



## **LIVING THE DREAM**

Tales from Corny Cove  
PREQUEL

Alannah Foley

When redundancy forces Henry and Margaret to rethink their life options, they decide to sell their home in central England and move south to the warmer climes of the delightfully picturesque coast of Cornwall.

However, as they travel round in their campervan in hot pursuit of their dreams, they discover the road to paradise has one or two potholes.

Read LIVING THE DREAM and join Henry and Margaret as they head off into the sunset...

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### **A Quick Note on Lingo**

This work is written in British English, so a few words might be different for American readers – eg caravan = trailer, windscreen = windshield, flat = apartment, bin = trash, etc.

## CHAPTER 1

The 'R' word. Redundancy. Whispers had slithered like a venomous snake about the corridors of the Council for months. And then, without warning, the cobra struck. *One bite, many wounded.*

But just what *do* you do if you're made redundant from your job? A job you were dedicated to. Where you thought your elders respected and valued the work you'd done... Only to find that, after thirty years of loyal service, you're no longer wanted. Tossed aside like a pull-ring off an old Coke can. Like Henry Mooney.

"Oh, well," Henry sighed, "maybe it's the right time for me to leave. Being a traffic warden isn't what it used to be, Margaret," he said as he and his wife sat at the kitchen table eating breakfast. "Years ago, people *respected* authority. I rarely had any trouble from the public. Nowadays, I worry for my own safety when I put a ticket on a car."

Henry wasn't the tallest of men, and with his meagre frame and little round glasses, people often saw him as an easy target. He stabbed a bread soldier into one of his boiled eggs, recalling his latest run-in with a disgruntled car owner who had taken him to task for leaving a ticket on his windscreen. A hulking great man with a bald head that was made up for by a wiry thatch of chest hair poking out from the top of his open-neck shirt, he towered over Henry like a tall building, casting a shadow over him as he leant in with an angry glare.

Henry didn't mind admitting he was intimidated. *Who wouldn't be?* The man was clearly more than capable of knocking his block off with one swipe of the fist, and was aggrieved that he'd been slapped with a ticket when he was only a few minutes over his allotted time. *More like twenty*, Henry thought, trying to explain in a somewhat anxious voice that he'd already written the ticket. *He couldn't just rip it up, now, could he?*

Henry counted himself lucky that he'd got away without incurring a black eye that day – or worse. Either way, the Council were either going to have to start sending body-guards round with the traffic wardens, or do away with parking fines and find other ways of taxing the already over-taxed public, he thought.

Henry prodded away at his egg. "'Corporate restructuring', they're calling it," he moaned. It was his last day of employment with the Council and the overcast skies seemed to mirror his mood. "Fancy name for government cutbacks is all it is... Thought I'd have found another job by now, but the world of work seems to have changed since I was a lad."

Margaret listened, not sure how best to help.

"The woman at the Job Centre reckoned I hadn't amassed many 'transferable skills' working as a traffic warden – or 'Civil Enforcement Officer', as they prefer to call me these days." Sadly, Henry realised, his working life had, over the years, become riddled with corporate speak. His words hung in the air as they ate in silence.

A shaft of morning sunlight came in through the kitchen window, bringing with it a glimmer of hope. "Maybe you could think of it as an early retirement," Margaret reflected, attempting to make light of the whole affair.

"Hmm..." mused Henry with a faraway look in his eye, egg yolk dripping from another bread soldier. Margaret was surprised to see Henry was taking her comment seriously. After all, they weren't over the hill yet. Henry would find another job and they still had a good few more years left until the Government deemed it time for them to start drawing a pension and spending it on essentials like luxury cruises.

"What're you cooking up this time, Henry?" asked Margaret, narrowing her perceptive green eyes. He might have worked as a lowly traffic warden, but his mind was keen and always working on something, whether it was how to fix his model boats and planes, or planning his next birdwatching trip.

"I think you may just have a point there, Margaret," he said, lifting his yolky bread soldier thoughtfully. "After all, we haven't got any kids to worry about. And we've often talked about retiring down south to Cornwall, haven't we? I mean, I spent many a holiday there when I was a lad, and there's hardly a year goes by we don't go down there. So why not make the break *now*?"

"But what about my job?... The house?" countered Margaret, frowning her brow. She felt fine when their retirement plans were only a distant dream. Then they could let their minds fly and explore all sorts of wonderful possibilities. Maybe they could buy a quaint Cornish teashop and serve up cream teas, they'd thought. Perhaps they could buy and rent out a holiday cottage in the countryside surrounded by cows and sheep. Or maybe they could even live in a motorhome and explore the rural delights of the British Isles before settling down by the coast.

But dreams were one thing, thought Margaret, reality was another. And now, here was Henry, dragging all their dreams from that fluffy safe space in the future, right into the daunting present. Margaret couldn't help feeling a touch anxious at the thought of turning their lives upside down so soon. Henry's redundancy had been enough to digest as it was.

"Well, we *could* sell the house, Margaret... People sell houses all the time... And we could buy a business down in Cornwall or something, like we've always talked about... Only... just a... decade or so early...?" his words slowed as he looked up to see that Margaret wasn't exactly warming to the idea.

Had Henry not had this decision thrust upon him, he wouldn't have entertained the notion of jacking things in this early and trying out something new. So, despite his enthusiasm, he could see why Margaret might not want to up-sticks and leave. Not only did she have a secure job – or as near to secure as you could get working for a government institution these days (as Henry himself had discovered) – but she'd grown up in the house they lived in.

When her parents had died a few years back, Margaret had inherited the house, along with her brother. She'd offered to buy his half, then she and Henry sold their own home and moved in. It was a lovely detached residence on the outskirts of Lichworth, a leafy town in south Staffordshire which was handy for their daily city commute – Margaret travelling over an hour in the rush-hour traffic in one direction, and Henry doing the same in the other direction. The decision to move would be much tougher for Margaret than it would be for Henry. Still, now that she'd planted the seed of an idea in his mind, Henry wasn't going to give up so easily.

"Just think about it, Margaret. How many people wait till they're half dead before they live their dream, eh? Most people are on their way out of this world by the time they retire. Or too tired to bother doing anything new... You've opened my eyes, Margaret," he enthused, prodding another eggy bread soldier into the air. "Maybe I've been handed a golden goose with this redundancy instead of the booby prize!"

At first, Margaret had regretted even putting the thought about early retirement into his head, but when she thought about it, Henry made a strange kind of sense. As a full-time nurse for many years, Margaret saw all manner of patients in hospital who were old or dying before their time. Fifty-year-olds with heart conditions because they neglected their health; people of sixty years plus who had to have hip replacements; younger folk in their thirties or forties with restricted use of their body because they were obese; patients of all ages with all manner of cancers. And, although Margaret was a healthy petite woman who, along with Henry, kept fit with regular cycle rides and walks with the Ramblers, she'd witnessed enough to know that nothing in life was guaranteed. Even fitness fanatics died young or became incapacitated for one reason or another.

No one really knew how long they had to live, thought Margaret, recalling one elderly patient she'd cared for who'd had a profound effect on her. In his day, he'd been an English professor who lived for poetry; and he would ask her to read to him whenever she could. Yet, despite his sense of romance, he'd lived more in his dreams than in reality. Riddled with regret over all the things he'd left undone, his final words to her as he slipped away one afternoon while she held his hand at his bedside were "carpe diem". *Seize the day*. It was all the more reason to live the life you wanted while you were healthy and mobile.

The more she thought about it, the more Margaret realised Henry might be right. After all, what was *really* keeping them in Staffordshire? Both Henry's and her parents were gone now. They had extended family, but no children of their own to think about; and although she enjoyed her work, Margaret would be turning fifty this year. *The big five-OH!* she thought with a sigh. Time seemed to whizz by at an alarming rate and she wasn't getting any younger. How much longer would it be before she got tired of the long hours and heavy lifting involved in her job? And how long would it be before the hospital went through its own 'corporate restructuring'? At her age, she'd be the first in line to get a redundancy letter. Perhaps this could be the right time to make a move after all.

Margaret suddenly realised she'd been staring at her toast for the past few minutes. Henry studied her, wondering whether he'd pushed things too far, thinking only of himself. But, surprisingly, his wife looked more contemplative than harassed.

"Hmm... Perhaps you're right, Henry..." said Margaret, still deep in thought. He smiled and dipped the last bread soldier into his egg. Permeating through the smell of boiled eggs was the sweet scent of freedom – *and it felt good*, thought Henry. Perhaps he was going to enjoy his last day at work after all!

## CHAPTER 2

*Several months later*

"This has *got* to be the most beautiful place we've been to so far in Cornwall – don't you think, Henry?" Margaret said as they sat in the front of their Autosleeper campervan, breathing in the salty sea air through the open window. Parked in the small car park at Corny Cove beach, they watched as seagulls hovered in the vivid blue sky, soaring over the ocean as it glistened beneath the sun.

Henry nodded. "It's stunning. And I bet the views from those cliffs behind us are even better," he said, taking a sip of tea they'd made just now on the gas hob at the back of the van. "Maybe we could go for a walk up there later – after our appointment with the estate agent in the village, that is."

Margaret sighed, a hand curled round her steaming mug. "I wonder how long it's going to take for us to find our dream 'place to be'," she said.

"Crikey, we've only been on the road for a couple of months, Margaret. We've got *plenty* of time," Henry replied. "Anyway, out of the two of us, you've always been the who liked the idea of travel... We've got the camper, so we can travel to your heart's content. You're living the dream right there – aren't you?"

"Well, I've always enjoyed our holidays down here in the past – but the odd week here and there with something more definite to do is a bit different from dotting about from one place to another in Cornwall, like we're doing now. I feel like a bubble floating about, going nowhere."

"Well, that's half the fun of it, Margaret. And we're not dotting about *willy-nilly*, are we? We're checking in with the local estate agents to see if there are any businesses around for sale that take our fancy."

"Oh, I know. Maybe I'm just being a bit impatient. I just assumed we would've found somewhere by now."

"Well, you can't expect miracles, Margaret. Anyway, something's bound to turn up soon... And I've got a good feeling about this place."

