



## Previously in Friday Barnes

The Chief Inspector left, closing the door behind him. Friday was still shaking, although she was no longer sure if it was from nerves or shock. She turned to the governor of the Uffizi. It occurred to Friday it was odd that she would want to speak to her alone.

‘I’d like to offer you a job,’ said Governor Offredi.

‘What?’ said Friday. Then she remembered her manners, ‘I mean. I beg your pardon?’

‘I am not really the governor of the Uffizi,’ said the governor.

‘You’re not?’ asked Friday.

‘No, I’m the Chief Investigator in the arts and antiquities unit of Interpol,’ said the governor. ‘Crime in this area is rife across Europe, and indeed the world, as criminals seek to move money about in the form of artefacts.’

‘I know,’ said Friday. ‘I read the papers.’

‘I know you do,’ said the governor. ‘You have subscriptions to major daily papers in five different languages. We’ve been watching you.’

‘You have! Why?’ asked Friday.

‘We want to offer you a job,’ said the governor. ‘A fifteen-year-old girl, with a criminal record. No one would suspect you of working for us.’

Friday glanced out the window at Ian and Melanie. She didn’t want this. She just wanted to be normal again.

‘I’ve had enough excitement,’ said Friday. ‘I just want to go back to school with my friends.’

‘You can do both,’ said the governor. ‘Your friend already works for us.’

‘Melanie?’ asked Friday.

‘No, although I’m considering taking her on,’ said the governor. ‘Her language skills are excellent. Her ability to tell if someone is lying would be invaluable. And I’ve read a report that she is incredibly gifted as archery. That’s got to be useful.’

‘Then . . .?’ began Friday.

‘Ian,’ said the governor. ‘He’s been working with us since he came to Italy. He has been a great asset. A sixteen-year-old with a conman for a father and a chip on his shoulder. It is an excellent cover story.’

Friday looked through the window at Ian. He was so good looking and charming. It all made complete sense. Ian was Uncle Bernie’s informant on the dark web. The inside operative spying on the antiquities underworld. Ian. Her Ian. The boy who had kissed her in the back of a horse drawn carriage while they were serenaded with opera. This was all too much even for her massive brain to comprehend.

‘Come and join him, and me, in investigating real crime here in Europe,’ urged the governor. ‘What do you say?’

Friday did not even respond. She was looking through the glass partition at Ian. Without saying a word she got up and stepped out of the office.

Ian looked up.

‘Were you only going out with Tatiana because you had to?’ she asked.

Ian nodded ever so slightly.

‘You let her into the Uffizi that night to entrap her?’ said Friday. Although it wasn’t really a question. She knew the answer.

‘I was trying to get her to trust me,’ said Ian. ‘By showing I would break the rules.’

Friday walked across the office. Ian stood up as she approached, bracing for some sort of impact.

Friday grabbed a hold of him and kissed him.

It was a really good kiss. She was getting the hang of kissing.

When she let go, Ian looked a little bewildered.

‘I just want you to know,’ said Friday. ‘I really hate you.’

‘I know,’ said Ian. Then he kissed her back.

**To be continued . . .**

## Chapter 1



# Big Decision

‘So is that a yes?’ called Governor Offredi from the office doorway.

Friday turned round. She realised she was clenching Ian quite tightly by his shirt front. She let go. Her enormous mind immediately processed the fact that her fists had left wrinkles that would have to be ironed out. She also noticed that Melanie had her phone out and was taking a video.

‘Delete that!’ said Friday.

‘No way!’ said Melanie. ‘I’ve been waiting four years for this. I need evidence it happened so I can be sure this isn’t just a dream.’

‘So are you taking the job?’ asked Ian.

‘I don’t know,’ said Friday.

‘I didn’t know there was anything you didn’t know,’ said Ian.

Friday looked into his blue eyes to check what he meant. Yes, he was laughing at her. ‘You know better than anyone the vast extent of my ignorance,’ said Friday.

