

WHITEOUT

by Ken Follett

Outline—2nd draft

100,000 words projected

1. Antonia "Toni" Baxter is a glamorous redhead of 40 from a working-class background. An ex-cop, she is now Facilities Manager for Oxenford Medical, a boutique pharmaceuticals company located near the Scottish port city of Harbourmouth. Her main area of responsibility is security.

On the morning of Christmas Eve, she is dealing with a crisis. She sits in her office looking at a threat letter. It purports to come from a group called Animals Are Free, who are threatening to "liberate" the animals from Oxenford Medical's laboratory over Christmas. The company has mice, rats, rabbits, dogs, pigs and monkeys on which it tests drugs before they are tested on humans. If freed into the Scottish moors in the middle of winter, most would die quickly, but any that survived might infect humans with dangerous illnesses.

Toni has a friend in the FBI, Odette Cressy, whom she met on a course at Hendon Police College. As a personal favour, Odette has agreed to run the letter past the FBI's threat assessment experts. Toni is waiting impatiently for her to call back.

Meanwhile, the company is preparing to give a press conference. Animals Are Free has sent the letter to the media, who are running stories about killer monkeys on the loose. The company's Public Relations Officer is a well-meaning, low-level employee who dispenses a small charity budget to school football teams and sponsored walkers, ensuring that the company name appears frequently in the local press in stories that make no mention of viruses or experiments on animals. She has no experience of dealing with the national media. Fortunately Toni has, having done a stint in police PR.

Toni looks at the closed-circuit TV monitors in the security office. Oxenford Medical is housed in the Fort, a Victorian-Gothic castle, all turrets and battlements, looking just like the kind of place where mad scientists would conduct fiendish experiments on poor dumb animals. The new laboratories are in modern steel-and-glass extension buildings, but Toni knows the TV news will show Frankenstein's castle.

The animal rights people are cleverly staging a demonstration outside the gates and that, too, is sure to be filmed by the TV crews arriving for the press conference.

At last Odette calls. All the signs are that the threat is not real, she says. She points out features of the letter that show that the writer has given no serious consideration to the practical challenge of breaking into the laboratory and freeing the animals; though he or she has thought about the media reaction to the threat. Therefore the FBI think the letter has been sent purely as a publicity stunt. But, says Odette, this stuff is only guesswork, and Tina should still take extra security precautions.

Toni goes in search of Stanley Oxenford, chairman and founder, to give him the good news. She finds him in the newest lab, a high-security zone. Oxenford has developed a new antiviral drug and is testing it against a range of lethal viruses. Like every employee at the Fort, Toni has been given every known vaccine against viruses. She has also undergone special training before being allowed inside the isolation laboratory. She has to use a special plastic key card to get in.

Even so, she cannot enter all areas. There are four BioSafety Levels, BSL1 through BSL4. She is only qualified for the lowest, BSL1. The highest, BSL4, is where they work with viruses for which there is no known vaccine or antidote. Everything that comes out of BSL4 is burned at 300 degrees C, except of course the humans, who have to be disinfected twice, once in their contamination space suits and once naked.

Toni feels compassion for the animals that have been infected with distressing illnesses in the cause of science. She looks carefully at the laboratory assistants, wondering if one of them might have become overly fond of their charges.

Stanley Oxenford is 60, tall and fit, with a warm smile and a twinkle in his eye. He has thick grey hair and wears a well-cut tweed suit. The son of a high street pharmacist, he was a brilliant biologist in his youth, and now inspires a team of young scientists of all nations. He is a shrewd businessman, though a risk taker. A demon squash player, he frequently beats Toni on the company court. His wife, Marta, died 18 months ago.

Toni has more than the usual reasons to want to please Stanley.

She has spent most of her working life as a police detective. She was a high flyer, tipped to be Britain's first female Chief Constable. Then she clashed with her boss over the issue of racism in the force. The row got into the newspapers, and she lost her job 27 months ago. Labelled a troublemaker, she found it difficult to find another job. She set up as a private security consultant in her home town of Harbourmouth, but she got little work.

She had been living for eight years with another detective, Frank Hackett, although they never married. The relationship was running out of steam, and they parted soon after Toni was sacked. Around this time, her mother began to go senile, and had to be moved into a nursing home.

A year ago, Toni was at the lowest point of her entire life when she was hired by Stanley Oxenford to investigate financial irregularities at the lab. She discovered that the head of security was systematically stealing. Awkwardly, he was in cahoots with Stanley's son, Kit. Nevertheless, Toni exposed them both. Stanley fired them and offered her a full-time job.

She is deeply grateful to Stanley for giving her a chance when she needed it so badly, and she is fiercely determined to do a good job for him.

She finds him talking to Cynthia Ross, an attractive blonde biochemist of about 50 who clearly fancies him. He is being charming with her. Toni wonders whether he will remarry, and if he would choose a scientist like himself. She recalls that his late wife was a tennis champion who became a coach.

Toni briefs him on the message from Odette. He is relieved. He is a wealthy man, but he could lose everything if this project goes wrong. The antiviral drug research is financed by the US Department of Defense (which is worried about biological warfare). Nevertheless, Stanley has sunk all his own money into building the new biohazard containment facility. He has a personal overdraft of a million pounds. He is confident of the scientific success of the project, provided he is allowed to pursue his research to its conclusion. But the threat letter presents an unexpected hazard—which is now underlined by a phone call from Washington.