Margaret didn't feel down very often, but by now, she was starting to lose hope. She'd lost count of the number of places they'd viewed so far. There were souvenir shops, cafés, ice cream parlours, fish and chip shops, bed and breakfast establishments... But none seemed 'just right'. Still, Margaret couldn't help feeling buoyed by Henry's infectious enthusiasm. And, she too, had a good feeling about the place. Despite the beauty of some of the other areas they'd checked out along the coast, Corny Cove had some indefinable magical quality that she hadn't experienced before.

"Hmm... I suppose you're right. I think the café that was up for sale – the one we went to see yesterday – put me off a bit, that's all. We're into September now – not even the height of the holiday season – and those waitresses were rushed off their feet. I mean, I don't mind working hard, Henry – you know that. But I imagined us taking things down a notch – finding something we could take on at a more relaxed pace."

"Well, that café *was* in a major tourist spot *and* it was right on the sea front, wasn't it?" Henry replied. "We might have more luck round here – it's a bit quieter."

"That's all very well, Henry," Margaret frowned, "but if there aren't enough holidaymakers in an area, we might not pick up enough trade to keep a business going."

"Well, we've set up an appointment with the estate agent in the village, so let's wait and see what this teashop's like that he wants to show us before you go losing heart, eh, love?" he said optimistically, trying to comfort her.

He reached over and squeezed her hand, all too aware that she'd given up much more than he had. Not only had she handed in her notice at the hospital, she'd sold her family home. It had been a lot to handle within a short time – especially as the house had sold the minute they put it on the market. Margaret had imagined it would take a year or so. And in that time, she could mentally prepare for the changes ahead. She'd have time to get used to the idea of leaving her beloved job and moving down south, and they could explore the possibilities for generating an income before their official retirement ages. All in all, the transition would've been much more seamless and smooth had it been spread over a longer period.

Instead, it had been a whirlwind affair, and before she knew what was happening, everything Margaret had cherished over the years was suddenly gone. And, to think... It had been the dying words of her beloved poetry-loving patient, *carpe diem*, that had motivated her to agree to making the changes in the first place. But once her world started turning upside down, those words didn't seem to offer any comfort – she just needed time to process it all.

In contrast to Margaret, Henry found the whole experience to be like some exciting camping adventure with the Scouts. There were endless possibilities for exploration – who knew what they might find down in Cornwall! In fact, it was only through Henry making a wrong turn in the camper that they'd stumbled upon Corny Cove that morning.

No, Henry had no regrets. This was an adventure, all right. There was no going back now. Margaret was the one who'd made him see that this was a second chance at life. Finally, the world was his oyster – his redundancy had set him free. Henry had worked full-time for long enough in his uninspiring traffic warden job and it was time for a change.

"You're right... Things might look different after we've seen the teashop," Margaret said, returning Henry's squeeze of the hand. "In fact, if there's one dream I'd really like to come true, it would be to own a teashop... Not a bustling place like that last café we went to go and see, but something quaint... Vintage decorations, bone China teacups, creams teas... that sort of thing," she gushed, as though her energy had suddenly returned.

"Well, Margaret," Henry said, patting her hand before glancing at his watch, "why don't we drive back into town, find somewhere to park and take a look around? Our appointment's in half an hour."

## CHAPTER 3

"Well, that was disappointing," Margaret sighed as she and Henry tucked into a plate of fish and chips later at the café overlooking Corny Cove harbour. A couple of seagulls circled and squawked nearby as a painted-blue boat chugged past, taking a couple of fishermen out on a tourist fishing trip.

"Disappointing?" Henry frowned. "I'm confused... I thought you loved the place...? In fact, it was the *exact* sort of place you were describing as your dream teashop right before we went to go and see the place."

"Oh, no, the *teashop's* not disappointing. It's wonderful... *perfect*, in fact!"

"Well, I'm glad you think so. Because, I think I've fallen in love with it as well. And that workshop space out the back is perfect for my models and electronic gadgets – they'll finally be able to come out of storage and find a new home. To be honest, I can't see what it is you're disappointed about."

"Well, there's no point us putting an offer in, is there? I mean, where would we live? We can't stay in the flat above that comes with the property. The owners have got tenants in there with another year left on the contract."

"Come off it, Margaret. Landlords break contracts on rental properties all the time. If you really *are* interested in buying the place, we'd just serve them notice. They could be out in a month."

"But that's someone's *home*, Henry. I don't know about you, but *I* couldn't toss them out."

Henry rolled his eyes. Margaret was too good sometimes.

"Well, if we bought the place and *didn't* toss them out, we'd lose a lot of money renting somewhere else," Henry said. "I can't believe how much people charge these days... Rent wasn't that expensive back in my day."

"Your day? Oh, you mean back when you could barter your rent for a goat?" Margaret joked, finally raising a smile.

Henry smiled back then stuffed another slice of battered fish down his gullet. He closed his eyes to savour the taste. "Cor, this whiting just melts in the mouth," he said, pausing for thought now. "You know, Margaret, we could always live in the van for a year while we're waiting for the teashop tenancy to expire... Maybe we could get a discount on a site if we rented a pitch for twelve months."

"Are you kidding, Henry? The last couple of months have been enough for *me*. I don't think I could live in the camper for another *year*," Margaret frowned. *What was he thinking?* Besides the fact that they were jostling for space sometimes in their little 'house on wheels', the winter would be setting in soon enough, and the kind of campervan they had wasn't insulated. Even in the relatively temperate climes of Cornwall Margaret was sure they'd find it hard going. In any case, she couldn't wait to get back to sleeping on a normal mattress again.

"You know, instead of buying a business, Henry, maybe we could get a house down here instead then look for a job. There's bound to be work around."

"Well, it's not a bad thought... But I'm not exactly brimming with qualifications, am I? I mean, I know you'd be all right looking for a nursing job or care work, but what sort of work could *I* do?" Henry said, shoving a forkful of chips into his mouth.



"Are you kidding?" Margaret said. "You're always making things and playing with some electronic gadget or other. *And* you're brilliant with DIY and fixing things when they go wrong. You're a man of many talents."

"A jack of all trades, master of none, more like. And I haven't got a recognisable qualification in any of those things, have I?... Always knew I should've finished that electrical apprenticeship with my dad when I was young," Henry groaned. "At least I'd have a proper trade to my name... But what did I go and do? Work for the flippin' Council instead... If only I could roll back time!"

"Well, back then, it was a different ball game. A job with the Council was a job for life. Your dad even encouraged you to go for it. Anyway, what's done is done. We'll just have to manage as best we can, Henry," Margaret tried to commiserate, even though she'd heard the gripe a thousand times.

She picked up her cup of tea and took a sip, glancing round the café, which was decked out in a blue-and-white nautical theme, with paintings of boats, cliffs and lighthouses on the walls. Turning to look out the window, she gazed at the shimmering sea as a small yacht floated by, trying to catch the gentle breeze in its sail.

"You know, I bet you could get a job painting boats," Margaret said. "I mean, you're always painting those models of yours, and I can't imagine you'd need a major qualification to do that...? I bet there'd be plenty of work around here, too."

Henry looked thoughtful as he downed his knife and fork, his plate now empty. "Hmm... You might have a point there, Margaret. But let's not discard the idea of buying the teashop *just* yet. If there wasn't the added complication of the tenants to worry about upstairs, I think you'd have your heart set on that place, wouldn't you?"

"Well, of course, but..."

"There's no buts about it, Margaret," Henry said firmly as he pushed his plate away. "We've been looking around for a few months now, and this is the closest we've come to finding something we're both keen on that we can afford... And maybe we can find out a bit more about the tenants and their plans – we might be able to come to some sort of arrangement."

"Like what?"

"I don't know... But, well, let's just sleep on it, eh?" Henry said.

"Oh, all right, then," Margaret conceded, putting her empty cup down onto the saucer. "You're right, Henry. I *do* love the teashop... And Corny Cove has definitely got a special something about it. I just feel so comfortable here – like I've finally come *home*."

"Well, there you go... If we *both* like the place, there's nothing to stop us from staying around for a bit and taking some time to re-evaluate our plans. In the meantime, let's keep an open mind on our options."

Margaret nodded. "Fair enough."

"Look, why don't we pop back to see Mr Curnow at the estate agent's and see if he can line up a few more things for us to look at tomorrow – houses, businesses, whatever...? He might even know of any jobs going round the place."

"Sounds good," Margaret said, looking more hopeful now. "Oh, and we could ask him if he knows of any campsites where we could stay."

"Eh? Didn't you see that sign on the way down here?" Henry said, creasing his brow.

"What sign was that?"

"You know... For the Corny Cove Campsite... It was sign-posted along the road – just before we came down that steep hill to the beach." He waved his hand vaguely behind her, in the direction of the harbour and cliffs.

"Ooh, no, I missed that," Margaret said.

"Well, I suppose the sign *was* a bit small. And it *did* look like it had snapped off – I think someone must've picked it up and stuffed it back into the hedge..."

"Well, we might as well stay *there* then – they're bound to have vacancies at this time of year," Margaret said, glad they didn't have to scout round for somewhere to stay.

"If the site's somewhere up on the top of that hill, we might be able to find our way onto the South West Coast Path and get some cliff-top views," Henry enthused. "We could book in for a few days, a week, whatever, and get some walking in while we're here, seeing as we like the place so much." *And maybe I could fit in a bit of birdwatching*, Henry thought but didn't say.

Despite Margaret's initial disappointment about the teashop, Henry's words made her think twice – all was not lost *just* yet. And you never knew what possibilities might still open up. Just like Henry, she had a good feeling about Corny Cove. It was a charming little village with a nice friendly atmosphere that catered for all the basics – an old post office, a grocery store, a range of eateries, and such.

Henry was right, she thought. Why not stay a while and explore what else this little Cornish paradise had to offer?

## CHAPTER 4

It was mid-afternoon now and, after a return visit to Mr Curnow at the estate agent's, the couple drove up the steep hill out of the village and followed the road to the campsite, turning left when they saw the small wooden sign precariously perched in the hedge. They headed down the tarmac driveway, dodging the potholes as they went, finally arriving at the reception area.

Henry parked up and pulled on the handbrake. "Place looks a bit run down, doesn't it, Margaret?" Henry frowned, noticing the shabby paintwork over the door to reception, welcoming the visitor to the Corny Cove Campsite. "Are you sure we want to stay here? I mean, there's probably other sites round about that're better looked after."

