

Introduction to Baz Frederick's draft script for the Black Death podcast, episode #13, 'Evil under the Snow'

The snow lay deep and crisp and deadly.

Scrambling over the crest of the fell, the two searchers came to a halt and scanned the countryside below. Where did moorland end and sky begin? They saw only an infinite white shroud.

Their quarry had vanished.

Both searchers carried backpacks and were equipped for arctic conditions. Visibility was hopeless and the cold gnawed at their bones like a terminal disease. Yet this wasn't some Siberian waste, but perhaps the highest stretch of English landscape. And certainly the loneliest.

The woman lifted her goggles, hoping for a clearer view. Flying slivers of ice stung her cheeks and made her eyes wet with tears.

'Could be anywhere.' The snow deadened sound, so she raised her voice. 'Anywhere!'

'Can't have gone far,' her companion said. 'Not in this weather. Not without landmarks to guide the way. Not in a dizzy and disorientated state. Bad enough to be a bag of shredded nerves in Midwinter. Out here in the wilds, you'd be scared to death.'

'We must call for help.'

He faced her, turning with care so as not to lose his

footing. The compacted snow was treacherous, the ice beneath their boots as slippery as polished glass.

'No!'

His ski mask formed a perfect disguise. She couldn't guess what was in his mind. The prospect of imminent disaster had stretched her own nerves to breaking point.

'We'll never do it.'

'Giving up isn't an option. We must keep looking.'

'But—'

'I don't have a choice.' A pause. 'This is *personal*.'

Without another word, he picked his way down the slope as if edging through a minefield. She knew he was following the safest route, but without crampons he'd never have kept his balance.

She stood motionless, hypnotised by the whiteout. In hollows of the landscape, the blizzard had carved the drifts into strange and ominous shapes, like surreal works of art dreamed up by a demented sculptor. She imagined them coming to life, snow monsters ready to devour everyone in their path.

Her temples pounded as the earthy smell of the snow seeped into her lungs. She longed to head back to safety, but he was right. They'd come too far. She dared not surrender to fear.

What was that? Could it be…?

She shifted her hat, made of thick wool with a waterproof lining, so it no longer protected her ears.

Yes, she hadn't imagined the sound. That eerie noise in the distance was the thrum of a helicopter, somewhere in the opaque sky. Marine commandos airlifting food and medicine to stricken communities cut off from the rest of the world.

Should she wave her arms in a wild attempt to attract attention? Or was she as invisible to them as the chopper was to her? Her companion would never forgive her. She dared not betray his trust.

As she strained her ears, the thudding of the rotor blades grew fainter until at last she heard nothing more. The helicopter was heading for the upland villages on the far side of the fell. Her head ached, bludgeoned by the silence. Had she squandered a lifeline or dodged disaster by the skin of her teeth?

Nothing for it now but to keep going.

She adjusted her goggles and hat before following in her companion's footsteps. The slope was pitted with ridges and cracks, and in places, the snow was unstable. She moved with exaggerated caution, desperate not to provoke an avalanche.

He glanced back, as if he'd calculated to the second how long she'd take to overcome her doubts and stick to the plan. He knew her too well.

When she caught up, he said, 'Hear the copter? Time is short. We need to keep moving before someone else beats us to it.'

'So where do we look?'

'Nobody could get far in these conditions. Think about what you'd do. Search for a stone shelter. Huddle up with the sheep and try to keep warm.'

'I don't see any shelters.'

'They'll be under twenty feet of snow,' he said patiently. 'We need to figure out where they are. Then we start digging. That's why I brought the snow shovels.'

In the past, she'd have smiled and said: *You think of*

everything. Now she scanned their surroundings, searching in vain for that lost horizon.

The wind gathered strength again, regaining its voice, ready to threaten livestock or people foolish enough to get in its way. The roar was as fierce as the snow whipping into their faces, blinding them to what lay ahead.

She had no idea how long they kept on walking. Five minutes? Fifteen? Thirty? Time became a blur, like the snow-smothered landscape.

Suddenly her companion halted and raised a gloved hand.

'Seen something?' she bellowed, trying to make herself heard above the blast of the gale.

He pointed.

Striding forward, she got a better view. They were standing above a gash in the terrain, a crevasse beneath a narrow overhang. Snow filled the bottom of the gully, with a small mound piled in the middle, its shape unnatural and yet sickeningly recognisable.