‘I like to think it’s like the dark side of the moon,’ said Ian. ‘It’s there. It’s big. And it’s yet to be explored.’

‘I’ll have to think about it,’ said Friday.

‘You’re capable of making all sorts of complex calculations on probability, human behaviour and tactics in a millisecond,’ said Ian. ‘Is whether or not to accept a job offer really that hard?’

‘It is when the job offer would involve working with you,’ said Melanie. ‘Obviously Friday is in love with you, but as a girl scarred by the indifference of her own family, she understandably has issues.’

‘Commitment issues?’ said Ian.

‘Self-esteem issues,’ said Melanie. ‘Essentially, she literally can’t believe her luck. To her computer brain, it makes no objective sense that someone as good-looking as you would like her.’

‘So she’s being superficial?’ said Ian.

‘Yes,’ said Melanie.

‘It’s a big decision,’ said Friday. ‘I should carefully consider it.’

‘Yes, if you’re a huge coward,’ said Melanie. ‘Most people wouldn’t find an interesting job, living in Europe and hanging out with a boy with movie-star good looks too much of a chore.’

‘But that’s why I like you,’ said Ian, smiling at Friday. ‘Because you’re complicated.’

‘What have you got to go back to?’ Melanie asked Friday.

‘Stability, familiarity, Mrs Marigold’s cooking,’ said Friday.

‘I’m sure Mrs Marigold will email you her pancake recipe,’ said Melanie.

Friday turned to Ian. He was smiling his *‘I’m smug, but I know I’m good-looking when I’m smug, so I’m not going to bother to hide it’* smile. While she did get these mad impulses to kiss him, sometimes just being

near him made her feel like she was having a panic attack. This was one of those times. She took a step back as if he were emitting some sort of gravitational pull that she had to struggle to overcome. Ian noticed the movement and frowned.

‘I’ve got to go back,’ said Friday. ‘To the convent. All my things are there.’

‘Really?’ he asked.

‘I don’t think I can just leave,’ said Friday. ‘Mrs Cannon must technically be responsible for me. And Dr Belcredi is responsible for me following the terms of my release. I’m not sure it’s even possible. I don’t want to violate the terms of my release. I don’t want to be arrested again.’ Friday realised she was talking very fast and the room was spinning.

‘Maybe you should sit down,’ said Ian, although his voice sounded different, like a recording played at the wrong speed.

‘She’s going to faint,’ said Melanie. She sounded pleased as she said it. Probably because she knew Ian would catch her.



Friday had, in fact, fainted. When she woke up, she was lying on the floor of the police station with her legs propped up on a desk chair, while Melanie, Ian, Uncle Bernie and Governor Offredi were having a conversation about her mental health.

‘She’s just had a rough day,’ said Uncle Bernie.

‘Her file says she’s been struggling with anxiety ever since she was released from juvenile detention,’ said the governor.

‘Yeah, wrongful imprisonment will do that to you,’ said Ian.

‘She’s fine,’ said Melanie. ‘She just hasn’t eaten for seven hours. If you just give her a biscuit, she’ll go back to normal.’

‘She was never normal,’ said Ian.

‘Exactly,’ said Melanie.

‘You know, just because I fainted doesn’t mean I’m deaf,’ grumbled Friday.

‘You woke up,’ said Melanie.

‘Come on,’ said Uncle Bernie, helping Friday to her feet. ‘I’ve got things to tie up here, but we’ll get someone to take you back to the convent. You need to get some proper food and a good night’s sleep. You can make a decision tomorrow.’



Five minutes later, Friday and Melanie were in the back of a police car, being driven to the convent where they were staying. Friday stared out the window as they passed through the narrow streets of Florence. There were so many beautiful buildings. So many tourists bustling about. It was hard to believe that just a month ago, she had been cooped up in a cell in a juvenile detention centre. Everything here was so lovely. And she was leaving it all behind tomorrow.