Margaret looked the place over. Even the large plate-glass window looked like it could do with a clean. "Well, we're here now," she sighed, not keen on the idea of hunting around for another site. "We could just book a pitch for the *one* night, couldn't we? When we see Mr Curnow tomorrow, we can always ask him if he knows of any other places we can stay."

"Hmm... I suppose so," Henry said before getting out of the van and walking over to reception with Margaret.

The hinges on the reception door gave a reluctant whine as Henry opened the door, and a loud tinkle rang out from the old-fashioned bell above their heads. The moment they stepped inside, a woman in her sixties with greying tousled hair and threadbare olive-green jumper came out from a back room to greet them behind the counter.

"Afternoon," she said in a friendly voice, smiling to show off her unattractive dental care. "You lookin' for a pitch for that lovely campervan o' yours, me 'ansome?"

Henry gave Margaret a look that said "Are we sure about this?". But her eyes just seemed to be saying "Get on with it, Henry!"

"Err... yes, that's right," Henry said.

"Not a problem, my bird! We'm quiet now, so if you want one o' them pitches overlookin' the sea, you're more than welcome."

"Ooh, lovely!" Margaret gushed.

They were interrupted by the woman's husband who walked in wearing a white string vest that looked like it had had one too many laundry sessions mixed in with the dark colours. His thinning grey hair was just as rumpled as his wife's and he was tutting loudly at the small radio in his hands that was horribly hissing and breaking up. He frowned, putting it to his ear as he tried to tune it to the local news station. Desperate, he gave it a few slaps with the side of his hand, but it was obvious the device was useless.

He looked up suddenly now. "Ooh, sorry, me 'ansome. Didn't realise we had customers..." he said lowering the radio. "And 'ere am I, only half dressed."

"Problems with your radio?" Henry asked, trying to ignore his state of attire.

"Bloomin' thing," the man tutted again. "Think I'll have to chuck 'e in the bin."

"I can always take a look at it if you like," Henry offered. "Might just be a loose wire."

The site owner looked down at the radio in his hands and raised his eyebrows. The thing had been on the blink for weeks now and he was convinced it was beyond

repair. "Well, if you wanna give it a go, boy, knock yerself out," he shrugged, handing it over to Henry. "No harm in tryin'... I'm Joseph Truscott, by the way – but jus' call me Joe. And you've already met my lovely wife, Alice, 'ere... So... You stayin' for a few days, then?" Joe gave a broad toothy smile to match his wife's.

"Probably just the *one* night," Henry replied, flitting a glance at Alice, who noted it down in a book behind the desk.

"We'm all out o' welcome packs, my lovers," she said in a Cornish accent that was just as thick as her husband's. "Not much point gettin' any more printed... 'Tis the end o' the season and we'm closin' up in a coupla weeks... Besides, our cousin's boy's wife normally prints 'em up for us and she's gone visitin' down Penzance way."

"I'm sure we'll manage," Margaret reassured her.

"We wouldn't mind fitting in a walk along the cliffs before it gets too late," Henry said. "So I'll take a look at your radio when we get back, if that's OK."

"You takes your sweet time, me 'ansome," Joe smiled. "Gotta enjoy the area while you're 'ere, eh?"

"Just follow that there sign to the cliff-view area of the site, my bird," Alice said, pointing out of the window. "Take whatever pitch you fancy... You can get onto the cliff path easy enough – or go for a walk in the forest. There's signposts all round to tell 'e where to go."

"Right, well, thanks very much," Henry said.

"Is it all right to pay in the morning?" Margaret asked. "Only, you never know, we *might* end up staying another day or two." Henry gave Margaret a strange look. *Who was she kidding?* The Truscotts might be a friendly couple, but they could probably find a site in the area that was better cared-for than this one looked.

"Too right, me 'ansome," Joe continued smiling. "Now you two go off 'n' enjoy yerselves, eh?"

## CHAPTER 5

Henry was just screwing the back onto the site owner's radio when Margaret returned from showering in the toilet block later that day.

"Just as I thought, Margaret," he said. "It was just a loose wire."

"Oh, Joe *will* be pleased," she replied, putting her washbag in the storage area over the cab of the Autosleeper before sitting down at the table.

The kettle on the side was just coming to the boil. Henry put the radio down on the table and went to pull out cups, teabags, milk and spoons to make them a drink before sitting back down opposite Margaret.

"Ooh, thanks," she said as he handed her a steaming mug. "I feel all freshened up now after that shower. Y'know, you wouldn't guess it from the outside of the building, but those showers are clean as a whistle," Margaret went on. "The site owners didn't mention we needed shower tokens... Anyway, luckily I got chatting to the cleaner and she gave me a few to be going on with – which I thought was very kind... Oh! Were those showers lovely and hot, or what?"

"Not like that *last* place we stayed at, then," Henry tutted, raising his eyebrows. "One token lasted all of two minutes – half the time, the water was burning me skin, and the other half, it was like ice."

"Strange how the *ladies'* showers weren't like it, though, wasn't it?" Margaret said, creasing her brow.

"Just my luck!" Henry sighed. "I hope it's not gonna be the same here... Hey, you forgot to bring your towel back, didn't you?"

"No, they've got a drying room," Margaret replied. "It's right next to the washing-up area by the shower block."

At that moment, Henry spotted Joe a short distance away. The site owner was now wearing a slightly-crumpled black polo top, and smiling as he approached a couple of site workers who Henry had noticed earlier while he'd been fixing the radio. From what he could tell, the two of them worked at a snail's pace, and during the time Margaret had been in the shower, all he'd seen them do was prod their forks about in the shrub border to give it a quick weed before sitting down to take what they no doubt thought was a well-earned break.

Joe didn't seem in the least perturbed by their lackadaisical manner, Henry thought. He was just glad they weren't working for *him*. He'd feel like lighting a rocket under their backsides to get them moving.

After a leisurely conversation, the two workers got up from where they were sitting on the grass, overlooking the sea, and all three headed in the direction of the reception. As they trundled past, Joe looked across at their camper and gave them a friendly wave.

Henry put down his tea and picked up the radio, jiggling it in the air. Joe's smile widened and he came across to the camper. "Don't tell me you've fixed it, boy...?" he said, speaking to Henry through the side window which he'd now opened. Margaret saw the two workmen following on, stopping a few steps behind. One had a face full of stubble and looked to be in his fifties. He had his arms crossed over his chest and held his fork in one hand. The other was much younger and rolled a toothpick around his mouth as he leant nonchalantly on his fork.

"It was only a loose wire – no problem to fix it," Henry said.

"Well, that be a miracle. I can't thank yer enough," Joe beamed. "I always likes to listen t' the shippin' forecast."

"Ooh, keen sailor, are you?" Henry enquired as he passed the radio out to him.

"Nah, can't even swim," Joe replied. "I just likes to listen in the night when I can't sleep, 'tis all. I finds it soothin' to listen to."

Henry creased his brow, unsure what to make of the comment. *No accounting for folk, I suppose*. They'd definitely met some interesting types since they'd been down in Cornwall – and logic definitely seemed to fly out the window with some of them.

"You been for that walk, then?" Joe asked.

"We certainly have," Margaret said, putting her empty cup down. "The cliffs down here are just *wonderful*."

"We're off to the village in a minute – it's a lovely clear evening," Henry said.

"Don't suppose you can recommend a nice place to eat?"

"Well, my nephew runs an 'ansome little pub down there. The Stargazy Inn 'tis called. Does proper Cornish fare every night this time o' year. And he's much cheaper than that restaurant down the road – you avoid 'e like the plague, boy. They dishes up half the portions, slaps a fancy French name on 'em and charges yer twice as much," he griped.

"Well, thanks for the warning," Henry said. "I suppose we'd better get ready, then."

## CHAPTER 6

During the night, a fierce storm got up, battering the granite cliffs as if trying to beat the unbeatable into submission.

"Jesus Christ!" Henry yelped, sitting bolt upright in bed as a gust of wind whipped ferociously round the van, rocking it back and forth on the suspension.

By now, Margaret was awake, too, and she watched Henry as he got up, switched on his torch and stepped into the central gap between their two single beds. "Better make sure the handbrake's on nice and secure," he said, leaning forward and yanking back hard on the stick.

"You don't think we're likely to roll along that far and fall off the cliff, do you?" Margaret said with a concerned look on her face.

"Probably not, but I wouldn't like to chance it," he replied, sitting back on the bed, brushing aside images of them toppling to their doom. "I'm surprised they allow campervans on this part of the site if this is how bad the wind gets. They would've been better off putting heavier caravans here, or small chalets."

"If it weren't for the wind, it'd be nice and snug in here, wouldn't it?" Margaret remarked.

"Snug or not, I'm not sure I'll get back to sleep now," Henry said. "Not until the wind dies down a bit, anyway... Fancy a cuppa?"

"Oh, I suppose so. There's no way I'll sleep if you're awake," she replied, sitting up now.

Henry pulled his dressing gown down from the storage space above the cab and put it on. The wind whistled up over the cliff edge again, shaking the van as if it were a toy in the humungous hands of a giant.

Margaret put a hand to her chest before biting her lip and finally raising a smile. "And there I was telling Joe how wonderful I thought the Cornish cliffs were yesterday," she said as Henry plugged in their mini camper kettle.

"Well, at least you can see the funny side," he said, noticing her expression as he switched on the side light and pulled out the bits to make tea with. "In fact," he added, joining her in a smile as the van continued to rock, "apart from that light breeze out there, it's damn well near perfect here."

## CHAPTER 7

The couple eventually went back to sleep and when they awoke the next morning, Henry picked up his watch off the side and looked at the time. *Ten past eight?* he thought, squinting in disbelief. That was unusually late for him.

Henry was naturally an early riser and often went out for a walk before the world roused its tired head. He'd usually take his binoculars with him and check out the local wildlife scene – especially his beloved birds. But there'd be no time for that today. If he was going to fit in a shower and have breakfast before they met up with Mr Curnow, the estate agent, that morning, he'd need to get a move on.