She gasped the words – she couldn't help herself – 'A snowman!'

But not a happy, smiling snowman with a battered hat, a carrot nose, and eyes formed from black buttons.

This snowman was stretched out on the ground. Arms and legs outstretched, beseeching and forlorn.

Even before they began to dig, she knew the truth.

They'd found the person they were looking for.

MIDWINTER

A RETREAT THAT IS A RARE TREAT

Midwinter is a very special place. This tiny village – barely more than a hamlet – nestles high in the rugged landscape amid panoramic views of outstanding natural beauty. The settlement dates back to its creation by Marcus Midwinter, a man of great enterprise and imagination, more than one hundred years ago. His aim was to provide jobs, homes, prosperity, and recreation for this sparsely populated local community.

Originally conceived as a model village for people who worked in the local mine, Midwinter was gradually transformed after the Second World War by Marcus's son, another high achiever blessed with vision, flair and idealism. Sir Maurice Midwinter founded and endowed a Trust which reinvented the village as a secluded, nurturing, and immersive retreat.

Today, the Midwinter Trust continues to perform an invaluable role as custodian of a village like no other, preserving its heritage and maintaining the values laid down by Sir Maurice while promoting diversity and inclusivity.



The private and tranquil surroundings offer a serene and wonderfully relaxing environment for those seeking peace and quiet, with time to de-stress far from the twenty-first century's hustle and bustle. The village is a haven of well-being, the perfect setting for contemplation, mindful thinking, and creative reasoning. Those fortunate enough to be invited to Midwinter will find time spent in the village more than merely therapeutic. Today the village is a fount of inspiration and enrichment, enabling talented people to refresh their lives and explore new forms of imaginative play and creativity so as to discover life-changing perspectives. You may come here simply to recuperate and decompress, only to find that you are embarking on a change of direction that will transform your life forever.





1

Midwinter

'Youdunit, Bernadette,' Ethan said softly. 'So, have you committed the perfect murder? Or will one of our detectives solve the mystery?'

Bernadette Corrigan smiled as she sat down at the far end of the leather sofa. Keeping a safe distance, as always.

'We'll soon find out.'

'Care to give me a clue?'

'If I did,' she murmured. 'I'd have to kill you.'

'You don't approve of people who peek at the last page of a detective story?' She gave a brisk shake of the head. 'So the deed is done. No flowers, by request?'

'A holly wreath, perhaps.'

She waved at the Christmas decor. Midwinter's village hall had never looked so festive. Exquisitely crafted baubles, elegant lanterns, and a tinsel-festooned tree giving off a heady fragrance of pine. Mistletoe with snow-white berries and glossy evergreen leaves, looking so romantic that it was easy to forget the plant was parasitic. And poisonous.

The Midwinter Trust never does things by halves, Ethan thought.

Blood-red poinsettias lent a lurid splash of colour to half a dozen oak tables in the centre of the hall. At the far end, out of earshot, two of their colleagues were chatting across the bar counter. Bernadette glanced towards them for a moment, then looked away. A man in his fifties – a silver fox in Savile Row clothing – was chatting with the bartender. Twenty years his junior, she hung on his words as if committing them to memory. Maybe she was, Ethan thought. Maybe she was a good actor. Or, just possibly, a bad actor?

'You've earned the right to celebrate,' Ethan said as they clinked glasses. 'Murder obviously suits you.'

'I think so.' Bernadette inhaled the spicy aroma of the mulled wine. 'I'd better take care. I'd hate to give myself away to such a skilled mind-reader.'

Ethan grinned. 'You make me sound like a fairground act. A charlatan who plays deceitful mind games.'

'Sorry. An expert in psychiatry, I meant to say. I'm afraid you'll fathom my darkest secrets.'

'If only,' he murmured. 'Anyone would make the same diagnosis. For once in your life, you seem at ease. Not tearing around trying to get a hundred and one things done before some crazy self-imposed deadline.'

'You've written me off as a hopeless workaholic?'

'I'm glad to see you finally getting into the Christmas spirit.'

'Appearances are deceptive.'

'Isn't that always the way in Midwinter?'

She gave him a curious look. 'I'm on tenterhooks, waiting for our detectives to arrive. To find out how they'll play the game. If the puzzles I've concocted are too easy or too hard.'