That thought made her pulse race. Worries started whizzing around in circles in her mind. Had she made the right decision? Had hormones clouded her thinking? Did Ian have some sort of hormone-based mind control over her? Was she being trapped? Why wasn't there enough air in this car?

'Are you hyperventilating?' Melanie asked.

Friday glanced across. She hadn't been paying attention. She realised her breathing was getting very rapid.

'I've got to get out,' Friday whispered hoarsely. She glanced at the car door. There was no handle.

She was in the back of a police car. They didn't have handles on the inside at the back. 'I want to get out! I can't breathe!' She pounded on the barrier between her and their driver.

'Just wait,' said Melanie.

'We're trapped,' said Friday. She had started to feel cold and clammy.

'No, we're not. But we don't want to walk further than we have to,' said Melanie. 'It's been a long day and I haven't had a nap yet.'

The car pulled up outside the convent and the driver hurried round to open the back door. Friday burst out onto the pavement, gasping in the fresh air like she had just emerged from a submarine that was low on oxygen.

'Is she okay?' asked the driver.

'Not really,' said Melanie. 'But there's nothing anyone can do. Her boyfriend just asked her to move to Spain. Her body is struggling to come to terms with the panic.'

'Ahh,' said the driver, nodding his head knowingly. '*L'amore*. Love makes fools of us all.'

'Oh no,' said Melanie. 'Friday was always struggling to pass for normal. Romance is only one of her

many problems.’ Melanie helped Friday to her feet, ‘Come on, let’s get you inside. We’ll have a nice gelato and a lie down. And you can read one of those boring books about pure mathematics to calm yourself.’

But it was not to be. As Friday and Melanie turned into the driveway, they found a crowd had gathered. Their teachers, Mr Maclean and Mr Nestor, as well as several students were huddled together arguing. Except for Nigel, who was just eating a massive gelato.

‘You can’t postpone. I have to fly back tomorrow!’ exclaimed Mirabella. ‘I have an appointment with Doctor Lee on Tuesday.’

‘Is it for an urgent medical issue?’ asked Mr Nestor.

‘No,’ said Mirabella, looking at Mr Nestor like he was crazy. ‘If it was a medical appointment, I could just reschedule. Dr Lee is much harder to get an appointment with than that. She’s a doctor of cosmetology.’

‘I’m sorry, I don’t understand what that is,’ said Mr Nestor.

‘Duh!’ said Mirabella. ‘Dr Lee does my nails. If I give up my October appointment, I’ve got no chance of getting in with her again before November.’

‘I didn’t know you could get a PhD in cosmetology,’ said Melanie.

‘It wouldn’t surprise me,’ said Friday. ‘I’ve met PhDs who’ve studied things much more ridiculous, and certainly less practical.’

‘This is an outrageous waste of all our time,’ said Mr Maclean, taking out his mobile phone. ‘I’m reporting her to the headmaster. Her behaviour on this trip has been scandalous.’

‘Who are we talking about?’ asked Melanie.

‘Mrs Cannon,’ said Trea Babcock.

‘Okay, that makes sense,’ said Melanie. Mrs Cannon was the English teacher chaperoning the excursion. She was beloved by the students because she was a great believer in the role of rest and relaxation in the educational process. ‘But to be fair, her behaviour has always been pretty scandalous. She did pose for a nude portrait that covered an entire wall of a two-storey school building.’

‘She did?’ asked Mr Nestor. He was a new teacher and this had been before his time.

‘Oh yes,’ said Nigel, between licks of gelato. ‘If you want to see it, it’s on the side of Farmer Bryson’s barn. He takes tour groups out to look at it every

Wednesday at 4 pm. He says that's when the light is best. As the sun sets, she appears to glow.'

Mr Maclean was still trying to call the headmaster. He glared at the screen several times before giving up. 'This place is ridiculous,' he snapped. 'Their mobile phone reception is terrible.'

'It *is* a convent,' said Melanie. 'I think they prefer to communicate with prayer.'