It was then that it dawned on him that all was calm. The van was no longer shaking about. He brushed the curtain aside and looked out the window. Sunlight streamed in through the gap and Margaret lifted a hand to cover her eyes as she lay in the single bed on the opposite side of the van.

"It's a beautiful day, Margaret. Fancy a brew?"

"Ooh, yes, please... You sound in high spirits – considering we didn't get much sleep last night, I mean," she said as he dropped the curtain back down.

Henry hopped out of bed and filled the kettle with water before switching it on. "I have a good feeling about today, Margaret... I can't wait to see what Mr Curnow's got lined up for us... And, who knows, he might even have found out a bit more about those tenants above the teashop," he said, rubbing his hands together.

"I think you must've been dreaming about all this after we chatted about it last night," she smiled. "Anyway, I'm glad you've still got a good feeling about this place. I thought maybe after all that wind last night, it might've put you off."

"Well, I wouldn't want to stay on *this* pitch again if they'd forecast wind, that's for sure. But the site's on a crackin' spot – even if it *is* a bit rough around the edges."

The kettle boiled and Henry poured hot water onto teabags in their cups, steam curling as it rose into the confines of the kitchen area of the van. "You sound like you might be up for staying here another night or two, then...?" Margaret said, sitting up now. Henry prodded the teabags with a spoon, looking across to see Margaret's hopeful face. He knew from their discussion during the night that she was completely taken with the place.

"I suppose we might as well," he said, yielding to her expression. Despite a few obvious flaws, Henry couldn't help taking to the place as well. *And, besides, it was nice and cheap to stay there.*



## CHAPTER 8

Henry took Margaret's remaining shower tokens and headed off to the shower with his towel, washbag and a bag full of fresh clothes. But when he got to the men's side of the toilet block, there was a sign over the closed door saying it was out of order. Beneath it was an arrow and simple instructions directing holidaymakers to use the other facilities.

They surely don't mean us men have to go in with the ladies next door, do they? Henry frowned. *But there could be nubile young women roaming round in there, with only a skimpy towel to protect their modesty!* he thought, horrified. But he had no choice. Not only did he need a shower, but his urge to use the toilet was growing more insistent by the second – and there was no way he'd have time to scout round to see if there was another shower and toilet block on site.

*Oh, for goodness' sake*, Henry whined to himself, feeling desperate now. He gave a loud tut and marched round to the ladies' toilets and tentatively looked in. He couldn't hear any activity and could only hope the coast was clear.

Unfortunately, as he stepped inside, a thin nervous-looking woman wearing a dressing gown and a towel wrapped round her head, let out a yelp at the sight of him. Henry jumped at the sound, trying to explain why he was there and putting his hands out as if to calm her. The woman flinched away and let out another yelp, pulling her dressing gown tight over her chest. She then quickly manoeuvred round him and toddled out, turning back only to give him a wary look. Henry tutted, feeling even more uncomfortable about being in there, but his growing discomfort in other parts of his anatomy overrode all else right now.

As soon as he'd finished up in the toilet stall, Henry decided to get out of there as fast as possible and see if he could find a shower block for men, where he was less likely to cause a stir.

Once he'd freshened up in the other shower block, Henry went to reception. The bell rang noisily above his head as the door squeaked open. *God, I don't know how Joe and Alice put up with that thing ringing all day. It'd drive me nuts.*

"Mornin', me 'ansome!" Joe said, emerging from the back room with a friendly smile on his face, looking like he was wearing the same crumpled black top he'd had on the previous day.

"Morning, Joe!" Henry said. "I just thought I'd come and give you forewarning... You might get a complaint about some strange man terrifying women in the shower."

"Oh? There ain't bin one o' them paedo-wotsits roamin' about the place, has there?" he asked, looking concerned.

"Oh, it's nothing like that, Joe... It's just – well, when I went to use the ladies', I inadvertently upset a female holidaymaker... Quite a thin lady. In her fifties, maybe?"

Joe creased his brow and scratched his head. "Why ever did you use the ladies', me 'ansome?"

"Well, that sign – over the men's toilet...? It said to use the other facilities."

"Oh, I see," Joe said, his face lightening. "The sign was meanin' for you to use the *other* shower block, not the *ladies'*." He was chuckling now, imagining the scene as Henry wandered into the shower.

Henry looked horrified that he'd misunderstood the sign. "Sounds like you might've put the wind up our Mrs Slocombe," Joe said, not looking the least perturbed about the situation. "I knows her well. Old bird's from Lancashire. Stays 'ere every year without fail. Her's an anxious sort. But don't worry, boy. I'll have words with her."

Henry looked relieved. "Don't suppose you know when the shower block'll be open again?"

"My sister's boy, Tom, he's got his own plumbin' business. Got some job on this mornin' but says he'll be over dreckly after that."

"That's good to know," Henry said, informing Joe that they'd like to stay for another couple of days. "Is it all right if we stay on a different pitch, though, tonight?" he asked. "Only that storm was awful last night – the wind off those cliffs was shaking our van about something rotten."

"No problem, boy. You just pitch where you like. Jus' a shame I didn't hear the shippin' forecast last night on me radio. I coulda warned 'e about that storm."

"Oh?" Henry frowned. "Radio still playing up, is it?"

"Nah, I jus' fell asleep afore the forecast came on," Joe smiled.

"Well, thanks for having a word with Mrs Slocombe," Henry said, looking at his watch, "but I'd best be off. We're meeting up with someone in the village in a bit."

"Enjoy your day," Joe said, waving as Henry left and headed off to the camper.

## CHAPTER 9

"Well, thanks for all your help, Mr Curnow," Henry said, shaking the estate agent's hand later that day in his office after returning from their last property viewing. "Looks like Margaret and I have got some thinking to do."

"No problem. But, really, just call me Jeff," he replied. Henry had been referring to him as Mr Curnow all day, even though the estate agent looked to be only in his twenties. When he'd first met the chap, Henry had instantly assumed he would be clueless, given his age. But he soon discovered he was wrong, and was won over by Jeff Curnow's professionalism. Clutching a clipboard, and turned out in a dark suit and tie, he was a well-spoken young man. Fortunately, he had a much lighter Cornish accent than the campsite owners, making communication that much easier. What had impressed Henry and Margaret the most was his enthusiasm for taking on the task of helping a couple from up country realise their dream.

"I'm sorry nothing's really jumped out at you so far. And it's a pity about the teashop. The vendors just won't sell without the reassurance that a new owner would honour the rental agreement on the flat upstairs," Mr Curnow said, raking a hand through his neatly-styled brown hair. "Anyway, there's always tomorrow," he said cheerily. "Unfortunately, there isn't much else I can show you within the immediate village, but I've got a few places lined up only a stone's throw away that you might like."

"Well, that's not a problem, is it, Henry?" Margaret said rhetorically. "It'll give us a chance to see what's around the area."

"Great!... Oh, I forgot to mention... If you need somewhere to stay while you're down here, we've got a few nice holiday homes overlooking the sea for rent that you might like to check out...?"

"It's all right," Margaret said, "we're staying at the campsite up on the cliffs."

"What? Not Corny Cove Campsite?" Mr Curnow frowned. "Oh, I'm sure you can do better than that..." He bit his lip then, realising he might have offended. "Don't get me wrong. It's a gorgeous spot, but from what I've heard, the Truscotts have let the place get well and truly run down. We had it on our books a few months back. Someone even made them a more than generous offer for it."

Henry's ears were pricking up now. "For sale, you say? That's strange... Well, they obviously didn't sell... So how come?"

"Goodness knows," Mr Curnow replied. "More fool them, if you ask me. From what I can gather, the owners are a strange pair. I mean, it's not as if they're gettin' any younger, is it? They won't be able to run the campsite forever – they'll be wantin' to retire soon enough. And if memory serves, Mr Truscott wasn't well when they were trying to sell." Mr Curnow shook his head. "Considering they've let the place go, I'm surprised they didn't take the offer that was on the table – people don't pay over the asking price every day, that's for sure. Mark my words, it won't be long before they realise they should've just taken the money and run."

"Err... Just out of curiosity," Henry asked, "what sort of price were they selling it for?"

"Hmm..." Mr Curnow's brow creased and tapped his pen against his mouth as he thought. "Can't quite recall now. My boss, Josh Renowden, was the one handling the sale, but he's on holiday in Spain at the minute." He noticed Henry's momentary look

of disappointment. "But if you're interested in knowing more, I can easily look up the details on the computer..."

## CHAPTER 10

As they drove back to the campsite later, Henry felt pleased. "That teashop might be struck off our dream list, Margaret," he said, "but we can add campsites to our list of possible avenues for places to look at buying."

"You know, I'm not sure why we didn't think of that before," she said as they turned into the site's driveway.

"If that's the sort of price campsites are going for, then we should be able to afford to buy one. We'd have a nice place to live *and* we'd have an income – just like we would've with the teashop."

"Oh, please don't keep mentioning the teashop, will you, Henry?" Margaret said sullenly. "I had my heart set on that. I think I got my hopes up that the tenants might not mind leaving after all."

"Well, let's see what turns up tomorrow, eh?" Henry said hopefully. "And if it's another wash-out, we can always go searching for another campsite like this somewhere else."

"I can't imagine another place like *this* exists. I mean, none of the sites we've stayed on so far had stunning views like *this*, did they?... It's just a shame this place isn't still up for sale," Margaret sighed. "I know Mr Curnow's right – it *is* a bit run down – but it's so beautiful here."

Henry looked across and put on a smile when he saw his wife's face. She was still the same fair-haired beauty he'd fallen for years ago. And normally, she took everything in her stride – so he hated to see her like this. "Well, don't lose heart yet, Margaret. Something'll turn up," Henry said, patting her clasped hands which were folded on her lap as he pulled up outside reception. "Wait here – won't be a sec."

"Could I get a few shower tokens please, Alice?" Henry asked, once inside.

She gave him a friendly smile as she rooted about behind the desk. "You have these on the house, my lover," she said, giving him a handful of tokens. "Joe said you bin terrorisin' our regulars... Mrs Slocombe was some proper worried seein' you in the ladies'," she added with a chuckle.

Henry's expression turned to concern.

At that moment, Joe stepped through the doorway from the back room. "Did I hear my name mentioned?" he asked.