'I bet you judged it to perfection.'

'Thanks for your confidence.' She smiled. 'And for

persuading me to come up with it. I'd never have managed to keep going without your constant encouragement.'

'You flatter me.'

Their eyes met for a moment, then she gave a light laugh.

'Not at all. That's why you're here, after all. You understand what makes people tick.'

He examined his fingernails. 'You know I haven't always got things right.'

'Don't be so hard on yourself.'

'Pot, meet kettle.' He savoured the tang of his mulled wine. 'You're turning the tables, trying to boost my morale.'

'I'm right. Admit it.'

He took a breath. 'Honestly, I can't believe this is actually happening. I never imagined coming back to Midwinter. If you'd told me five years ago that I'd ever want to set foot in this place again, let alone for a Christmas murder mystery game, I'd have said you were crazy.'

'The pandemic was such a strange time,' she murmured. 'Everyone in the world lived through a nightmare. So much uncertainty and fear for the future. We couldn't take anything for granted. Not even in Midwinter. A village like nowhere else.'

'You can say that again.'

'We pride ourselves on being different,' she said dreamily. 'This is such a special place. A refuge from the damaged world outside. Five years ago, things were so… very challenging.'

He nodded. 'I'm so grateful you gave me a second chance.'

'You know Midwinter inside out. You share our values, and you can keep a secret. Rare qualities, believe me.' She exhaled. 'Besides, it wasn't only my decision to offer you a new contract. Jeremy was strongly in favour. Chandra too.'

He said in a low voice, 'Believe me, I'm delighted to be back.'

For the first time in their acquaintance, she blushed. She hated any form of betrayal, most of all when it came to disclosing her own feelings. To cover her embarrassment, she looked away towards the two people at the bar. A shadow crossed her face.

Ethan followed her gaze. The bartender, attractive and vivacious, threw back her head and laughed at a bon mot from the silver fox. She rested a ringless hand on the snow globe which had pride of place on the bar counter. A superfluous ornament, given the Met Office's red weather warning. Outside, the wind was howling in fury. Within twenty-four hours, the snowstorm would cut them off from the outside world. Just like…

No, he mustn't dwell on the last time he was here. Not tonight. The game hadn't even begun.

Bernadette sipped her drink. 'I love the tang of cinnamon. Daisy mixes the ingredients perfectly. This is the best mulled wine I've ever tasted.'

'She's a woman of many talents.'

'Yes.' A pause. 'I wonder what she really makes of Midwinter. This place could hardly be more different from Maryland.'

Ethan said mischievously, 'Jeremy obviously approves.'

'So do I,' she said calmly.

Bernadette wasn't easy to tease. She had a lifetime's experience of keeping her emotions on a tight leash. Staying in control was part of her skill set. Time to get her talking about murder again.

'You cut it fine, getting things ready. Last night, you were

still hard at work. This time tomorrow, and the game will be well and truly afoot.'

'Murder's a serious business,' she said. 'Takes a lot of planning.'

'So how do you go about weaving your plot?' He grinned. 'If you don't mind letting me into the tricks of your trade?'

'I simply asked myself who should kill whom and why. Motive is key, you know that better than anyone.'

He took a breath. 'Yes, the psychology of the murderer is crucial.'

'What drives one person to commit the ultimate crime, to end someone else's life?' She had a habit of avoiding his gaze, but for once she looked straight into his eyes. 'Even though we're indulging in make-believe, *whodunit* and *whydunit* need a credible explanation.'

'And *howdunit*?'

'If the method of murder is too outlandish, every last shred of plausibility flies out of the window. So my crime isn't committed with the help of wild animals or elaborate Heath Robinson-like contraptions or poisons unknown to medical science. This is like any game. We need to set out the rules and keep to them.'

He raised his eyebrows. 'You're playing fair?'

'Of course. Cheating can't be tolerated in a mystery game. That goes for the puzzle-maker too. All the clues must be laid out before the people who are hunting the truth. Misdirection is fine, but solving the puzzle mustn't be so arduous that the players find it impossible. Twists are part of the fun, but only if they make sense in the context of the mystery. My aim is to lose gracefully so the winner is pleased that they've done something smart. Figuring out the answer needs to reward you with a sense of fulfilment.'

'You sound positively evangelical.'

'The skill lies in diverting attention from what really matters. Seducing the players with red herrings.'

