

DEAD... AGAIN

NORFOLK COZY MYSTERY: CLUB MEMBERS'
PREVIEW CHAPTER

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FOREWORD

Thank you for downloading your exclusive extract of my latest book in the Norfolk Cozy Mystery series, 'Dead... Again'

I hope you enjoy chapter one of this exciting and plot-twisting tale!

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With my warmest wishes

Keith

Beggars Man's Cave

“Can you think of anything better to do on a warm Saturday morning than be out and about in a vintage Morgan sports car?” Ant had to shout his question at Lyn to overcome the low rumble of the car’s powerful engine.

“As a matter of fact... oh, what’s the point?” She watched Ant mouth “eh?” before leaning into him. “Either stop and put the hood up or slow down so we can hear each other. Honestly, Anthony Stanton, sometimes I could—” Ant got the message and slowed the Morgan to a more sedate pace. “There, isn’t that better, silly man. We’re on a country lane in the middle of nowhere, not the Le Mans racetrack. While we’re at it, tell me again why you’ve dragged me out so early on the first day of my summer holidays?”

Ant lifted his chin and frowned at his passenger.

Since I’m already in trouble, may as well go for it.

“I thought you said head teachers didn’t take holidays, they just worked at a slower pace?” He had judged Lyn’s reaction to a tee and only his quick thinking staved off one

of her famed ear flicks, which he dreaded. “Anyway, we're not in the middle of nowhere.”

Her eyes flared. “Don't change the subject. You may be a Lord, but it doesn't cut any ice with me.” Lyn rearranged herself in her rich leather car seat and looked straight ahead. “Anyway, where are we, and more's the point, where are you taking me?”

Ant looked across and smiled, then looked to his front as Lyn glared at him for not watching the road. “Just around this bend and... yes, I think you'll recognise where we are.”

The Morgan continued at its sedate pace as an ornate set of wrought-iron gates came into view, as did two armed police officers. Lyn's eyes were glued to an ornate hand-painted sign to the right of the gate:

Sandringham House - No Entry to the Public

She looked at Ant, then the police officers. “You have the wrong entrance and are going to get us shot, stupid man.”

Ant revved the Morgan as an act of defiance and obeyed an assertive hand gesture from the female officer to come to a halt. Clutching the menacing matt-black submachine gun into her body, the officer leant into the Morgan. “Good morning, Lord Stanton. You are expected. May I just ask for a form of identification for the lady?”

Ant turned to Lyn and took in the unglamorous site of her jaw hanging half open.”

“You have remembered to bring your passport, Lyn?”

The question shook Lyn out of her stupor. A look of panic now replacing her open mouth. “I... er, well...”

“Not to worry. I picked it up when I called around for you.” Ant retrieved the document from his inside pocket.

As the female police officer compared Lyn's likeness

with her passport, the second police officer busied himself circling the Morgan. Ant was unsure if it was part of a security check, or that the officer simply liked vintage automobiles.

“That all seems to be in order, sir. Please park in the stable yard behind the house. You will be met as previously agreed. May I take any mobile phones that you have?” Ant gestured to his completely bemused companion, who complied without saying a word. “Thank you, sir.” The officer stood back from the car, pointed in the direction of the ornate gates that were beginning to open, then saluted.

Ant returned the salute and gently urged the Morgan forward, reaching the entrance just as the still-moving gates allowed just enough space for his car to squeeze through.

“Are you going to tell me what all this is about, or am I here just for the ride?” Lyn’s words demanded an answer.

Ant ignored the question for several seconds as the Morgan continued at a stately pace in keeping with the incredible surrounding of parkland, sweeping vistas of flower gardens, and in the distance, the majestic sight of Sandringham House, the Queen’s Christmas residence.

“You’ve been here before. Why are you so surprised?” Ant gently swerved to avoid a pair of turtle doves who were far too preoccupied with each other to notice danger to life and limb.

“Yes, I have, but through the tourist entrance holding a guidebook and ice cream, not being waved through by armed police who were clearly expecting us, or should I say you?”