It is the lawyer who helped Stanley negotiate the deal with the Department of Defense. The US government received a copy of the threat letter, and they are worried that a US-financed research project could lead to the escape of a deadly virus. Stanley is glad to be able to give him the FBI news. Nevertheless, the lawyer warns that the US government is nervous about bad publicity, and could pull the finance. Stanley tells him he is about to give a reassuring press conference.

Stanley and Toni hurry to the great hall of the Fort, where the journalists are waiting. Stanley talks about the importance of his work. Viruses of all kinds, from influenza to HIV, kill millions of people all over the world. Viruses are not germs. They are smaller, and cannot be killed because they are not living creatures, just lengths of DNA in a protein capsule. A virus cannot reproduce itself, but propagates by entering a living cell and subverting the cell's reproduction system, causing it to generate duplicates of the virus. Germs can be killed by antibiotics, but there are few drugs effective against viruses. Oxenford Medical has developed such a drug, and is testing it against a list of deadly viruses. Obviously it has to be tested in animals before humans.

Next, Toni outlines the Fort's watertight security. The isolation lab has a state-of-the-art alarm system connected directly to regional police headquarters in Harbourmouth. There will be security guards on duty 24 hours over the holiday. The guards cannot enter the isolation area without triggering the alarm, though they can see inside by closed-circuit TV cameras.

A local TV reporter, Carl Osborne, asks hostile but shrewd questions: How dangerous are the viruses? If the animals were released, could they infect humans? How many people would die—hundreds? Thousands? Are the Americans using Scotland for research too dangerous to be done at home? There is nothing Stanley and Toni can do but answer these questions honestly.

Snow begins to fall as the conference ends, and Toni has a flash of inspiration: she orders hot drinks served to the demonstrators at the gate. This is filmed by the departing cameramen.

As Carl Osborne is leaving, he has the nerve to ask Toni for a date. He is certainly eligible: handsome, affluent, a local celebrity, and her own age. She turns him down flat, and he says: Ah—I suppose you're interested in Stanley Oxenford.

Stanley now tells Toni he needs to leave. His home, Steepfall, is a few miles north of the laboratory, on the coast. He is expecting his three children, with their families, to come for the holiday. It will be the first time he has seen his youngest son, Kit, since firing him nine months ago.

He asks Toni to drop by the house in an hour to watch the lunchtime news and see how effective the press conference has been.

2. Kit Oxenford, 25, wakes up late in his Glasgow loft. Beside him is a pretty girl he met last night. The girl thinks he is wonderful. He has brains, charm, good looks and athletic prowess. He takes a phone call from one of his sisters, who also adores him. He is used to this: the worshipped baby of his family, he is deeply egocentric.

He tells the girl he is going to spend Christmas with his family at his father's house, Steepfall. It will be the first time he has seen his father for nine months. He explains:

After getting a degree in computer science, and competing in the winter Olympics, he went to work for his father at the Fort. With the head of security, Ronnie Sutherland, he devised and installed the state-of-the-art security system.

Then Kit's mother died, and his father became embroiled with Toni Baxter, a gold-digging bitch who conspired to ease Ronnie out and take his job, and at the same time turned Stanley against Kit. Now she hopes to step into Kit's mother's shoes.

The truth is that Kit is always looking for easy money, and would rather spend all day cheating someone out of a few pounds than earn twice as much by honest work. He is a chronic gambler.

Nevertheless, he burns with resentment towards Toni and his father. A typical rogue, he expects his victims to forgive his misdeeds, and he is outraged when they insist on remembering them.

Since being fired he has remained unemployed, but he has not stopped gambling. Six months ago, he tells the girl, he owed £50,000. He phoned his father and vowed he would give up gambling if Stanley would pay the debt. Stanley refused. Consequently, Kit had no option but to try to win back what he had lost. The debt now stands at £300,000.

Kit's creditor is Harry McGarry, known as Harry Mac, a middle-aged Glasgow gangster with a chain of brothels and unlicensed gambling clubs in Scotland and the north of England. His partner is his thuggish daughter, Donna, ironically nicknamed Daisy. They would think nothing of breaking Kit's legs to persuade him to pay his debt.

However, an alternative solution has been proposed.

Harry Mac introduced Kit to Nigel Buchanan, a quietly sinister Londoner. Unusually, Harry seemed intimidated. Nigel said to Kit: Can you get me inside the isolation laboratory at Oxenford Medical? Kit said Yes. I'll pay you three hundred thousand pounds, said Nigel, and he left.

Harry explained that Nigel was a professional thief who stole only to order and for a prearranged price: works of art, industrial secrets, nuclear warheads, special jewellery. Kit deduced that Nigel had been commissioned to get hold of a sample of Oxenford Medical's antiviral drug, worth millions to a competitor.

Kit has devised an ingenious plan for getting past the guards and defeating the alarm system. No one will be hurt. In fact, no one will know the theft has taken place until the scientists return to work after the Christmas break.