"I was just teasin' Mr Mooney 'ere about Mrs Slocombe," Alice replied.

"Oh, don't 'e worry about her, boy," Joe said. "I soon put her right, but you still can't use the men's side o' that shower block. My sister's boy, Tom, reckons he can't make it today after all... Got called away to do an emergency job down at the hotel. So we dun't know when he'll be over. Told him not t' worry, though. We'm quiet now, and there's plenty o' showers and toilets in the other block till end o' season."

Henry didn't like the sound of that. Sure, he could always use the toilet in the camper, but he preferred not to. And if he got caught short again, the other block was right over the other side of the site.

"Err... I do the odd plumbing job – only at home and for friends, I mean," Henry said. "I don't suppose you'd like me to see if I can fix the problem...?"

"Well, err..." Joe scratched his head. "We ain't got much in the way o' plumbin' tools 'n' such... Tom always brings his own gear."

"I tell you what," Henry said. "I've got a bunch of tools on board the van, so why don't I grab a few out? Margaret can get herself settled on a pitch somewhere while I'm taking a look. Shouldn't take *too* long to sort you out."

Joe and Alice exchanged glances then beamed a smile.

"Right, boy. It's a deal."

## CHAPTER 11

Margaret's stomach gave a decided growl. She looked up from her novel, put her cup of tea down on the table and glanced at her watch. She'd been sitting there for an hour and a half – and no sign of Henry.

*Might as well drive over to the shower block*, she thought, wondering whether her husband was apt to finish trying to fix the plumbing system any time soon. *He always has to tinker with something*, she thought. *I don't know why he thinks he can fix their plumbing. It's not a small household system he's playing with.*

As Margaret drove over and parked up outside the block, she saw Henry and Joe standing outside with smiles on their faces. Henry looked a bit of a mess and was just taking off a pair of sheer plastic gloves.

"I ain't much for plumbin'. Gardenin's more my thing," she heard Joe say as she stepped out of the van. Margaret frowned at that last comment. As far as she was concerned, the place wasn't exactly a showcase for horticulture. Sure, the wildflowers in the verges and colourful plants in the hedges were a picture of beauty. But in terms of any formal plantings, it left a lot to be desired.

"Love cuttin' hedges 'n' sittin' on me ride-on mower," Joe added. "'Tis what they calls *therapootic*. No, our sister's boy's the one with the plumbin' genes."

*Sometimes wish I didn't have the plumbing gene!* Henry thought, throwing the plastic gloves in the bin nearby. *That wasn't exactly the most pleasant of jobs.* Maybe running a campsite wasn't quite as easy as he'd assumed.

"We're all done, Margaret," Henry said with a self-satisfied look as he turned to his wife. "But what's with the van?"

"Well, we've been so busy gallivanting about the place, we haven't had time to stock up on provisions, have we? I thought we could pop into town and get a bite to eat," she replied, feeling relieved he'd finished in the shower block.

"It's not that time *already*, is it?" Henry frowned, glancing at his watch and noticing it'd been splashed with goodness-knew-what. "Oops! Looks like I lost track of the time again," he said, rubbing at the glass face of the watch. "Anyway, love, I managed to sort the problem in the end... Someone was playing hide and seek with a shampoo bottle – weren't they, Joe? Found one stuck in the pipes," he went on, unsure as to why Joe had closed off the whole place for that alone.

"Yep, your boy's a real marvel," Joe grinned, his hands stuffed in his dishevelled grey trouser pockets. "Don't fancy a job, I s'pose?"

Henry and Margaret exchanged glances. "Err... Are you serious, or was that just a joke?" Henry asked.

"I makes a point of never jokin'," Joe replied with a twinkle in his eye. "'Course I'm serious. We could do with a boy like you around." Henry couldn't help smiling at Joe's continual reference to him as a boy. He knew it was just the Cornish way of speaking, but he was in his fifties, for goodness' sake. Mind you, it *did* make him feel young again.

"Since I was ill earlier in the year, Alice has been onto me to slow down," Joe went on. "I ain't a youngster no more, even if I still feels like it on the inside... Anyway, I knows you won't be interested in workin' 'ere. You two are just passin' through, eh?"

"Well, err... actually, we're looking to move down here," Henry said. "We've been looking at properties with an estate agent today. So it's not such a bad idea after all." He looked at Margaret, wondering whether he was saying the right thing. But her expression was more than agreeable.

"Mind you, we're still looking into our options," Margaret said. "And if we *did* take any work on, we'd have to find somewhere to live – but nothing's turned up that we like yet."

Joe looked thoughtful as they spoke.

"When we were with the estate agent, he happened to mention you had this place up for sale a while ago," Henry said.

"Huh! Not that Renowden fella you're dealin' with, is it?" Joe said grumpily.

"Err... No, a Mr Curnow."

Joe humphed again. "Don't know he. Jus' knows Renowden. Wouldn't trust him as far as I could throw 'im."

Henry and Margaret exchanged glances again. "Why ever not?" That was Margaret now.

"All they thinks of is money, these 'state agents. We had a bloomin' good offer on this place, and we was about to take it, too. But then us found out on the grapevine that the buyer was some fancy bloke from up country who had grand ideas for the place. Was gonna turn it into some sorta Disneyland by all accounts," Joe griped. "And there was that young Renowden fella tryna convince me 'twas someone decent buyin' the place... Tellin' me lies just so's he could get a nice hefty commission... If his father was still alive, he wouldna got away with that sorta behaviour."

Margaret frowned. "Disneyland?"

"Well, I don't rightly know if 'twas *exactly* Disneyland he was gonna turn this place into. But there's no way we was gonna let the likes of he have it and set about ruinin' this beautiful site, that's for sure."

"Err... Don't suppose you'd reconsider putting it back on the market, by any chance?" Henry asked tentatively.

"Why? You're not thinkin' of runnin' a campsite, boy?"

Henry shrugged. "Well, possibly... If we found a nice place and the price was right." He and Margaret gave him a hopeful look.

Joe looked from one to the other, his brow creased. "Well, I'm sorry to disappoint, but Alice and me had it in mind to run the place on for a bit longer... We only put the site up for sale in the first place 'cos I was ill. Angina, see," he said, tapping his chest. "But me pills keeps me right as rain now."

He paused and rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I suppose I *could* have a word with the missus. 'Twas originally her parents' site, see. I can't see as she'd wanna sell up unless we had to, but yer never know, she *might* be persuaded. Leave it with me, and I'll let you know what she says tomorrow."



## CHAPTER 12

After Henry donned some fresh clothes in the car park outside the Stargazy Inn, the couple went inside – and this time, their evening meal was set to folk music. An informal group of local musicians who regularly congregated there were playing to their heart's content.

It was a cheery sight after their long day, Margaret thought. She pushed her empty plate away, smiling and joining in with the locals as they clapped to the tune of the accordionist and penny-whistle player. She couldn't help thinking just how special this place was – yet, somehow she couldn't give herself over to it completely. In the back of her mind, thoughts whirred about the teashop that had slipped through their fingers that day. And now there was the slim chance that the campsite might be on the cards – but would it, too, remain a pipe-dream? Corny Cove seemed so precious that she didn't want to let it go. But if they didn't find somewhere soon, she knew Henry would be urging them on to the next place.

Margaret was distracted from her thoughts by an attractive singer with long dark wavy hair and flowing gypsy-style clothes who was weaving her way over to them as the musicians played a melodic ballad. She was obviously a bit tipsy and proceeded to try and get Henry to stand up and dance. When he politely shook his head, she sashayed her way onto his lap.

Henry flushed with embarrassment, trying to give his wife a look that protested his innocence. *This isn't my fault – I've invited none of it!* But all Margaret could do was stifle a grin, watching him sit there awkwardly as the beautiful troubadour put an arm round his neck and sang for all she was worth.

The couple eventually pulled themselves away from the pub and drove back to the site while it was still light, taking a pitch on a stretch of hard-standing situated on one side of a line of caravans. There'd be no winds whipping up off the cliff to bother them tonight, Henry thought as he pulled the handbrake on.

Used to their rhythms now, Margaret stepped between the front seats and went into the back of the van to fill the kettle with water. Meanwhile, Henry had got out and was just busying himself with the electrics when he caught sight of the occupant of the caravan next door. It was the lady who he'd encountered in the shower block.

*Mrs Slocombe.*

*Oh, great! Of all the places we could've parked, we pitch up next to her,* he thought. Although he'd had reassurances from Joe that he'd 'had words' with the woman, he was wary she might still cause a fuss, given her overreaction to him in the shower block.

From his crouching position behind the electrical hookup point, he felt safe. She hadn't spotted him, so maybe if he just stayed out of sight, he could avoid contact with the woman altogether, he thought. *That would make life a whole lot easier.*

Henry's eye was trained on Mrs Slocombe as she walked across the tarmac and sorted out a box of recycling into the designated bins. He kept his head down when she finally turned around and walked back to the caravan door on the other side of the van.

Once out of view, Henry blew out a sigh of relief and stood up. But as he did so, he noticed the net curtain of the caravan lounge was pulled back – and a thin man with a moustache was glaring at him.

The man, who he assumed could only be Mr Slocombe, definitely did *not* look happy, Henry thought, realising that, from *his* point of view, it may well have looked like he'd been surreptitiously crouching down to ogle his wife. Henry put up his palms as if in surrender and shook his head, silently protesting his innocence. Then the net curtain was abruptly closed, as if in a huff, and the man was gone. *Thank goodness for that*, Henry thought, dropping his shoulders.

A moment later, though, the curtain was yanked back up, this time revealing a more red-faced Mr Slocombe. He jabbed an accusing finger in Henry's direction then turned to his wife, who was now behind him, his growling words muffled behind the window. Mrs Slocombe put a hand nervously over her mouth and nodded vigorously.

The net curtain dropped back down and Henry suddenly felt anxious, fearful of what might happen next. *Was Mr Slocombe about to come out and knock his block off?* He wasn't going to wait around to find out! Henry quickly stepped over to the camper, pulled back the side door and leapt in, slamming the door behind him and tripping the lock.

"Goodness, do you need to be so loud, Henry? You made me jump, closing the door like that," Margaret frowned as she stood in the kitchen area at the back of the van, putting milk in the teacups.