Ant smiled as he brought the Morgan back onto the narrow tarmac road which carved its way through the park like a ribbon of black silk through a sea of green. “They

knew you were coming too. Why do you think I nicked your passport?"

One, two, three...

Lyn exploded. "And that's another thing, how dare you—"

"Oh, look at that. Isn't it magnificent?"

Lyn stopped shouting and followed Ant's extended finger. As they passed St Mary Magdalene Church to their right, the road swept down and to the left. A small lake revealed itself. The water's edge was broken by a thick carpet of brightly coloured vegetation and carefully placed rocks, which added to the rustic feel of the place.

"Isn't that fantastic, Lyn?" Ant didn't wait for an answer. He knew they were seconds away from rounding one side of Sandringham House and turning into the spacious stable yard, now used as a refreshment area and entrance to the museum. "This place will be full in a few hours, just as well we were told to be here early."

Lyn gave Ant a look of incredulity. "We? I think you mean The Lord Stanton."

Ant closed his eyes for a second just like a child who believed if they couldn't see their parents, their parents couldn't see them.

"Er, well, yes, I suppose you're right. But they'll look after you while I'm meeting, er..."

She immediately picked up on his faltering sentence. "Meeting whom, exactly? I assume it's someone rather important given where we are. Are you seeing a member of the—"

"You've guessed, Lyn. I should have known. Yes, you are right, I'm seeing a member of the Intelligence Corp. Haven't a clue what they want, but I told you months ago that the military never really let you go."

Lyn shot her friend a sceptical look. "Intelligence Corp my foot. You could have met them anywhere. You must think I'm stupid."

Before Ant had a chance to respond, he had brought the Morgan to a stop by a heavy half-glazed oak door, its frosted glass etched with the cipher of the Prince of Wales. Within seconds an immaculately turned-out footman in a dark blue tunic with red piping in his collar and cuffs appeared on Lyn's side of the car. "Good morning, sir, madam. Please allow me to show you through. Perhaps Ms Blackthorn would like to look around the museum, which you will have all to yourself?"

Ant climbed out of the car as the footman opened the door for Lyn.

"Sounds like a plan. Are you okay with that, Lyn? It should only take twenty minutes or so".

Get me in before she throws something at me.

Looking slightly perplexed at the footman using her name and offering unfettered access to thousands of artefacts belonging to the Royal Family, she remained rooted to the spot as Ant disappeared into the Victorian building.

"SO THAT'S IT, then. You're not going to tell me who you met?" Lyn's face thundered as they neared Sidbourne Deep, a long cliff-lined beach thirty minutes from Sandringham.

Ant smiled at Lyn enigmatically, knowing this would do little to placate his friend. "As I've said half a dozen times. There are some things I can't share even with you. I'm not being awkward or evasive. I took an oath and that's all there is to it."

Before Lyn was able to pursue the matter further, Ant

brought the Morgan to a halt in a small public car park which had, at one end, an old wooden five-bar gate giving access to the beach.

“Come on, you said you wanted to fill your lungs with good Norfolk sea air. Well, now’s your chance. Come on. Last one through the gate buys lunch.” Ant had started to run before he’d finished making the challenge.

“That’s not fair. You have a head start.”

Ant looked back and waved as he sped towards the gate. He soon realised his mistake as he tripped over a protruding stone and fell head over heels onto the rough ground.

“Serves you right. Have you not read about the hare and the tortoise?” Lyn made the most of her good fortune and reached the gate as Ant continued to dust himself down from his fall. “And I want the full works for lunch, so I hope you’ve brought your wallet with you? See you on the beach.”

By the time Ant had stopped rubbing his knee, having first looked around to make sure no one other than Lyn had seen him fall, he had lost sight of her. Limping, he passed through the gate and looked down a steep slope of loose sand.

That’s all I need.