The whole thing appeals to Kit's sense of mischief, his need for money, and his yearning for revenge against his father and Toni. Today, however, he feels nervous as he contemplates committing a major crime. Then something happens to make matters worse. He turns on the TV and sees a shot of the Fort. The newsreader explains that an animal-rights group has threatened to "liberate" the laboratory animals.

Kit assumes that Animals Are Free is Nigel's customer. He knows that animal charities are enormously rich, raising vast sums by their scientifically devised ads, and it is perfectly possible that a lunatic fringe has hired Nigel to free animals.

But the public announcement of the threat could ruin Kit's plan. With the Fort's security people expecting trouble, everything is more risky.

Feeling indignant, he goes out into a light snowfall and goes to see Harry Mac.

The gangster lives in a large new house outside Glasgow. Kit is shown into the pool house. Harry sits in a robe drinking coffee. Daisy is swimming laps, stroking up and down the pool tirelessly. Kit is surprised to see that her muscular body is naked.

Kit explains to Harry that the break-in is now too hazardous and must be called off.

Daisy gets out of the pool. She is 25, six feet tall, with several tattoos and a nipple ring. Her head is shaved.

Harry says: Remind Kit how important it is to pay his debts.

Daisy pushes Kit into the pool and holds his head under the water until he cannot help opening his mouth and drawing water into his lungs. She pulls him out then, as he is desperately trying to breathe, she plunges his head under again. He thinks he is going to die. He struggles desperately, terrified, but she hold him under until he breathes water again, then lifts him out. She keeps this up until he passes out, then she throws him out of the water, brings him round, and leaves him coughing and retching at the side of the pool.

3. Miranda Oxenford, 35, is Stanley's younger daughter. She is divorced with a nice 11-year-old son, Tom. They live in Edinburgh. Miranda is MD of a small recruitment agency for IT personnel. After several good years in which she earned high bonuses, the company is going through a lean patch. Miranda is attractive, though overweight. She is smart and determined and usually gets what she wants in the end.

Her first husband was a bully and a tyrant. She has proved that she can take care of herself and her daughter without him, and she is proud of herself for that; but she wants more from life.

She is living with Ned Hanley, 39, charming, erudite, a Shakespeare scholar, impractical and weak. He is editor of the *Edinburgh Review of Books*, a successful cultural-political journal that pays a pittance. He lives rent-free in Miranda's apartment. He is good with Tom. He has a troubled 14-year-old daughter, Sophie, who lives with her mother.

Ned is what Miranda needs to complete her journey back to happiness after a bad marriage and divorce. But Ned hesitates. He is uncomfortable being financially dependent on Miranda. He also says that everyone needs time to get used to the idea of his marrying again. "Everyone" really means his ex-wife, Jennifer, a skilled troublemaker.

Miranda's sister, Olga, says she should not have let Ned move in without first getting him to commit to a wedding date. Miranda thinks this is all part of Ned's laid-back attitude to life, such a pleasant change from her controlling ex-husband.; but Olga tells her Ned is a free-rider who will use her for as long as he can.

Miranda hopes this holiday will bring resolution. Jennifer is going to Nassau with a man friend. For the first time, Sophie will be joining Miranda, Ned and Tom for several days. Miranda hopes this will prove to Ned that they can be a family. They are going to Steepfall.

The holiday begins badly. Miranda drives Ned and Tom (Ned can't drive) through a light snowfall to Jennifer's house to pick up Sophie. Jennifer is out and Sophie, a precocious teen in a skimpy sweater that reveals her pierced navel, has not begun to get ready. Ned begs Miranda to help Sophie pack. Miranda has never been inside the marital home, and she agrees only with great reluctance.

Jennifer returns unexpectedly. She rudely orders Miranda out of the house. Miranda waits in the car, feeling humiliated, wondering if Olga is right, and Ned is just too weak.

4. Toni arrives at Steepfall during a lull in the snowstorm. She feels anxious, and asks herself why. She admires Stanley and wants his approval, of course. He rescued her when she was at rock bottom. She likes his brilliant mind, his warm smile, and the twinkle in his eye when he is talking to an attractive woman, especially

if that woman happens to be herself. She wants to please him and win his approval because, she tells herself, she owes him so much, and she has to make a success of this job.

She has not been to Steepfall before. The house is high on a cliff with spectacular views. It is an old stone farmhouse with low ceilings and exposed beams.

She meets Stanley's son-in-law, Hugo, the husband of Olga. He is her own age, and makes no attempt to conceal his attraction to her. Olga is not yet here: she is coming later. With Hugo are their two children. Caroline, 17, is a sentimental animal lover who has brought with her a cage full of her pet white rats. Craig, 15, is more likeable, having his grandfather's warm smile and sexy twinkle.

Toni and Stanley retire to the study to watch the one o'clock news. The coverage portrays Oxenford Medical as a responsible scientific group threatened by crazy protestors. The closing shot shows their staff handing out hot drinks to the demonstrators in the snow. Stanley says: "That was a brilliant touch, Toni."

They agree there should be no further damage to the company—provided Animals Are Free do not succeed, against all the odds, in liberating any laboratory animals.

Stanley shows Toni around the house. The main building has a study and living room on the ground floor and three bedrooms upstairs. Adjacent is the old dairy, now converted to a modern kitchen. Alongside the dairy is a new extension, dining room below and master bedroom suite above.

