



HELENA MARCHMONT



BUNBURY
A COSY MYSTERY SERIES



SWEET REVENGE



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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. In “Murderous Ride,” the second Bunbury book, Alfie discovers that he has not only inherited a cottage from his late Aunt Augusta but also a 1950s Jaguar. He is dismayed: for reasons of his own, he no longer drives. Aunt Augusta’s best friends, Liz and Marge, persuade him to get behind the wheel again - but that’s just the start of his troubles.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Alfie is back in London, trying to pick up his old life there. But even a wild social whirl with his best friend Oscar can't disguise the fact that he misses Bunburry. And then a cry for help reaches him - Liz and Marge are in trouble, and Alfie races back. But as he and Police Constable Emma Hollis join forces to clear the ladies' names, he has to confront a growing suspicion. Has Liz made a mistake while making her celebrated fudge, or have the ladies been up to something more sinister?

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*.

HELENA MARCHMONT



Sweet Revenge

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events, and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental. This book is written in British English.

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This ebook contains an excerpt of "Cherringham - Murder under the Sun" by Matthew Costello and Neil Richards.

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“Marriage is a long, dull meal with dessert served at the beginning.”

Oscar Wilde

1. LONDON TOWN

The wine waiter held out the bottle of red, displaying the label.

“Would you like to taste it, sir?” he asked.

Before Alfie could reply, Oscar said: “Just pour it as quickly as you can. We’re in urgent need of alcohol’s anaesthetizing properties.”

Radiating disapproval, the wine waiter filled Oscar’s glass, and even as he turned to do the same for Alfie, Oscar drained a quarter of it.

“Thank you, my dear fellow. I needed that,” said Oscar. “Stay close. I imagine we’ll need a second bottle before too long.”

The waiter placed the bottle on the table. “Very good, sir,” he said, his tone implying the opposite, and stalked off.

“You’ve upset him,” said Alfie. “He thinks a wine with such an exorbitant price tag should be treated with more respect.”

Oscar took another draught and topped up his glass. “My dear McAlister, since *I’m* paying the exorbitant price tag, I think I can treat it any way I like. And however upset our waiter friend might be, he’s not as upset as I am.”

Alfie laughed. “You knew it was going to be an avant-garde production.”

“There’s avant-garde and there’s sacrilege,” said Oscar. “When one is performing Shakespeare, there must be limits. Dear God, I never thought I’d live to see Antony and Cleopatra whizzing around the stage on Segways. I would have walked out had we not been sitting in the middle of the row.”

“I wouldn’t have let you,” said Alfie equably. “That would have been very unkind to the cast. When you and I were in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, how would you have felt if someone had walked out?”

“I would have assumed they had been called away to a family emergency,” said Oscar. “You and I were excellent. And we weren’t on Segways.”

Alfie had first met Oscar in that amateur production. It was an unlikely friendship: Alfie, the self-made man, brought up by a single mother in London’s East End; Oscar de Linnet, languidly aristocratic, who had only ever lived a life of privilege. Oscar had no hesitation in indulging his eccentricities, and only ever had phone conversations on a landline to avoid the problem of a mobile signal breaking up.

Alfie also suspected that this 21st-century Oscar thought of himself as a reincarnation of Oscar Wilde. Perhaps a Wildean quote might be a way of getting through to him right now.

“When a man is old enough to do wrong, he should be old enough to do right also,” Alfie remarked.

Oscar quirked an eyebrow. “I sense an implied rebuke, my friend.”

“Perhaps you could sip your wine instead of swigging it?”

Oscar made a show of raising his glass to the light in order to study the colour, before swirling the liquid round and round.

“And now to assess the bouquet,” he said, taking a deep sniff. He paused. “Ah.” He took a delicate mouthful of wine, and carefully replaced the glass on the table. “I say, Alfie, that really is rather special.”

Oscar signalled to the wine waiter who came over with obvious reluctance.

“Another bottle, sir?”

“Absolutely not,” said Oscar. “This is a wine to be savoured, not downed like lemonade. I wanted to apologise. I mistreated it. It’s no excuse, but I was recovering from a most traumatic experience.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, sir. I hope all is now well.”

“It’s not the sort of behaviour you expect from the queen of Egypt - ”

“Everything’s fine,” Alfie broke in. “We’re very happy with the wine. Thank you.”

The wine waiter left, looking confused, as a waitress arrived with the Wagyu beef. She was young, like many of her Bunburry counterparts, but unlike them had no visible piercings or tattoos. She was perfectly groomed, wearing her uniform as though it was haute couture, and she presented the plates as though they were the latest treasures in the British Museum.

“The finest steak in the world,” said Oscar enthusiastically. “Don’t you agree?”

Alfie, pretending to concentrate on chewing, inclined his head in a way he hoped signalled agreement. But the truth was he didn’t agree. He had travelled the world - had eaten Wagyu beef in Japan - and the finest steak in the world was definitely served in the Drunken Horse Inn, Bunburry.

He glanced round at his plush surroundings, velvet drapes, monogrammed plates, original art on the walls, a battalion of waiting staff. It couldn’t be more different from the Horse, a traditional English pub, some of whose wooden chairs were distinctly rickety. But the Horse’s lovingly prepared, locally sourced food was better than the meal in front of him, which cost at least five times more than anything in Bunburry.

But the latest phone call from the village had revealed that the Horse had changed since his return to London three months ago.

“You remember Edith?” he asked.

Oscar laid down his knife and fork. "Ah, the redoubtable Edith, the first person to greet me when I came to visit. My dear fellow, I could win Mastermind with the inhabitants of Bunburry as my specialist subject. Edith, mother of William, who is landlord of the Drunken Horse, and mother-in-law of the tempestuous Carlotta. Engaged in a perpetual battle to serve traditional English fare to the Horse's patrons in preference to Carlotta's fine Italian cooking, which Edith describes as 'foreign muck'."

He picked up his fork again and made inroads on the fondant potatoes. "I overheard huge praise for Carlotta's braised rabbit pappardelle - though never in Edith's hearing, obviously. I'm sorry I didn't have the chance to try it."

"And now you've missed your chance completely," said Alfie. "Carlotta's gone vegan."

Fondant potatoes fell from Oscar's fork. "Did you say - ?"

Alfie nodded. "Arrivederci braised rabbit pappardelle. Hello quinoa and lentils. Edith is apoplectic."

"As, I presume, are the diners," said Oscar.

"Not at all," said Alfie. "Carlotta's new menu is very popular. Which of course has made Edith even more apoplectic. William's now spending most of his time outside, smoking to calm his nerves."

Oscar raised his glass. "To Mesdames Hopkins and Redwood. Long may they continue to supply you with the latest Bunburry news."

"Liz and Marge are very good with their weekly phone call," Alfie agreed, raising his own glass. "That reminds me. They sent you this with their compliments."

From his jacket pocket, he retrieved a small bag, neatly tied with a red ribbon, and handed it to Oscar.

"And long may the dear ladies continue to supply me with the best fudge in the Cotswolds," Oscar said. "I take it the fudge-making business continues to do well?"