"Err... Sorry, love," Henry said as he sat on one of the seats by the table. He nervously kept an eye out the window as Margaret joined him.

"Are you all right, Henry? You look a bit pale," she said, passing his tea across the table.

He looked vacant for a few seconds. "Err... fine... Yes, love, I'm fine," he said to Margaret, patting the back of her hand and trying to raise a smile. Henry sipped his tea, his gaze still trained on the caravan as he looked over the top of his cup.

"You know, I reckon that woman's got you all flustered," Margaret said, narrowing her eyes at him as she took a sip of tea.

"Err... Woman?" Henry said, trying to hide his uncomfortable expression behind the cup. *Looks like Margaret must've seen everything from inside the van after all*, he thought.

"You know – that singer at the pub," Margaret said, grinning at him now. "You should've seen yourself – sitting there, squirming like that."

Henry kept quiet. He had enough on his plate worrying about the present situation with Mrs Slocombe without having to think about some Gypsy Rose Lee type latching onto him back in the village. Either way, he was just glad Margaret hadn't copped onto what had occurred outside the van.

"Oh, I *did* need a good chuckle like that," Margaret said. "Took my mind off the teashop and whether the Truscotts might sell this place... What do you think, Henry? Do you think they'll change their minds about selling up?" Margaret asked.

"Err..." Henry said hesitantly, still thinking about Mr Slocombe. Surely, if he was planning to defend his wife's honour by beating the living daylights out of him, he would've been round by now, he thought, relaxing his shoulders a little and lowering his cup now. "Well, I certainly *hope* they'll sell... If we can buy it off them for the same price they had it on the market for earlier in the year, we should be able to afford it. From what I can see, the place seems to be OK structurally – just needs a lick of paint here and there."

"I love all the wildflowers about the place, but there's definitely scope for some nice flower borders, too. It'll liven the place up."

"Yeah, and I tell you what else would liven the place up... Some decent staff. The crew they've got on board here look like a bunch of layabouts," Henry moaned.

"Well, I don't know about that, Henry. Their cleaner, Mrs Jago, makes the toilet and shower area sparkle. I'd be happy to keep someone like that on, if she wanted to stay, of course."

"Huh! Whenever I see her about the place, she's always leaning on that mop of hers, gossiping to all and sundry. I haven't seen her push that mop round *once*. And as for those workmen..." Henry rolled his eyes and tutted. "If it was up to me, I'd get rid of the lot of them and start over afresh – throw a bit of money at the place to bring it up to scratch and get in some vibrant new workers who look like they're ready for action."

Margaret shrugged. "I suppose you're right. It *would* be nice to start over with a clean slate," she said. "Anyway, I've already been disappointed with the teashop, so let's not put the cart before the horse, eh? The Truscotts may not even decide to sell yet... But if they don't, you could always *work* here, couldn't you? Joe seemed serious about that job offer."

Given his feelings about the workers, Henry wasn't exactly sure, on reflection, that he'd fit in on site, but decided to say nothing more on the subject. "Hmm... Well, let's see what young Jeff Curnow comes up with tomorrow, eh? It might just be our lucky day!"

## CHAPTER 13

Henry and Margaret drove out of the village feeling dejected later the following day. Unfortunately, nothing the estate agent had come up with was either suitable, to their liking or at a price they were happy with.

"I think it might be time to move on to another place, Margaret," Henry said as the Autosleeper engine sluggishly crept up the steep hill towards the campsite.

"Sadly, I think you might be right... It's strange, I really felt this would be the place we'd finally find somewhere to settle," Margaret sighed. They eventually turned into the site driveway and Henry parked up outside reception.

"Might as well settle the bill, I suppose," Henry said. "Let them know this'll be our last night on site."

Margaret nodded slowly. "I'll come in with you."

At the reception desk, they were greeted by Joe and Alice. "How was your meetin' with that 'state agent, then?" Joe smiled. "Find anything you liked?"

"I'm afraid not," Margaret said, heaving a sigh.

"So, err... We've decided to call it a day," Henry said. "We'll be leaving in the morning."

"'Tis a *real shame*... 'Cos we was hopin' you might stay 'ere a bit longer," Alice chuckled, her eyes twinkling as she looked back at Joe now.

Henry creased his brow, confused by Alice's strangely-chirpy demeanour. *What's going on here?* he thought, glancing back at Margaret, who looked equally mystified.

"Yeah, if you're set on leavin', 'tis all right by us. But we was hopin' you might wanna consider puttin' in an offer on this place."

Henry and Margaret exchanged glances. "So... you've changed your mind about selling?" Margaret asked.

Joe and Alice nodded. "Truth be told, I was over the moon when Joe told me you was interested in the site... Ever since he had his angina attack, I've bin worried sick about him workin' on this place. He won't admit it, but 'tis too much for 'e to look after now."

"We've thought about it good 'n' proper, and we'd be happy to sell the place to you two. We reckon it'd be all right in your hands." Henry and Margaret looked pleased.

"But afore we sells the place," Joe went on, "we wanna put our minds at rest, see – so we got a coupla conditions," Joe said firmly.

Henry and Margaret looked at each other again, their eager smiles starting to fade. *Had their hopes been raised once again, only to be dashed on the rocks?*

"Conditions? What *sort* of conditions?" Henry said curiously.

"Well, we'm happy to sell at the price Josh Renowden had the place up for, but we don't want he to get a slice o' the pie. We dun't trust the fella as far as we can throw 'im – does we, Alice?" She shook her head decisively. "So we gets our own solicitor to sort out all the legal mumbo-jumbo for the sale, right?"

"I don't think that'd be a problem, do you, Henry?" Margaret said. He agreed. "So what's the other condition?"

"Well, 'tis like this, see," Alice said, looking at Joe. "We'm worried 'bout our workers. They bin with us many a year now, and we dun't wanna let 'em down. So if you wanna buy this place, they comes with it."

*Oh, great!* Henry thought. *Saddled with that bunch of layabouts! I can just picture it!*

Margaret looked at Henry and noticed his expression. He obviously wasn't enthralled by the idea. "Well, that's understandable," Margaret said diplomatically. "I tell you what... It's a big decision to make... Why don't we mull it over and let you know in the morning?"

"Yes, we've had quite a long day looking round properties. My mind's a whirl," Henry said, feeling awkward.

"You take all the time you need, me 'ansome... We'll be here in the morning as usual, whatever you decides t' do," Joe smiled.

## CHAPTER 14

Margaret was enjoying the glorious late-season sunshine as she picked up a small foldable plastic crate from outside reception, glad it wasn't raining, as it had been the day before. The crate was the last of their things which Henry had earlier off-loaded from the campervan and left for her to unpack in the bungalow behind reception.

As she headed towards the glass door, Margaret looked up with a dreamy smile at the reception sign, with its flaky paintwork. *Henry's right! With a lick of paint, this place will soon sparkle*, she thought, imagining how the site would look once they'd spent a bit of time bringing it up to scratch.

It was hard to believe the place was now theirs. That they'd agreed on a price. That Henry had finally succumbed to her persuasion that keeping the staff on wouldn't be the worst thing in the world. That the Truscotts had now moved out and bought a small house they could retire in – thanks to an estate agent in the neighbouring village.

Her mind was cast back to their last conversation with the Truscotts. All seemed to be going smoothly – the details lodged with a local property conveyancer and a date arranged for when they'd vacate the premises. But, before they did an unofficial handshake on the deal, Joe Truscott pulled out an official-looking piece of paper saying they still had something to settle between them first.

She remembered Henry squinting at it, fearing it was some new condition Joe suddenly decided he wanted in place before he'd sign on the dotted line. Margaret smiled to herself as she recalled Joe's next words: "'Tis your bill, boy... You owes us two weeks' pitch!" *Oh, Henry's face was a picture!* And when Joe tore up their bill and gave him a wide toothy smile, Henry suddenly got the joke and finally looked relieved.

Margaret shook her head at the fond memory and pushed through the squeaky reception door now, glancing at the clock on the wall. *Wonder what's taking Henry*, she frowned. *Surely he should be back from town by now*. Oh, well, she still had plenty to do now that their stuff had been brought in from the camper. If nothing else, the house would need a darned good clean. And once they'd done all that, the place would eventually need more than a lick of paint – it hadn't been decorated in years.

Margaret made her way through the gap in the wall behind the reception desk, out to the back room, and from there, she could access the bungalow to the rear. She was definitely looking forward to the fact that she wouldn't have to commute to work any more. If she totted up how many hours she'd spent driving to where she worked at the hospital in Staffordshire each day, it would probably work out that she'd lost a few years of her life in the process. *And it was all so tiring!*

She went round the house, unpacking the bits and pieces from the crate into the various rooms, and eventually settled back in the kitchen. She put the kettle on, looking at her watch. She fancied a cup of tea and was just wondering whether to wait for Henry, when she thought she heard the campervan engine outside.

Margaret reached reception just as Henry was pushing his way through the door, loaded up with a couple of large plastic bags, chock-full of groceries. The bell tinkled noisily above his head as he entered. "Oh! That's the first thing that'll have to go," he moaned, straining with the bags as he walked round the counter and plonked them on the desk.

"I'll get the other bags in a minute, love. Sorry I'm a bit later than expected," he puffed. "God, I was stuck behind a tractor for ages!... Bloomin' farmer wouldn't let me past – and we passed at least *one* layby."

"Oh, well, it's not as if it's likely to happen *that* often, is it?" Margaret commiserated. "Come on! Get yourself inside. You look like you could do with a nice cup of tea," she added.

"We can do better than that, Margaret," Henry said. "I've bought us a pre-chilled bottle of champagne."

"Ooh, we *are* splashing out!" Margaret said jokily, alluding to Henry's frugal tendencies. "Well, there'll be plenty of time to celebrate later. Get yourself inside and have a cuppa first while we unpack the bags, eh?"

"You're right," Henry nodded, pulling a handkerchief from his trouser pocket and mopping his brow. "And I could do with being inside in the cool for a bit after sitting in that hot cab for so long... I feel all sticky. Can't believe it's this warm so late in the year."