In the kitchen are Lukey and Lori, the Filipino help. Lori, the cook, gives Toni a frankly appraising look. Toni wonders if she is the first woman Stanley has brought home since Marta died.

She wonders what Stanley's feelings for her might be. She knows he enjoys her company. He is attracted to her, but most men are, and Stanley can twinkle at Cynthia Ross, too. It is 18 months since Marta died—is that long enough to mourn a 40-year marriage?

Yet, if he is attracted to her, why has he not asked her to have dinner with him? The problem could be political correctness. Nowadays it is considered wrong

for a boss to make sexual advances to an employee, who might be too intimidated to reject unwelcome overtures. Toni almost feels nostalgic for the old days, when a colleague could cop a sly feel without fear of a lawsuit.

She wonders why she is being given this tour. Surely Stanley is not saying: "All this could be yours." Marta's personality is imprinted on the house: her portrait over the fireplace, her tennis cups in the dining room, her watercolours of the surrounding Scottish landscape, her choice of curtains and upholstery. Perhaps Stanley is letting Toni know that there is no room yet in his life for another woman.

He shows her around the grounds. There are three outbuildings: a one-bedroom guest cottage; a converted barn with a large play area and a hayloft bedroom; and a three-car garage. In the garage are Lukey's Toyota and the four-wheel-drive jeep Stanley uses when the roads are icy. Stanley's Maserati is parked outside the front door of the house. Lukey and Lori live in a cottage a mile away: Stanley explains that he and Marta liked to have help in the day but preferred privacy at night.

They walk to the cliff edge. There is a low fence designed to deter small children, but they climb over it easily and stand on the edge, looking down on a mile-long beach dusted with snow. Stanley thanks Toni for the way she has handled the press. Then he says how much he enjoys her presence in the office. She realises he is about to kiss her. Then his grandson Tom appears, full of excitement, and says: "Uncle Kit has arrived!" And the spell is broken.

Back at the house, Kit is being welcomed by everyone. Toni cordially dislikes him and wonders how many of his family realise that his father fired him for stealing. She takes her leave quietly. But by bad luck she bumps into Kit on her way to her car. Mustering as much good will as she can, she says: "Happy Christmas, Kit."

He replies: "Get lost, bitch."

She drives away with a sour taste in her mouth.

5. Craig Oxenford, Stanley's 15-year-old grandson, is on the edge of manhood, sometimes mature and responsible, sometimes mischievous. At school he is always top of the class, often in trouble. He has been looking forward eagerly to renewing

his acquaintance with Sophie, his aunt's boyfriend's daughter, a magnetically bad girl who wears sexy clothes and smokes cigarettes. He has met her once before, at a family gathering a few months ago, and he has been thinking about her ever since.

He shows her the hayloft bedroom in the barn, which she will be sharing with Caroline. He will be sleeping on a camp bed in the play area—an arrangement that strikes him as full of potential.

He shows her his favourite hiding place in the main. House. When the dairy was converted, a large attic space was created above the new kitchen. This is used as a junk room. The main entrance is a high loft door accessed from the outside by standing on a lean-to roof outside the kitchen. There is also a concealed entrance at the back of a wardrobe in Stanley's dressing room. The attic contains a sofa, a guitar, photograph albums, paintings, and boxes of junk. Evidence of how it has been used in the past lies around in the form of candy wrappers, cigarette packets of long-forgotten brands, and a pile of old Playboys.

Craig shows Sophie how you can look through a generous crack into the kitchen below and eavesdrop on adult conversations. He warns her that Nelson, the Labrador retriever, always knows when someone is in the attic, and an alert adult may notice Nelson's behaviour and draw the right conclusion.

Craig is working his charm as hard as he can. He tells Sophie how much he likes her. She says she is dating a boy of 19. Craig does not know whether to believe her. Is she as sophisticated as she seems? Or is she just a troubled girl pretending she is not desperate for admiration and affection?

They hear a noise. Someone is in the master suite. They peep. Kit is there, going through his father's suit pockets. Craig switches off his torch.

6. Kit is looking for the plastic key card his father uses to pass through security doors at the Fort and enter the isolation lab. He expected to find it in his father's wallet in a suit pocket, but it does not seem to be here. While he is searching, he hears a footfall on the stairs. He is about to be caught. But he remembers the attic hiding-place from his childhood. He slips in there.

He leaves by the loft door (without noticing Craig and Sophie in the dark). The key is essential to his plans. Without it, there is no way to enter the isolation lab without setting off the alarm. He surreptitiously searches the house. In the study he sees his father's suit jacket hanging behind the door. He takes out the wallet and searches it. He finds the key card and slips it into his pocket. Almost certainly, his father will not miss it during the next few hours, after which Kit will return it.

7. Toni returns to the lab for a final meeting with the guard supervisor, Steve Tremlett. Toni likes Steve and she is glad he will be on duty tonight. Steve was a pal of the sacked Head of Security, Ron Sutherland, but there was no evidence he was in the scam with Ron and Kit. Toni decided to take a chance on him, and he has rewarded her trust by being reliable and loyal.