Two minutes and three stumbles later, Ant found himself on a firmer surface as he limped down to the shoreline across damp sand in an effort to locate Lyn. She was nowhere to be seen. As he looked around, he held a hand to his hair, for which the onshore wind had other ideas. Ant’s gaze was drawn to the horizon as he watched two container ships and a bulk carrier glide slowly across his field of vision like ducks in a fairground shooting gallery.

“You took your time.” Lyn’s voice startled him as he turned to see his friend just yards away.

“Er, I’ve been here for several minutes while you’ve been hiding.” Ant waved a hand around to emphasise his point.

“If you think I was going to hang around while you felt sorry for yourself, you can think again. Anyway, the cliffs are really interesting, you know, the way the sediment layers were laid down. Look, you can see about eight different layers. Fascinating, isn’t it?” Lyn pointed to a long line of cliffs with alternating red, grey, and white stripes running through them.

Ant was far from impressed. “If you say so. Now, you were the one who wanted to stroll on the beach, so what’s it to be, a lecture on sedimentary rocks or getting our feet wet?”

Lyn shook her head. “You are a philistine. Come on, Hopalong, let’s get going”

Ant tried his hurt schoolboy look but quickly realised Lyn wasn’t biting. The tactic, having backfired, made his sore knee worse as he hurried to catch up with his unsympathetic friend.

“Strange place name, Sidbourne Deep, don’t you think?”

Ant struggled to hear what Lyn was saying in the stiffening north wind as he rubbed his right knee with one hand, all the time trying to keep up with his companion’s brisk pace. “Normal for Norfolk, you mean. Just think of Wymondham and Tasburgh. They sound nothing like the way they’re spelled. Dad reckons they did it on purpose during the Middle Ages to identify strangers. If you couldn’t pronounce a place name like the locals, you must be an enemy.”

Lyn smiled. “Always been an awkward lot, haven’t we?”

“If you mean Boudica falling out with the Romans and Robert Kett’s run-in with the king, I suppose you have a point, not that it ended well for either of them, did it?”

She smiled as Ant finally stopped limping and linked arms with her. “No, but I suppose there’s a sort of nobility in standing up for yourself.”

Ant laughed. “If you mean ending up in the mud of a Roman battlefield or hanging from Norwich Castle, then yes, I suppose there is, except everyone else went home for tea while poor old Robert swung like a pendulum, and Boudica never saw Norfolk again after ransacking London.”

“Well, well, I’d forgotten you were such a swot at history; about the only thing you did take an interest in at school if my memory serves me right.”

Without warning, the heavens opened, catching them off guard. “What the... Come on, Lyn, let’s make for Beggar Man’s cave.” He pointed at a small opening in the cliff face around fifty feet distant.

He could see Lyn straining to see where he was pointing to, such was the intensity of the squall. “Just beyond that upturned boat. Come on, let’s get out of this weather before we catch our death.”

Ant unlinked arms with Lyn and pulled her by the hand towards the cave entrance. As they neared the old boat, the sand gave way to a broad line of shingle. Ant swerved to one side and made a final push for the relative safety of the cave. “Thank heavens we’re out of that. Here, take this to dry yourself.” Ant passed Lyn a handkerchief.

She inspected the bedraggled fabric before accepting his gift. “And just how long have you had this in your pocket?”

Ant wore his hurt look. “Not that long, a couple of months... or so. Six at the most.”

She shook her head, causing water droplets to spray over Ant.

“Steady on, girl. Anyway, beggars can’t be choosers.”

Lyn wrung out the square of cloth having rubbed her

hair, then ran her hands through what had been, until a few minutes previously, shoulder-length flowing locks, now reduced to a series of stringlike braids.

“Then why is this called Beggar Man’s cave?” Lyn’s challenge made Ant laugh.

“That’s clever... for you, anyway. Come here, give me that handkerchief.” Without waiting, he grabbed the wizened fabric and started to rub it in a circular motion through Lyn’s hair.

“Er, thank you, but no thank you. Left to you, I’ll end up bald.” Lyn pulled away from her helper and walked farther into the cave, what light there was fading as she walked deeper into the cliff.