## CHAPTER 15

Breathing in the evening sea air, Margaret gave a long pleasurable sigh and eased back on the weathered old garden chair. It had been a long day of unpacking and cleaning up the house, she thought as she looked out over the darkening granite cliffs that stretched out for miles in each direction. The breathtaking views felt like a well-earned tonic.

Margaret was sat at the bottom of the long garden that led out from the back of the bungalow, situated on a small promontory that jutted out from the cliff. Henry came out now from the kitchen clutching an old purple bucket to his chest. And somehow, he was also managing to hold two champagne flutes in one hand and a couple of white packets in the other.

Margaret looked round when she heard him approach. "What've you got there, Henry?" she frowned.

"Well, I told you I was going into the village for fish and chips, didn't I?" he replied.

"No, not the packets – the bucket," she said.

"Well, we didn't have a proper champagne bucket, did we? So I thought I'd make my own," Henry said as he placed the things down on the table. Margaret gave a knowing smile. *He was always tinkering with something.*

"I bought some cool-blocks when I got the champagne earlier and popped them in the freezer – they're in here now, keeping the champagne chilled." He tapped the sides of the bucket looking pleased with his own ingenuity.

"Well, don't keep a girl waiting," Margaret said. "Let's get eating those fish and chips – I'm starving."

They soon polished off their food, and Margaret sat back with a satisfied expression. The sun was low now, filling the sky with comforting shades of orange and casting a strange quality of light over the cliffs. The sound of waves shucked gently on Corny Cove beach below. It was tranquil at this time of year, with only the occasional dog-walker or beachcomber strolling across its sands, which were turned even more golden in the evening light.

"I almost can't believe the site's ours. We'll be able to come out here any time we like and take in *these* stunning views," Margaret sighed. "And to think we found this place because you made a wrong turn, Henry."

"Hmm... I suppose we've got that old farmer to thank, hey? If he hadn't given us directions that were too ridiculously complicated to follow, we'd never have stumbled on the place," Henry said, reaching across and picking up their empty fish and chip wrappers. He scrunched them into a ball and plumped it back down on the old ornate garden table that the Truscotts had left behind.

"Actually, I was surprised at the time you could even understand what that farmer was saying, what with that thick Cornish accent of his. I didn't catch a word," Margaret replied, hugging her green fleece jacket to her as a breeze whipped up over the cliff. "Ooh, it's getting a bit nippy, isn't it?"

"Well, it *is* autumn, Margaret. Don't suppose we'll get too many warm days like we've had today over the next few months. Winter'll be on its way soon enough," Henry said, standing up. He lifted the champagne from the old plastic bucket and set about pulling off the gold foil and wire over the cap. "I'm just hoping we've done the right thing, buying this place," he added.



Margaret frowned in confusion. "But I thought you loved this place as much as I do."

"Oh, I do. You know how I feel – it's a dream come true. No, that's not what I'm worried about. I'm just not too happy about the fact we've had to keep the staff on. I can't help thinking we'll be leaking money, paying them for doing naff all about the place."

"Well, give it time, Henry. We don't know for sure what they'll be like yet, do we?"

Henry gave a light shrug. "Suppose you're right."

"Anyway, I don't think worrying about the staff is a burning priority," she said, watching Henry struggle with the cork on the bottle. "We've got to get this place looking a bit more ship-shape before we open next Easter. And we've never run a campsite before – it'll be a bit of a learning curve, with lots to prepare for."

"Hmm..." Henry said as he put the bottle back down, taking a rest from struggling with the cork. Margaret was right. The focus of his concerns had been far too narrow – obsessing about the staff as he was. Now he thought about it, the place was in need of a complete makeover, and they'd need to think about what systems were in place for handling bookings, dealing with holidaymakers, and advertising to get people in.

Henry's mind flitted to Mrs Slocombe – the woman he'd startled in the shower block – picturing the look on her husband's face when they'd pitched up next to them just weeks before. *Didn't Joe say she came to stay here every year without fail?* Henry thought as a smile of satisfaction appeared on his face. Yep, Mrs Slocombe would have one helluva shock when she phoned to book into the site next year, only to discover that her supposed stalker was now running the place, wouldn't she?

"Oh, well, if Alice and Joe can run the place, then I'm sure we can rise to the challenge," Henry said optimistically.

"It was nice of them to offer to come up and walk us through everything once we got settled, wasn't it?"

"It certainly was... They're diamonds in the rough, that pair." *And to think I nearly backed out of staying at the site*, he thought, glancing at the champagne and deciding to tackle the cork again. He lifted the bottle, braced himself and clamped his hands round the neck, grimacing as he gave the cork a firm push with both thumbs. The cork eased its way out and finally popped. When the mouth of the bottle had stopped frothing, Henry filled their glasses and they raised them, light from the sunset catching the golden liquid as bubbles fizzed to the top.

*Funny how taking a wrong turn can end up being the right one*, Henry mused as they gave each other a broad smile.

"Yes, Margaret," he announced, giving her glass a decided clink, "living in a Cornish paradise like this, what could *possibly* go wrong?"

\* \* \*

**Stay tuned for more...**

Read my infamous 'faux reviews' by pseudo-celebrities,  
Catch a preview of my Campervan Bushman Mystery Series, plus  
Find out more about me and my other titles...

## NOTE TO READER

*Dear Reader*

I hope you've enjoyed joining Henry and Margaret on their journey to finding their dream 'place to be' in Cornwall, despite the potholes in the road along the way. Of course, if you've read any or all of the Tales from Corny Cove, you'll know by now that their life at the campsite is both a blessing *and* a curse. Sometimes they have to deal with a few nightmare customers on site – but, thankfully, the beautiful landscape of the Cornish coast is always there at the end of the day to offer them respite from the challenges that come their way.

If you're new to my work, I'm a multi-genre author who loves to write 'across the board'. So I currently have mysteries and other fiction on my shelf plus a bunch of travel tales. [Click here](#) to check out the line-up.

More titles will be appearing on my shelf over time, and coming up next is a preview to one of my mysteries, *Killer Climate*. It's book 1 in the Campervan Bushman Mystery Series starring Aussie Scott Chevalier, who I like to describe as part campervan-surfer, part Crocodile Dundee. If you haven't read any books in the series yet, why not check it out?

One last thing... If you feel so inclined after reading this story, I'd be most grateful if you'd leave an honest review online. Why do I ask? Because they are so often hard to come by for authors, yet they are vital – without them, we struggle to build a following and promote ourselves on reader websites. So if you have a moment, kindly [click here](#) to visit my website, where you can pick your favourite site on which to leave a review – even if it's short and sweet!

Once again, thank you for reading *Living the Dream*, and remember to pass on the good news if you've enjoyed it!

Warm regards



*Alannah Foley  
aka The 'Pyjama Writer'*

## **FAUX REVIEWS**

**By Pseudo-Celebrities for Tales from Corny Cove**

Here are just a few of the author's infamous 'faux reviews' of the spurious kind for the Tales from Corny Cove...

No mozzies, no snakes and no lethal sharks... Corny Cove sounds like a fair dinkum paradise. Trouble is, what the heck would a fella like me do with his time without crocs to hunt all day, eh?

**Crocodile Dundee ('Mick' to his mates)**

After ditching my RV back in the States to buy a small camper for my trip to the quaint little British Isles, Alannah recommended I visit Corny Cove – and I thought, "Why not?" Boy, has she done the place justice in her book! Nearly got lost in the forest but the beach was real cool. Unfortunately, the place was so remote I couldn't get a burger anywhere. The upside? – I never got hit by the paparazzi or crowded out for an autograph *once*. Five stars all round!

**Tom Crews**

**Actor turned Motorhome Nut (after reading the author's Campervan Capers book)**

Cornwall is so hot right now! Oh, hold on a second... Are we talking Cornwall, Ontario or Cornwall, England?

**Mugatu**

**Fashion Designer (& self-proclaimed inventor of the piano-key necktie)**

Corny Cove sounds like a great spot for a good old-fashioned Wild West-style showdown... It's remote, full of character, and has a campsite full of troublesome folk just begging to be picked off at gunpoint. The only thing I'm concerned about is whether they'll end up banning smoking on site – only, a cowboy can't pose properly without a cigar, now, can he?

**Clint Westwood**

Whilst I heartily relished the tales set in Corny Cove, I did wonder where all the smugglers and pirates were. Having said that, some of the characters did behave just as roguishly, so full marks for that, at least.

**Daphne du Moore-Dumerrier**

**Cornwall-based Author**

Wouldn't mind a visit to Corny Cove. Tawny owls, barn owls and a plethora of flora and fauna in the forest to rummage around in near the campsite. The place sounds

like it might be up for one of my awards. Might even stop by for a brew at the Corny Cove Café if I'm down that way.

**David Belle-Ami**  
**Naturalist**

My publisher's on my back about deadlines again, so this'll have to be quick. OK, here goes... Alannah's stories are a fantastic read. She even writes one decent tale with an irresistibly-handsome doctor in it – a character from my latest novel, by the way. So if you liked that, you might like *my* books as well... Check them out!

**Yvie Tomsen**  
**Cornwall-based Medical Romance Author**  
**(Featured in Tale # 3)**

Another fantastic piece of writing set in a drool-worthy location – one of the few places in the world I haven't managed to travel to – yet! By the way, you still haven't told me when you're going to let me plug my books!

**Billy Brisun**  
**Embittered Travel Writer (after reading the author's Campervan Capers book)**

Sorry, mate, I can recommend the book, but forget about havin' a holiday at Corny Cove... Place is way too quiet – except for the local wildlife, that is. Noisy little blighters! I got back home more knackered than when I arrived.

**Mr Chigwell**  
**Former Top London Record Producer**  
**(Featured in Tale #2)**

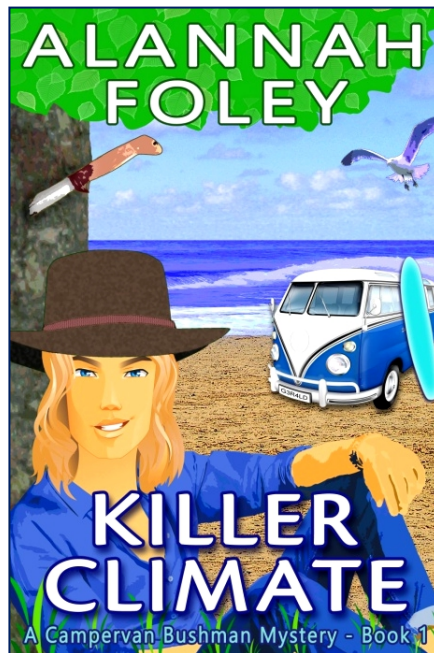
Why go to the lengths of travelling to Siberia when Corny Cove is right on one's doorstep? It sounds like another frontier of remote wilderness up for some serious exploration. I'm sorely tempted to shack up in the forest, light a fire from scratch and live off the local wildlife. Sounds like there's plenty around to pick off.