Together they run over security arrangements for the holiday. Steve has a list of people to call in case of fire, flood, power cut, phone breakdown, and so on. Toni emphasizes that she will have her mobile phone on 24 hours, and she wants to be called if anything in the least unusual happens. Steve must also not hesitate to call regional police headquarters in Harbourmouth. She asks if he knows who is acting chief there tonight. It is her ex-boyfriend, Frank Hackett.

There are normally three guards on duty: one at the gate, one in Reception, and one in the Control Room where the CCTV monitors and the mainframe computer are. They switch positions during the shift, just for variety. One of them patrols the entire premises for twenty minutes in every hour. Toni has doubled the guard tonight, so they will be paired, and patrol every half hour.

Looking at the roster, she notices that all the guards on duty tonight, apart from Steve, are men who have joined the company in the last six months. She mentions this to Steve, who says he had not noticed. It appears to be a coincidence with no significance.

Steve asks her about her plans for Christmas. The last two years she has taken her mother out of the nursing home. However, this year her sister Bella, not normally good at taking responsibility, has offered to take Mother. Toni is going to a

hotel with a group of friends, all singles or childless couples, for a grown-up Christmas.

Steve wishes her a happy Christmas, and she leaves. It is now dark, and the snowfall is becoming heavier.

8. Kit tells his family he needs to go into Harbourmouth to have a drink with a man who may give him a job.

In fact he drives to a disused airfield a few miles north of Steepfall. There he meets up with Nigel Buchanan, Daisy McGarry, and George Cox, who is in charge of transport.

With his inside knowledge of the computer system at Oxenford Medical, Kit uses his laptop and mobile phone to hack into the phone system at the Fort. First, he shuts down all the phones but the one on the desk in reception. Next, he has all calls into and out of the Fort diverted to his mobile. Finally, to attract the attention of the guards, he causes all the phones in the building to ring then stop.

Almost immediately, an outgoing call is made. Kit checks the number dialled: it is Toni Baxter's mobile. He plays an unavailable message. Next, the guards call Hibernian Telecom, the company that services the phone system. Kit answers and promises to send an emergency repair crew.

The four of them then get into a van, provided by George, which has "Hibernian Telecom" on the side. They head for the Fort.

9. Miranda is desperate for the holiday to go well, but it begins badly.

Her sister's husband, Hugo, is a charming philanderer. Years ago, in a moment of depression and low self-esteem, she slept with him. It was a foolish act she has bitterly regretted ever since. However, Hugo feels no guilt, and always flirts with her. Now, in Olga's absence, he comes on strongly to her. She turns him down, and begs him not to compromise her in front of Ned. She is trying to get Ned to commit to her, and the last thing she needs is for him to know her worst secret.

10. Kit, Nigel, Daisy and George don light disguises—glasses, wigs, and hats—so that the guards at the Fort will later give misleading descriptions of them.

As they approach the Fort, an incoming call to Oxenford Medical rings Kit's mobile. He does not recognise the caller's number. He answers, saying: "Oxenford Medical." It is the wife of a security guard. Making a snap decision, he redirects the call to the phone in Reception.

They drive up to the gate in the Hibernian Telecom van. They show fake ID and are admitted.

They go to the Control Room. The room is not big enough for them and the two duty guards, so Kit asks the guards to move to reception while he is working on the computer. (Although Kit is disguised, the guards might recognise him by his voice, except that these are all men who joined the company after Kit left.)

When they have gone, he gives Nigel the key card, then watches on the screen as Nigel and George slip into the isolation lab.

Kit's plan is that the theft should take place without the guards knowing. As they cannot enter the isolation lab, and cannot see what is going on in there without the CCTV monitors, they will not learn what has happened until after the holiday.

But this plan goes wrong almost immediately, because of the extra guards. As Kit watches the screens, seeing Nigel in the isolation lab, he realises he is not alone. There is a guard looking over his shoulder.

As the guard begins to ask an indignant question, Daisy attacks him brutally, rendering him unconscious.

11. Toni is ready to leave for her grown-up Christmas. Before she goes, she calls the Fort to make sure all is well. The phone is answered by a vaguely familiar voice. (We realise it is Kit's.) She is immediately transferred to Steve Tremlett, who explains about the phone breakdown.

She mulls this over. It sounds perfectly straightforward, but she should probably go to the Fort and check for herself. She calls Stanley and tells him what has happened. He urges her not to make herself late for her party—but says the decision is hers.

She is about to drive to the Fort when she gets a phone call from her sister. Bella's husband does not want her to drive in the snow, so she cannot have Mother after all.

Toni cannot bear the thought of her mother spending Christmas in a nursing home. She cancels her plans and drives to the nursing home.

Carl Osborne phones. He wants to drop by with a gift. To get rid of him, Toni agrees to see him after Christmas.

12. Stanley's Maserati is still parked outside the front door of Steepfall. He leaves it there, with the keys in, for Lukey to garage. Last time Craig was here, he was allowed to put the car into the garage. Now he decides to do so again. He tells Sophie he does not need permission.

However, the snow is thick on the ground now, and Craig cannot control the car. He skids and dents it against a tree.

Sophie points out that no one seems to have seen or heard the accident. She proposes garaging the car with the dent to the wall, so that it will not be visible to the casual observer. With luck, the damage may remain undiscovered until after the holiday, when Craig will have left.

Craig agrees.