'And heavenly gelato,' added Nigel.

'So, what's happened?' asked Melanie.

Friday sighed. Now that the adrenalin had worn off, and her hyperventilating was under control, she realised she was totally exhausted. She really wanted to go inside, lie down and be left alone. She didn't want to know about whatever petty drama was unfolding with her school group.

'Mrs Cannon's room was robbed,' said Nigel.

'I don't know why she's making such a fuss,' said Mirabella. 'It's not like she had anything nice anyway.'

This did catch Friday's attention. She may have been so exhausted she could barely stand, but she really liked Mrs Cannon. She was deeply eccentric in a fun way. Friday didn't like to think of someone she liked being robbed.

‘What did they steal?’ asked Melanie.

‘Everything,’ said Mr Nestor. ‘All Mrs Cannon’s things. And all her clothes. Right now, she’s sitting in her room naked and refusing to come out.’

‘And no one else is the same size as her,’ said Trea. ‘So no one has any clothes they can lend her.’

‘And Mr Maclean and Mr Nestor can’t go inside because men aren’t allowed in the convent,’ added Nigel.

‘We have a plane to catch at 8 am tomorrow morning,’ wailed Mr Maclean. ‘We don’t have time for this.’

‘Just call the police,’ said Friday.

‘The nuns don’t want police in the convent,’ said Mr Nestor. ‘I tried reporting the theft to the police myself, but they are too respectful of the nuns. They won’t come in unless they are invited.’

‘Mrs Cannon can hardly get on the plane naked,’ said Melanie.

‘I wouldn’t put it past her,’ said Trea.

‘She can’t go anywhere,’ said Mr Nestor. ‘Everything is missing. That means all her documents are gone – including her passport.’

‘The airline won’t let us on the plane without a female chaperone for the girls,’ said Mr Maclean. ‘This whole thing is a debacle!’

‘Friday will investigate,’ said Melanie. ‘She’ll sort it out.’

‘No, I won’t,’ said Friday with a yawn. ‘I’m too tired.’

‘It will only take a minute,’ said Melanie. ‘I’m sure you’ll find a clue that will reveal the culprit. It’s probably just one of Mrs Cannon’s admirers souveniring some of her things.’

‘I don’t want to,’ said Friday. She had her eyes closed and was trying to fall asleep while standing. She had been in two chases that day. One in which she was chased by the police because they thought she was an art thief. And another when she was chasing the actual art thieves. It all added up to a lot of exercise.

‘Come on,’ said Melanie. ‘Mrs Cannon’s room is just along the corridor from ours, anyway.’

A few minutes later, Friday and Melanie were standing outside Mrs Cannon’s door. Friday longed to walk the few extra metres to her own room. ‘Aren’t you going to knock, so we can get this over with?’ she asked Melanie.

‘I’m a little nervous,’ admitted Melanie. ‘If Mrs Cannon’s clothes have been stolen, I don’t want to confront her naked.’

‘She might be wrapped in a bedsheet,’ said Friday.

‘I don’t really want to see that either,’ said Melanie. She knocked on the door. ‘Mrs Cannon? I’ve brought Friday to investigate your crime.’

‘Go away, I’m too traumatised to see you,’ called Mrs Cannon.

Friday was tired of standing. She slumped down on the floor with her back against the door. ‘Fine, just tell us what happened,’ she said with a yawn.

‘When we got back from town,’ said Mrs Cannon, ‘I went to take a shower. Afterwards, when I returned to my room, it was entirely empty. Everything was gone. I suspect those mean girls. Highcrest students are forever throwing clothes into the swamp. My suitcase is probably in the Arno River, halfway out to sea by now.’

‘How did you get from the bathroom back to your room?’ mumbled Friday. Her eyes were closed again and she was drifting off.

‘I walked,’ said Mrs Cannon.

‘But I thought you were naked,’ said Friday. Her eyes drifted open again. ‘Did you walk the length of the corridor naked?’

