

Spluttering, Wilson turned on Gerry. “You’re joking! You actually believe all that fake news? Crimes get solved by good old-fashioned police work, not three amateurs completely out of their depth.”

Stung by this disloyalty from his so-called friends, he gulped down the rest of his pint, and announced he was going home, even though it was his round.

He was still in a foul mood the next morning, and it didn’t improve when he turned up at the police station to find Constable Emma Hollis wasn’t there. He belatedly remembered she was off on some training course at headquarters. He would have to make his own coffee.

“Training courses, load of rubbish,” he muttered as he switched on the kettle. “You learn by doing.”

His mood deteriorated further when he found the milk in the fridge had gone off, and

he would have to drink his coffee black.

There was still half a packet of chocolate digestives in the cupboard. Wilson dunked one in his mug in a bid to make the coffee more palatable. It helped a bit, so he dunked another, and settled down to read the sports pages.

The computer suddenly beeped.

He didn't like the computer. You could press a key and next thing you know, something crucial has gone missing. It was better to let Hollis deal with it; that way, if something went wrong, there was only her to blame. But right now, he didn't have an option. He heaved himself out of his chair and lumbered over to Hollis's desk.

The message was from headquarters. It began with the image of a sketch, not one of those e-fit composites that scarcely looked like a person at all, but a drawing that was utterly recognisable.

“Thank you, God,” breathed Wilson, and then chortled aloud at his own words.

There was one man in Bunburry he loathed more than Alfie McAlister. And that was the Reverend Philip Brown. He would never forgive that man for what he had done.

“Gotcha,” Wilson said to the computer screen.

Bunburry’s elderly vicar had made a pathetic attempt to disguise himself, but there was no doubt it was him — the angular face, the deep-set eyes, the mouth curved in a sanctimonious smile. Wilson scanned the information below the sketch. A mean, nasty crime. The vicar would be kicked out of Bunburry with immediate effect, a thought which delighted the sergeant.

Grinning, he shrugged on his jacket and fastened it over his paunch before heading out to the car and driving to the vicarage.

The door to the two-storey Victorian house was shut. Sergeant Wilson pressed hard on the bell, following this up by hammering on the door knocker.

He could hear a voice in the distance: “Yes, yes, I’m coming, just a moment.”

The door opened, and there was the vicar in his usual dark suit and dog collar, not what he had worn to commit the crime.

His expression of mild concern changed when he saw Sergeant Wilson. Guilt? Fear?

“Good gracious,” he said faintly.

“You weren’t expecting me, sir?” the sergeant asked. “I thought you might have been.”

“No – no, I wasn’t. What’s happened, sergeant?”

“I was rather hoping you would tell me, sir.” Sergeant Wilson was enjoying himself. “I wonder if you would accompany me to the station where we could have a little chat.”

“Now?” The vicar hesitated. “I’m sorry, sergeant. I’m quite busy this morning. I could pop in this afternoon if that’s any good.”

Sergeant Wilson puffed out his chest and gave a tight smile. “I don’t think you quite understand, sir. It’s not exactly an invitation. I’d like you to answer some questions in connection with an incident that took place yesterday.”

“An incident?” The vicar frowned. “I haven’t heard about any incident. So I really don’t think I can-”

His gaze shifted from Sergeant Wilson as something else caught his attention. Wilson half-turned to see what it was. Dorothy from the post office was coming up the path. The day was getting better and better.

“Goodness! Sergeant Wilson,” she said as she got closer. “What on earth is going on?”

“I don’t quite-” the vicar began, but the sergeant spoke over him, using his most