13. Kit has to find somewhere to put the unconscious security guard. He carries the man to the isolation lab and locks him in an empty monkey cage.

As he is coming out, he is surprised by another patrolling guard. The man overpowers him.

His phone rings, but he cannot answer it.

14. Toni is at the supermarket, about to get some groceries for two unexpected days at home. Before going inside, she calls the Fort, but there is no answer. This worries her, but she decides to check again in a few minutes.

As they walk the aisles, Mother makes embarrassingly apt comments about other shoppers: I wouldn't wear a tight sweater if I were that fat; Fur coat and no knickers, they say; Look at that old lesbian buying cat food.

Toni hurries Mother out of the place. As she drives home, she calls the Fort again. Still there is no answer. She becomes worried. Arriving home, she decides to turn right around and go to the Fort, even though she will have to take Mother with her.

As she is setting off, Carl Osborne arrives, amiably drunk, with his Christmas gift—a puppy. To Toni's fury, he follows her car.

15. The guard who has captured Kit summons Steve to help him. But, instead of Steve, Daisy appears.. We realise that Steve is in cahoots with Kit.

Daisy beats up the guard.

With Steve's surreptitious help, Daisy and Kit round up all the guards and lock them in the chimpanzee cage. They include Steve so that he will not fall under suspicion.

16. Olga arrives at Steepfall. The eldest Oxenford child at 40, she is a highly paid barrister. Imperious and egocentric, she immediately starts a row about allocation of rooms.

Stanley has put Miranda and Ned in the principal guest room, because it has an adjacent small bedroom suitable for little Tom. Olga is outraged that she and Hugo have been "exiled" to the guest cottage, and she starts ostentatiously to make plans to leave early. Miranda offers to swap, so that Olga can be in the main house. The only drawback is that Tom will have to sleep on a camp bed in the barn alongside Craig. But a quarrel has been averted.

17. At the Fort, Kit's plan has gone awry, but the situation can still be rescued. Kit has lost much of his anticipated time advantage. The theft will not now remain undiscovered beyond the arrival of the next shift of guards at six a.m. However, by

then he and the others could be back at the disused airfield, where they are due to meet Nigel's customer at dawn.

Kit expects Nigel now to take a representative selection of healthy animals from BSL1—maybe some rabbits, a dog, and perhaps a monkey. They will be no danger to anyone provided he selects animals that are being used as controls, and therefore not infected with viruses. Presumably the customer will take photographs of them happy in their new environment and send the pictures to the newspapers for further publicity.

But, to Kit's surprise and horror, Nigel puts on a space suit and enters BSL4, the most dangerous area. There he goes to the freezer and takes several vials containing samples of the most deadly viruses. He places them carefully in a liquid-nitrogen tank used to transport such samples. Then he goes through the decontamination procedure.

Kit realises he is involved in something much more sinister than he imagined. These samples could kill thousands of people. But what can he do? He still owes a fortune to Harry Mac, and Daisy is right here beside him to prevent his doing anything to undermine the operation. He can only stick with the program and hope to come out unscathed at the end.

The four of them get back into the Hibernian Telecom van and drive away from the Fort.

The blizzard is getting worse.

18. Toni arrives at the lab, with Mother in her car, followed by Carl Osborne in his car with the puppy. They barely make it because of the snow.

Toni discovers the break-in. She frees the guards, calls the police, settles Mother in a comfortable chair, and debriefs Steve and the other guards. None of them knows what has been taken (except Steve, who lies), and none of them recognised any member of the gang (again except Steve, who knew Kit, but lies again.)

Toni calls Stanley at Steepfall and tells him what has happened.

19. After dinner at Steepfall there is another row.

Years ago, Stanley bought a small apartment building in the names of his three children, as an investment for their future. Miranda now wants to sell the building so that she can buy a house for her and Ned to live in after they are married. But when she proposes this, the shit hits the fan. It turns out that Olga long ago sold her share to Kit, and Kit has pledged all his stake against a loan on which he has defaulted. Obviously, says Miranda, the building should be sold, Kit's loan should be repaid, and she should have her third. At this, Olga becomes enraged. She sold her share to Kit for a tenth of what it is worth today—surely siblings ought not to profit from one another's mistakes in this way? Useless for Miranda to argue that the house Olga bought with her stake has also appreciated in value. Spitefully, Olga now reveals that Miranda once slept with Hugo. Ned is shocked, and Miranda is humiliated.

20. Kit and the others drive to a motel called the Dewdrop Inn near the Fort. Here they switch vehicles, dumping the Hibernian Telecom van and getting into a nondescript station wagon.

The weather is getting worse, and there is a bad-tempered argument about whether they should go on. Then Steve calls from the Fort to warn Kit that the break-in has already been discovered, and Kit realizes he has no real choice. They drive on.

Long before they reach their rendezvous, the blizzard slows them to a crawl. George, the driver, can barely see the front end of the car. They slide all over the road, and it is a good thing there is no other traffic, otherwise they would surely hit something.

They all get edgy. The customer will wait for them until noon. At this rate they could miss their rendezvous.

They are not far from Steepfall. Kit proposes they borrow his father's four-wheel-drive jeep, kept for just such weather as this. By now everyone will be in bed. He can either return the car without anyone's noticing its absence or come up with some story about rescuing people in the snow.