‘Goodness, no,’ said Mr Cannon. ‘This convent is too draughty for that. I wore my dressing gown.’

‘So you’re not naked?’ said Melanie ‘That means we can come in and have a look at the scene of the crime.’

‘I don’t think so!’ said Mrs Cannon. ‘I’d have to check with my union representative first. I don’t want my rights to be violated.’

‘But aren’t you the union representative at Highcrest Academy?’ said Friday.

‘Which is why I’m so vulnerable,’ said Mrs Cannon. ‘I look after everyone else, but who looks after me?’

‘We will,’ said Melanie as she turned the handle and pushed the door open. Friday was still leaning on it, so she fell backwards into the room. It was the same size as their own room at the convent. There was only one bed. And as an added touch of comfort there was a small armchair. The most notable feature of the room was, however, the total lack of anything else.

‘Wow,’ said Melanie. ‘They totally cleaned you out, didn’t they?’

‘They didn’t even leave my toothbrush,’ said Mrs Cannon.

‘How did the thieves get in?’ asked Friday as she slowly struggled to her feet.

‘Through the window,’ said Mrs Cannon.

Friday went over to inspect it. It was a leadlight window, made up of a dozen small panes. One piece, near the latch, had been punched out so the thief could reach in and unlock the window. The broken glass was still lying on the windowsill.

Friday took a measuring tape out of her pocket and measured the width, height and depth of the whole window.

‘It’s like the building was designed to slot suitcases through the windows,’ said Friday. ‘It’s exactly the right size for a large suitcase.’

‘Maybe the nuns did it,’ said Melanie. ‘They designed the windows so that guests would be easier to rob.’

‘The building was constructed four hundred years ago,’ said Friday. ‘I doubt the architect could have anticipated the invention of the airplane, let alone

the exact specifications of an airline-compliant suitcase.'

'Who knows? Galileo and Leonardo Da Vinci were very clever,' said Melanie. 'Maybe they did?'

The wall was so thick, Friday had to climb up on the windowsill so she could lean far enough forward to see down into the garden. There was a two-metre drop to the flowering bushes below. The height made her feel queasy. Friday climbed back into the room.

'What do the clues reveal?' asked Melanie.

'The broken glass is on the inside,' said Friday, pointing to the shards.

'I know what that means!' said Melanie. 'It comes up on TV police dramas all the time. If the broken glass is on the inside, that proves that someone broke it from the outside. When people fake crimes they always get that wrong.'

'Or it could mean that someone who watches a lot of TV knew to open the window before breaking the glass,' said Friday. 'So that it would look like it was broken from the outside.'

'So it could be an inside job?' said Melanie.

'It would be such an easy crime to commit,' said Friday. 'All our thief had to do was wait until

Mrs Cannon went down the corridor to take a shower. They could easily sneak in, pack up her suitcase and tip it out through the window – then go around the outside of the building, pick it up and roll it down to the river.’

‘All my lovely things, gone,’ said Mrs Cannon, dabbing her eyes with the corner of the bedsheet.

‘Except that didn’t happen,’ said Friday.

‘You can’t prove that,’ said Mrs Cannon.

‘I don’t have to,’ said Friday. ‘The daphne has proven it for me.’

‘Daphne?’ said Melanie. ‘There aren’t any students in our group called Daphne.’

‘Daphne is the name of the lovely flowering shrub in the garden bed outside,’ said Friday. ‘Like many beautiful things, daphne can be delicate. Now, a passenger is allowed to take twenty-three kilos of luggage on an international flight. Mrs Cannon likes to dress with style. Isn’t that right?’

Mrs Cannon shrugged. ‘I like to look my best. I consider it a professional duty.’

‘Which means you are not a light packer,’ deduced Friday. ‘Your suitcase would have been full. If you drop twenty-three kilos from a height of two metres,

that would generate 225 newtons of force. Daphne bushes are not designed to withstand that. They would be crushed.'

'Then the thief must have thrown it out the window,' said Mrs Cannon. 'Right over the flower bush.'