Ant followed, straining to make out the uneven surface of the ancient excavation. “Suit yourself but don’t moan to me when you come down with a cold.”

Lyn let out a throaty laugh. “So says the king of man flu.”

As their eyes became accustomed to the murky light, Ant felt compelled to run a hand over the jagged stone of the cave wall. “Notice anything?”

Lyn looked around, put a finger to her chin, and adopted a studious look. “Er, it’s dark, or is that a trick question, Sherlock?”

“Not at all. No, I mean... look... this place is as dry as a bone. No seepage of water from the surrounding rock. I can see why old One-Arm Jake set up house in here.”

Lyn once more scanned the space, her eyes flitting as minerals within the ancient rocks caught what light there was and sparkled. “Not a bad place for a beggar, I suppose. He must have done all right to have dossed here for so long.”

“Guess you’re right. Dad said he’d been told Jake lost his arm in WWI and when he came home the man couldn’t cope with normal life after what he had experienced in

France, so he lived out the rest of his life in here. I guess the locals must have brought him food and slipped him the odd penny. Sad, really.”

The cave fell silent as Ant’s words bounced around the hard surfaces before being lost in the dark.

“Come on, don’t go into a decline on me. Let’s see if it’s stopped raining.”

Lyn’s words struck home and shook Ant out of his darker thoughts.

Straight to the truth of it as usual.

He followed Lyn to the cave mouth and scanned the horizon. The sky still looked threatening, promising more heavy downpours. “I always wanted to go to sea, you know. Pity I can’t stand being seasick. Mind you, it didn’t put Nelson off, did it?” Still taking in the majesty of the North Sea, he waited for Lyn to respond, half expecting her to rib him about throwing up when sailing on anything other than the calm of the Norfolk Broads. “Lyn, did you hear what I said?”

Still his friend didn’t answer. Ant turned his attention from the incredible vista before him to see what Lyn was up to. “Lyn, you’re as white as a sheet. What’s wrong?”

“What? Yes... I, er, what were you saying?”

“For goodness’ sake, woman, what’s up with you?” He watched as she slowly began to move forward ignoring the lingering drizzle. She stopped about four feet away from the upturned boat that straddled the entrance of the cave. “Look.”

Ant strained to see to what she was referring. “Look at what. Are you ill? This isn’t like you.”

Lyn didn’t answer. Instead, she lowered herself to her knees. “It’s hair.”

By now Ant stood at her side and now understood what

she meant. Silence once again fell as both friends tried to make sense of what they were looking at.

“It’s rope, Lyn. I’m sure of it.”

Lyn reached forward to touch the damp strands snaking out from underneath the broken vessel. “No, it’s not, Ant. Someone is inside the boat.”

Ant gently touched Lyn’s hand to encourage the woman to let go of whatever it was.

Oh no. I think she’s right.

“Lyn... Lyn, let go. There’s only one way to find out, isn’t there?” Ant put a hand under Lyn’s elbow and helped her to her feet. “Come on, stand back, and I’ll flip it over.”

Doing as she was asked, Lyn stepped away from the sad scene and watched as Ant took hold of one edge, being careful to avoid the material Lyn had run through her fingers.

“Shouldn’t we ring the police first?”

Ant turned to his friend, almost causing him to lose his grip of the boat. “And what if it is old rope, Lyn. Imagine what dear Inspector Riley would have to say.” Not waiting for a response, Ant turned his attention back to righting the weather-beaten vessel. Loose paint flaked off as he manhandled the boat, leaving a scattering of red and white flakes on the shingle beneath. With one last heave, Ant flipped the vessel over and watched it rock back and forth until it found its balance. As he turned to look at what lay inside, he hoped against hope that he was right about the rope. He soon had his answer.

“What a terrible way to leave this world.” Lyn moved forward as she spoke, her eyes fixed on the tragic scene.

AFTERWORD

Well, what did you think?

I hoped you enjoyed your special extract of Dead... Again. Don't forget, I always like to hear from my readers, whether comments are positive or constructively critical!

...And don't forget you can buy the full version of this book by tapping here.

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