George turns off the main road. But the snow is even thicker on the side roads, and soon the car is stuck.

They are about a mile from Steepfall across fields. They continue on foot, freezing cold, fighting their way through snowdrifts, blinded by the whiteout, Nigel holding on grimly to a leather bag containing the nitrogen tank.

They reach the house. Kit opens the garage. The jeep has gone, but Lukey's Toyota is there. Lukey and Lori must have taken the jeep to get home to their cottage.

They are stuck. They must enter the house, or die of cold (the garage is unheated). But, before they do, as a precaution, they cut the phone lines.

21. Toni realises the thieves have taken a sample of a deadly virus. Using her mobile phone, she tells the police. They say there is nothing they can do—no traffic is moving in the blizzard.

She insists on talking to the acting commander, who happens to be her ex-boyfriend, Frank Hackett. She points out that the thieves are likely to be stranded. Almost certainly they are sitting in a car, stuck in the snow, no more than a few miles away. She demands he commandeer a snowplough and mount a search.

Frank refuses. He doesn't really grasp the scale of the biohazard—plus he enjoys saying No to Toni. Although he was the one who left her, in her hour of need, he still acts toward her as if she wronged him.

She tries to call Stanley, but the phones seem to be out of order at Steepfall.

She calls Odette Cressy, her FBI agent friend, who is horrified by the lassitude of the Scottish police and promises to call Scotland Yard.

Unfortunately, Carl Osborne hears all this.

22. In the barn at Steepfall, the children are still awake.

Sophie produces a bottle of vodka. Tom has some and throws up. Caroline falls asleep. Craig is still trying to charm Sophie.

Miranda comes in, having seen lights on late. She confiscates the vodka, scolds Craig and Sophie, cleans up the bathroom, and sends them all to their beds.

When she has gone, Craig and Sophie get up again.

23. In the kitchen, Kit puts on a kettle for tea. He calls Steve, who tells him the police have refused to commandeer a snowplough. That gives Kit a breathing space.

He turns on the TV for a weather forecast. The blizzard is expected to last until midday. He cannot wait that long. As soon as it gets light, he and the others must try to reach Lukey's cottage and take the jeep.

Stanley appears, wakened by the sounds. Kit explains that his car got stuck in the snow not far from the house. He presents Nigel, Daisy and George as complete strangers who also had to abandon their car.

Stanley asks Nigel and Daisy polite questions: where were they headed, will anyone be worried about them? Their answers, being unrehearsed, are a bit implausible and inconsistent, and Kit wonders how long they can keep up the pretence of innocence.

24. Toni gets a call from Odette. The news is shocking. FBI intelligence has linked the theft of the virus with a serious terrorist group. They plan to disperse the virus tomorrow at one of the traditional big sporting events of Boxing Day.

The Bureau has already alerted the British government, which has come down on the regional police like a ton of bricks, and a snowplough is on its way.

Toni reasons that the thieves probably switched cars at the earliest opportunity. They must have had a second, less conspicuous vehicle waiting at a location where it would not attract attention—a public or semi-private car park. She starts calling likely places: a golf club, a filling station, a warehouse. Although all these places are closed, she usually gets a janitor or a guard willing to look out of a window (or into a CCTV monitor) and say whether he can see a Hibernian Telecom van.

She tracks down the getaway vehicle to the car park of the Dewdrop Inn, a couple of miles north of the Fort.

25. In the barn at Steepfall, Craig at last succeeds in kissing Sophie. He realises right away that she is not such a bad girl as she pretends to be. In fact she seems no more experienced than he is.

This is all right, but unfortunately Tom is still awake, in the same room. Then Caroline passes through on her way to the bathroom. Feeling they have no privacy, Craig proposes they move.

They put on coats and boots, cross the yard in the blizzard, climb the lean-to roof, and enter the attic by the loft door.

Looking down into the kitchen, they see strangers.

26. Kit manages to allay any suspicions Stanley might have about Nigel, Daisy and George by pretending to be suspicious himself, and asking challenging questions, thereby giving Nigel the chance to provide plausible explanations. Then Miranda appears. To Kit's dismay she, too, questions the others. She clearly doubts their story, but does not challenge them openly.

27. A team of police in three cars, led by a snowplough, arrives at the Fort. In command is Frank. He tells Toni to stay out of the way as he is now in charge.

They clash because she will not let him into the isolation lab.

He surmises that the thieves probably headed south, aiming for the nearest motorway. Toni tells him that in fact they headed north, and switched cars at the Dewdrop Inn.

The convoy heads that way. Toni puts Mother in the car and follows.

28. Miranda confides to Stanley her suspicion of Kit's companions. (They do not yet suspect Kit of involvement.) Stanley tells Miranda about the robbery at the Fort. (N.B. He still does not know what was stolen.) They decide to call the police. They find the phones are not working.

Stanley does not carry a mobile phone, though there is one in his Maserati. Miranda has one, but she has left it in the cottage beside her bed. She is about to go there when Olga appears.

Olga is also suspicious of Kit's companions but, unlike Miranda, she does not have the sense to be discreet. She questions them aggressively, barrister-style. Cornered, Daisy becomes violent and attacks her. When Stanley jumps to Olga's defence, Nigel pulls a gun.