'Deception, in other words?'

She shrugged. 'Isn't that our stock-in-trade?'

'See yourself as a new Queen of Crime? Even a professional crime writer like Harry Crystal might look over his shoulder?'

A shake of the head. 'Poor old Harry. He's not so much a Prince of Puzzlers as a literary has-been.'

He flashed a grin. 'You think he's lost the plot?'

'You tell me.' She ran her fingers through her mass of thick chestnut hair. A habitual gesture, a sign she was choosing her words with special care. 'His career has fallen apart. Why else was he so desperate to come here?'

Ethan pursed his lips. 'A last throw of the dice. Unless, of course, he has another agenda. Something we're not aware of.'

'I don't believe it.'

'Who knows? He is a man of mystery, after all.'

'Thirty-two mysteries to be precise. His gimmick was coming up with titles that riff on masterpieces of the genre. Something he stumbled on by accident, then tried to turn to his advantage. Of course it was crazy to invite comparison with the classics.' She smiled. 'Weirdly enough, his books helped to inspire my own mystery.'

'Really?'

'Sort of. Not that I want to murder people for a living.'

He considered her. 'Just an occasional indulgence, then?'

She finished her drink. 'We call this a game, but Jeremy is deadly serious. He says the Midwinter Trust's future is at stake. Everything depends on what happens this Christmas.'

'No pressure, then.' Ethan shook his head. 'Is he right?'

'Yes. His passion for Midwinter never falters. Despite all the setbacks, he keeps the faith.'

'I admire his confidence,' he murmured. 'After all that's happened…'

'Jeremy is right. We must look forward, not back. Your evaluations of our guests are invaluable. So is having you on the spot to see how they cope once they start to play the game.'

'I wouldn't miss this for anything.' He put down his glass. 'The most important person in Midwinter is you. You make all the pieces of the jigsaw fit.'

'The first thing Jeremy told me when I arrived in Midwinter is that no one is indispensable.'

'He'd be lost without you.'

'No, he'd be fine,' she said. 'He's the ultimate survivor.'

'You think so?' he said wryly.

'Absolutely. Take this Christmas. The forecasters are predicting a snowmageddon. The worst weather since you-know-when, and Jeremy is jubilant. Reckons it will create the perfect atmosphere for what we want to do. Nothing fazes him.'

Ethan finished his drink. 'I'd better be off. An early night is called for before the fun begins. You're obviously not going to give me a clue about whodunit. Won't you at least tell me the name of the game?'

'It's spelled out in this invitation to our guests, but they need to decrypt a cipher in ancient Greek. A limbering-up puzzle to get them in the mood.'

She took an oblong card from her bag and pointed to the Greek letters and accompanying verse.

λ η ρ ρ υ η μ σ γ π η μ
σ ζ γ κ η ω π ψ π χ
υ η σ ζ ψ ι μ η δ γ

if it's all greek to you,
then just clear your head
go two letters forward
and forget about z

He wrinkled his brow. 'The verse is a clue?'

'Yes, the verse is all written in lower case, with no capitals, a hint that the cipher is also in lower case. Turns out there are twenty-five lower case symbols in ancient Greek, though sigma has two symbols, which confused me, never mind anyone else.' She grinned. 'If only I'd had Jeremy's posh education. Just as well I never became a cryptographer, eh? Anyway, there is a symbol to represent each letter of our alphabet except one. Which is "z", according to the verse. It's a substitution cipher. The verse tells you to move forward, plus two. So "alpha", the first symbol in the Greek alphabet, becomes the third letter in our alphabet, "c". In the cipher, the single symbol is most likely to represent "a" and the three-letter word is likely to be "the". One symbol appears six times, so it's likely to be another vowel, either "i" or "u". In fact, it's "i".'

'I'll take your word for it.' He rolled his eyes. 'Go on, I'm hopeless at these things. What's the solution?'

She threw a theatrical glance over her shoulder before lowering her voice to a throaty whisper.

'*Miss Winter in the Library with a Knife*.'

He blinked. 'Don't you need a spoiler alert before revealing that? If Miss Winter is your murderer…'

'Miss Winter isn't a character in my mystery.'

His eyebrows lifted.

'There's no library, either.'

A pause. 'Dare I ask about the knife?'

'None of my characters has a knife.' She gave an enigmatic smile. 'Told you it was a mystery.'