'The window is eighty centimetres deep,' said Friday. 'It would be impossible to lean into the window and then throw a twenty-three kilogram suitcase very far. Besides, no thief came in that way, because no one stood on that daphne bush either.'

'Then who did it?' asked Melanie. 'And how?'

'For that, we have to look for a motive,' said Friday. 'And there isn't really one. Not a sensible one. But I can think of an un-sensible one. Which leads me to deduce . . . that Mrs Cannon did it! You staged this whole thing, didn't you?'

'What an outrageous accusation,' said Mrs Cannon.

'Outrageous? Maybe,' said Friday. 'Accurate? Definitely.'

'I don't understand,' said Melanie.

'Mrs Cannon does not want to go back to work at Highcrest Academy,' said Friday.

‘But Mrs Cannon never does any work at Highcrest Academy,’ said Melanie.

‘Yes, but Mrs Cannon loves Italy,’ said Friday. ‘The food is fantastic, the scenery spectacular and the waiters flirt almost as outrageously as she does. She doesn’t want to leave.’

‘This is why you’re my favourite teacher,’ Melanie told Mrs Cannon. ‘You’re so wise.’

‘You can’t prove any of these accusations,’ said Mrs Cannon. ‘My personality can’t be taken down and used against me in a court of law.’

‘Actually, character is routinely taken into consideration in a court of law,’ said Friday. ‘But that doesn’t really matter, because I don’t think it will be hard to find some physical evidence.’

‘The suitcase is long gone,’ said Mrs Cannon.

‘Really?’ said Friday. ‘Is that what you truly believe?’ Friday was back in deductive mode again. ‘We know you don’t like physical exertion, so if you had moved it, I doubt it would have gone far.’

Mrs Cannon smirked.

‘But I noticed on the way in that Nigel was eating a six-scoop gelato,’ said Friday. ‘Gelato is wildly overpriced here. We’ve been in Italy for two weeks.’

Nigel is not good at mathematics. I know, because I was in the same maths class as him for two terms, so I know he failed financial maths repeatedly. I doubt he has any money left. So, how could he afford that enormous, overpriced gelato?’

Mrs Cannon didn’t look so smug anymore.

‘Mrs Cannon, did you pay Nigel to hide your clothes?’ asked Friday, tucking her thumbs into the front of her cardigan as if she was a barrister. She was enjoying the cross-examination and getting caught up in the role. ‘And I warn you, Nigel will confess. He is terrible at lying and he’s frightened of me, so it won’t be hard to get him to spill the beans or . . . in this case . . . the gelato.’

‘You must be tired,’ said Melanie. ‘That was a terrible joke.’

Mrs Cannon sagged. She realised the gig was up. ‘I paid him twenty euros to throw my suitcase in the river,’ she admitted. ‘I’m going to get in trouble, aren’t I?’

‘Don’t worry, teachers can’t get detention,’ said Melanie.

‘Besides, it might be okay,’ said Friday. ‘Nigel is pretty lazy too. Let’s find out if he actually did it.’

After bribing Nigel with another twenty-euro note, they soon had all the facts. He had thrown the suitcase in the Arno. But, being Nigel, he hadn't checked the tide, which had been low at the time. The suitcase was still stranded, wheels in the air, partially embedded in the muddy bank.

'Mr Maclean is going to be insufferable when he finds out,' grumbled Mrs Cannon.

'Don't worry, Mrs C,' said Friday. 'We'll tell him the truth, but not the exact truth. We'll say a student threw your things in the river and we were able to retrieve them, so everything is okay.'

'The fact that you paid Nigel to do it doesn't need to get out,' said Melanie.

'What if Nigel blabs?' asked Mrs Cannon.

'Give him another twenty euros if he promises not to,' said Friday.

When Friday finally got to lie down she went out like a light. The mystery of Mrs Cannon's clothes had taken her mind off the life-changing decision she had to make the next day.