Kit pretends to be shocked, so that his family will not realise he is part of the gang. After a moment's hesitation, Nigel goes along with this pretence, and Daisy and George follow suit. Miranda notes the hesitation but is not sure how to interpret it.

Before the situation settles, Miranda manages to slip out of the room.

29. Craig hears raised voices and breaks off from kissing Sophie to look into the kitchen. He sees Nigel pointing a gun at Stanley, Olga and Kit. He realises he must call the police. He steps into Stanley's bedroom suite and picks up the phone. The line is dead.

Sophie, who is watching the kitchen, hisses a warning and, a moment later, Craig hears boots on the stairs. He gets back into the attic a second before George bursts into the room.

30. To evade Daisy, Miranda steps into the guest bedroom. Hugo says: "What a lovely surprise, jump into bed with me." She passes quickly into the adjacent small bedroom. Through the keyhole, she sees Daisy pull Hugo out of bed naked.

31. The TV in the kitchen is still on, and a news bulletin reveals that a deadly virus has been stolen from the Fort.

Stanley pleads with Nigel to return the sample, pointing out that it could kill thousands of people including Nigel himself. Nigel is impervious.

While Daisy and George are still searching the house, Stanley jumps Nigel and tries to overpower him. The gun flies across the room. Kit snatches it up—and hands it back to Nigel. Stanley realises that Kit is one of the gang.

32. The snowplough and its cavalcade near Steepfall. Toni decides she could stop off here, brief Stanley, leave Mother, then catch up with the police. The snowfall is easing, and the path cleared by the plough should be drivable for another hour.

She puts this to Frank. He refuses to divert the snowplough down the Steepfall drive. Toni plays a card from her sleeve: she threatens to reveal to Frank's colleagues that he used to like dressing in her underwear. He caves in.

Toni calls the Fort and checks in with Steve. All is well there. She tells Steve she is about to stop off at Steepfall.

33. Craig recalls there is a phone in Stanley's Maserati. He and Sophie leave the attic and go to the garage. The Maserati is there, but it is locked and the keys have gone. Lukey must have locked it before going home.

34. Kit's phone rings. It is Steve. He warns Kit that the police are about to arrive at Steepfall.

Daisy pushes Stanley, Olga, Hugo into the pantry, a windowless refrigerated room, and closes the door on them.

Kit goes to meet Toni.

35. Miranda looks out of a window and sees Toni arrive with the police. She is filled with hope. Then she sees Kit come out of the house and help Toni with Mother. Toni waves goodbye to the police. Realising what is happening, Miranda yells to Toni, but the window is closed and Toni does not hear.

As Toni enters the house, Miranda appears at the top of the stairs and yells a warning. In the fracas, Toni gets away and runs to the barn.

36. Craig, in the windowless garage, has not seen the police or the snowplough. He is still hoping to phone from the Maserati. But the keys must be in the key box on the wall in the boot room, a kind of lobby to the kitchen. He decides to sneak in there and get them. Sophie will stay in the garage.

37. Kit sees his chance. The snowplough has cleared a path to Lukey & Lori's cottage. He can drive there in a normal car and pick up the four-wheel-drive jeep. With that, he should be able to reach the disused airfield. If he can deliver the goods to the customer, he will pay off his debt to Daisy's father, then he can flee the country and start a new life somewhere else.

But, before leaving Steepfall, he must make sure no one here can alert the police. He needs to round up those family members that are still at large: Ned, Miranda, and the four children.

It should not take long.

He sends Nigel to the guest cottage, Daisy to the garage, and George to the barn.

38. Craig leaves the garage, heading for the kitchen, but he sees Nigel, Daisy and George emerge, and is forced to hide behind a dustbin.

39. Toni and Caroline are hiding in the hayloft bedroom. When George comes in, they are ready for him. Caroline has taken her rats out of their cage and is holding them in her arms. She throws them at George. Then Toni hits him on the head with a pool ball.

40. Nigel emerges from the guest cottage with Ned and Tom. At the same moment, Daisy comes out of the garage with Sophie.

Tom spots Craig, hiding behind his dustbin. Terrified, Tom calls to Craig for help, revealing his hiding-place. Daisy is about to go to Craig when Sophie attacks her. Daisy beats Sophie viciously.

To everyone's surprise, indecisive Ned attacks Daisy. The Shakespeare scholar is no match for the young thug, and Ned is badly beaten up; but Daisy's attention is distracted from Sophie, and Craig escapes.

41. Craig enters the boot room and snatches the Maserati keys, but he is not quick enough to get away, and he is forced to hide in a cupboard.

42. Kit is desperate to leave. But he doesn't know what has happened to George, and he still needs to round up Toni and two more children, Caroline and Craig. He sends Nigel to find George and tells Daisy to get a car.

43. In the barn, Toni attacks Nigel and overpowers him.

44. Craig is about to call the police on the Maserati phone when the garage door opens and Daisy stands there. He starts the engine and runs her down.

45. Kit grabs the nitrogen tank with the virus samples and runs. He is diverted and runs to the cliff.

Back to the wall, he threatens to open the vials and kill them all.

Prevented from doing this, he tries to kill himself by jumping. Toni saves his life.