

HELENA MARCHMONT



BUNBURY
A COSY MYSTERY SERIES



DROP DEAD, GORGEOUS



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BUNBURY – A COSY MYSTERY SERIES

Miss Marple meets Oscar Wilde in this new series of cosy mysteries set in the picturesque Cotswolds village of Bunbury. Here, fudge-making and quaffing real ale in the local pub are matched by an undercurrent of passion, jealousy, hatred and murder - laced with a welcome dose of humour.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Deb's Beauty Salon becomes the last resting place for merry widow and property magnate Eve Mosby, whose passions include haute couture and a young lover. Plenty of people disliked Mrs Mosby, but enough to kill her? And what really baffles amateur sleuth Alfie McAlister and his friends Liz and Marge is that the body is found in a locked room - how did the murderer get in and out?

CAST

Alfie McAlister flees the hustle and bustle of London for the peace and quiet of the Cotswolds. Unfortunately, the “heart of England” turns out to be deadlier than expected ...

Margaret “**Marge**” **Redwood** and Clarissa “**Liz**” **Hopkins** have lived in Bunburry their entire lives, where they are famous for their exceptional fudge-making skills. Between Afternoon Tea and Gin o’clock they relish a bit of sleuthing ...

Emma Hollis loves her job as policewoman, the only thing she is tired of are her aunt Liz’s constant attempts at matchmaking.

Betty Thorndike is a fighter. Mostly for animal rights. She’s the sole member of Bunburry’s Green Party.

Oscar de Linnet lives in London and is Alfie’s best friend. He tries luring Alfie back to the City because: “anybody can be good in the country. There are no temptations there.”

Augusta Lytton is Alfie’s aunt. She’s dead. But still full of surprises ...

Harold Wilson loves a pint (or two) more than his job as local police sergeant.

BUNBURRY is a picturesque Cotswolds village, where sinister secrets lurk beneath the perfect façade ...

THE AUTHOR

Helena Marchmont is a pseudonym of Olga Wojtas, who was born and brought up in Edinburgh. She was encouraged to write by an inspirational English teacher, Iona M. Cameron. Olga won a Scottish Book Trust New Writers Award in 2015, has had more than 30 short stories published in magazines and anthologies and recently published her first mystery *Miss Blaine's Prefect and the Golden Samovar*.

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Drop Dead, Gorgeous

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*“A man’s face is his autobiography, a woman’s face is her
work of fiction.”*

Oscar Wilde

1. A FAREWELL DINNER

Alfie passed the leather-bound menu to Betty.

“Have whatever you want,” he said expansively. “Your last meal in Bunburry should be special.”

She quirked an eyebrow at him. “My last meal in Bunburry? You make it sound like ‘the condemned woman ate a hearty dinner’. I’m planning to come back, you know.”

“I’m counting on it,” said Alfie. “The Green Party meetings are going to be sad affairs without you. Just me and the vicar staring into our pints, and we’re not even party members.”

“Thanks for spelling it out.”

Alfie was confused. “Spelling out what?”

“How little difference I’ve made.”

That wasn’t what he had meant at all. This was their first dinner together, and he’d wanted her to know that he would miss her. Now the evening seemed to be going wrong as soon as it had started.

He could point out all the work she did as an environmental activist, the lectures and seminars, the articles, the tireless organising of meetings and events. But there was every chance that she would just call him a patronising jerk. You had to tread warily where forthright American feminists were concerned.

He looked round the pub. The tourist season was almost over, but The Drunken Horse had no problem attracting locals. Two barmaids and a barman were busy serving under the supervision of Edith, the elderly mother of The Horse’s owner. But there was no sign of either the owner or his wife.

“I wonder where William and Carlotta are,” he mused.

“They’re in Italy, visiting Carlotta’s family,” she said.

“They left yesterday. Edith couldn’t wait to see them go – she loves being in charge.”

In a few months, Alfie would have been in Bunburry for a year. But it still amazed him how everybody seemed to know everything about everybody else, and he didn’t. Perhaps there was a secret village website. Perhaps after a year’s residence he would be given the password.

Betty closed the menu.

“So, what would you like?” Alfie asked.

“An omelette.”

Alfie blinked. If Betty had been another kind of woman entirely, he would have assumed she was on a diet. But Betty was too active to need to go on a diet, and he suspected she would have ethical objections to women dieting anyway.

“Cheese,” she elaborated. “With chips.”

He had to admit that The Drunken Horse’s hand-cut chips were outstandingly good, and he had already decided to have some along with a medium-rare fillet steak, one of his favourites. And probably mushrooms and broccoli with almonds as well. A cheese omelette paled in comparison.

“Have something more exciting than that,” he urged.

“A cheese omelette will be just fine.”

He picked up the menu and scrutinised it. Now he could see the problem. Edith was indeed in charge. Gone were all Carlotta’s pastas and risottos, which Edith constantly disparaged as “foreign muck”. Instead, the menu was a carnivore’s delight, with vegetarians like Betty confined to an omelette – cheese or mushroom, since the other options were ham or shrimp.

And he should have been thinking more tactfully. She had never tried to impose her vegetarianism on him but marking her departure by tucking into a juicy steak wouldn’t impress her.

He stood up. "Come on," he said. "We're going."

"But ... we can't. You booked the table. What will Edith think?"

He grinned down at her. "What will Edith think? I'll tell you exactly what Edith will think. She's already convinced that you're my girlfriend, so she'll think we've decided to spend your last evening doing something much more exciting than having dinner in The Horse. And that's exactly what we're going to do."

She hesitated. "I don't -"

He grabbed her jacket from the back of her chair and pulled her to her feet. "Come on! Edith's not looking - we can make a run for it."

He tugged her out of the pub and into the cool evening air.

She snatched her jacket from him and put it on.

"So," she said, "what are we doing that's more exciting than dinner in The Horse?"

"Dinner where vegetarian cooking is a speciality," said Alfie. "Follow me."

They walked through the narrow, cobbled streets to the village's Indian restaurant, From Bombay To Bunburry.

It was packed, and for a dreadful moment, Alfie thought they were going to have to slink back to The Horse and order cheese omelette and chips for two.

But Rakesh Choudhury rushed over to them. "Betty, Alfie, what a pleasure. Sit in or takeaway? Sit in, good, good, I have one table left, specially for you. So sorry, we're a little busy this evening. Here we are. I'll leave you to look at the menu. Any drinks? Yes, of course, two Indian beers, right away."

He shot off to attend to another set of customers.

Betty watched him go. "Wonder what's up with him. He's not himself."

Alfie knew the answer to this one. Liz and Marge had told him. Feeling part of the Bunburry news network at