**Ray Meyers**  
**Bushcraft Expert**

**N.B. – Disclaimer (to be referred to in cases of acute gullibility):**

As denoted by 'faux' and 'pseudo', the above reviews are completely spurious in nature. Although they are loosely based on real-world characters, note that they do not reflect the opinions of any person, whether alive, dead or fictitious. Needless to say, no offence is intended upon the original characters.

## PREVIEW – MYSTERY SERIES STARTER



### **KILLER CLIMATE**

Book 1 in the Campervan Bushman Mystery Series

*A Mystery with an Edge of Humour,  
A Sense of Adventure and  
A Hint of Romance*

Ex-surf champ and model, Scott Chevalier, isn't just a pretty face!

With an enviable campervan-surfie lifestyle, and a handful of impressive bush skills learnt from his grandfather, producer Frank Buckler sees great potential in the young Aussie and hires him to host a British TV show called The Campervan Bushman

Unfortunately, things don't start out too well when Scott arrives on location in England. When things hit rock bottom and the director dies, no one suspects it could be anything but an accident – at least not to start with. But as the evidence begins to mount, Scott realises that the cold English climate isn't the only killer around.

**Join Scott Chevalier as he dives into his first mystery...**

Catch a preview below...

\* \* \*

## CHAPTER 1

Red rummaged round in his holdall as he sat on the dunes and pulled out a bottle of sunscreen. "Mum says they should make a sun factor 500 just for people like me," he said to Scott. "I must be part vampire or something. As soon as the sun hits my skin, I just sizzle."

Scott chuckled. "Can you *get* ginger vampires?"

"Don't see why not," Red shrugged. "Dracula's not fussy. He'll bite anyone."

Scott eyed him up. *Not sure about you, though, mate.* The tall, skinny beanpole didn't look like he had enough blood in his veins to warrant a suck-fest from Dracula or any other self-respecting vampire. They'd probably take one look at him and decide it wasn't worth the effort.

*Anyway, talking about havin' a bite...* he thought, opening up a navy-blue drawstring bag he'd brought along. He pulled out a doorstep sandwich from a brown paper bag. *Mmm... I've been lookin' forward to this!* Chicken, lettuce, tomato, and some rather tangy piccalilli he'd bought from a farm shop on the drive up from London. All wrapped in fresh-baked rye bread from a local bakery. *Scrummy!*

Red finished smearing sunscreen onto his freckled arms then handed the bottle to Scott, who shook his head. "No, thanks, mate. I'll be lucky to top up my tan in this," he said, flitting a glance at the darkening skies. He shuddered as he looked out over the ocean. *Hmm... Gettin' a bit choppy out there now.*

Red could only look on with envy as Scott sat there in his board shorts, a blue towel thrown round his shoulders. The guy had it all. Good looks, a buff physique, dazzling blue eyes, and sun-bleached, shoulder-length hair. And, by all accounts, he was quite the sporty outdoors type. *God! Some people are just born lucky, aren't they?* he thought. *Almost makes you sick! No wonder my film company snapped him up.* Apparently, when owner and CEO of Young Sheila Productions, Frank Buckler, was on a recent visit to his Australian homeland, he discovered Scott Chevalier and brought him back to star in his brainchild, an outdoors lifestyle TV show called *The Campervan Bushman*, which he'd pitched to a national network.

Red shook his head. *Why on earth someone like him would want to come to England, I have no idea,* he thought. *Sure, we get some decent summers, but the weather's predictably dreary most of the time. I mean, Scott looks like he's spent every waking hour under a sun lamp, for Christ's sake.*

His thoughts were broken by the squawks of seagulls circling above them. *Flippin' heck! They don't look friendly.* His mind flitted to the old horror-thriller movie, *The Birds*, where flocks of gulls went around terrorising the locals. He tried to shake off the chill feeling. *Come on! Don't be paranoid! We're on the Northumberland coast, not on a Hitchcock set.*

Just as Scott was about to take a satisfied bite of his sandwich, one of the birds broke free from the rest and dived down. Red's eyes widened. "Christ! Look out!"

But Scott reacted too late. Before he knew what was happening, the gull had swooped over his shoulder and lanced the sandwich with its beak. The bread and its contents flew onto the sand. He stared at his empty hands, incredulous. "Jeez!" *What just happened there?*

He flitted a glance at the bird – *flamin' thing!* – then began retrieving the scattered food, but Red piped up. "Err... Y'know, I've got an awful feeling that gull's a terminator."

Scott frowned. *Terminator?*

"See? He didn't get what he was after," Red said. "The blighter's not giving up. He's coming back."

Scott looked in the direction he was pointing and spotted the bird, who was now circling back with intent. *Strewth! He's right!*

The mob of birds continued to squawk, as though cheering the sandwich thief on, goading him to try again. And he didn't waste any time, either. The second he gained his vantage-point of height, he tucked in his wings and hurtled in Scott's direction.

"He's going right for you!" Red cried, jumping to his feet and giving him a wide berth.

Heart pumping, Scott tossed the food aside and dived into his bag. Quickly, he found his catapult and grabbed a pebble off the sand. He spun round to see the gull dive-bombing right at him. He let loose with the catapult and abruptly, the bird ceased its trajectory. It spun in circles as it tumbled, finally smacking down in a spray of sand in front of them.

Red stared at the inert bird, incredulous. Tentatively, he stepped forward and cringed. "Blimey! Is it... dead?"

"I should think so," Scott replied. He tapped it with his bare foot, but the bird didn't move. "Yep! He's gone, all right."

Above, the gull's cheering squad shrieked their displeasure. Scott eyed them as they continued to circle, his jaw gritted. "I've had enough of this!" he said. First he'd been robbed of his lunch, then he'd narrowly escaped the stab of a lethal beak, and now he was being harangued by pesky sea birds.

He grabbed a handful of smaller pebbles from the beach then shot them up to the birds. Within no time at all, they'd dispersed. *Good flamin' riddance!*

Red wasn't sure whether to be impressed or horrified by what he'd just witnessed. Maybe he was a little of both. "Where on earth did you get *that* thing?" he said, staring at Scott's catapult.

"Ah, made it myself," he replied with a casual shrug. "My grandfather taught me how to make these when I was a kid. It's just a toy." *A white lie.* He was well aware that catapults were one of the most underestimated weapons around.

Red raised an eyebrow. *Hmm... I used to make catapults when I was a kid, he thought, but they were flimsy little things you'd try and knock tin cans over with.* What Scott was holding, though, looked positively lethal. Was it even legal? *Wonder what other iffy paraphernalia he's managed to smuggle through British customs.*

"Comes in handy for pests like this, eh?" Scott added. "Did you see that thing goin' for me?"

"Yeah, he would've had your eye out."

"Back home, magpies can go for yer in the breedin' season if you get too close to the nest," Scott said. "But I've never heard of gulls gunnin' for anyone like *that*."

"My aunt and uncle live on the coast down south, and they reckon holidaymakers get attacked by seagulls all the time. They hang around the chip shops and cafés waiting for scraps of food, but they'll steal it if they're hungry."

"Well, let's hope we don't have any more trouble," Scott scowled, scanning around in case the birds made a hasty return.

Red sat back down on the dune and pulled out a bag of sandwiches. He was just about to take a bite when the dead bird in front of him caught his eye. He winced. "Can't you... I don't know... cover it up or something?" he asked Scott. "I feel like those beady eyes are staring at me."

Scott gave him a look. *Are you kidding me?*

"Well, I'm just about to have my lunch here," Red replied. "Besides, *you're* the one who killed it. I'm not going *near* the thing. Filthy creature's probably got all sorts of germs on it."

Scott rolled his eyes. He'd only known Red for a few days, and from what he could tell, his cameraman was a nice enough fella. But – *Jeez!* – was he on the nervous side, or what? "No worries," he said. He went over to the bird, picked it up by the feet, and popped it behind a bush nearby. "Happy now?"

Red nodded. "Thanks... The thought of eating with a dead animal hanging round – *urgh!*"

Scott scooped up the scattered remains of his lunch and plonked himself down next to Red. "Well, I can see why they call these sandwiches now," he said, holding up the limp piece of rye bread. "This one's eighty per cent sand. Ah, well, I suppose it's nice to have a bit o' crunch with yer lunch," he added, trying to make light.

"Hmm... I think I'd rather stick with some crispy lettuce and celery for *my* crunch, thanks very much," Red said, pulling out a plastic bag from the side pocket of his holdall. "Better shove what's left of your sandwich in here." He looked up and checked around. "The gulls have gone for now, but leaving food out only encourages them."

"Thanks, mate," Scott said, depositing the bits in the bag. The wind picked up and he pulled a blue fleece out of his bag and put it on, covering his bare torso.

Red took out a bottle of anti-bacterial lotion and passed it across. "Want some?"

Scott shook his head. "No thanks... I'm good. Reckon a bit of exposure to germs builds up yer immune system."

Red looked at him with a curious expression. "Suit yourself," he shrugged.

As he returned the bottle, it occurred to Scott that Red seemed to have just about everything in that bag of his. It was like an Aladdin's cave of 'must-have' supplies.

Red looked over at Scott's empty hands then and reached across, handing over a sandwich. "You'd better have one of mine," he sighed. "You'll be starving by dinner-time if you don't get something down your neck."

"Good onya," Scott said, trying to sound grateful despite the look of the bread. It was the same colour as Red's skin. A pasty shade of morgue.

Scott proceeded to open the sandwich and peered inside. A limp piece of lettuce, two thin slices of tomato, and a square slice of processed cheese that looked like it had been sprayed with Agent Orange.

Red noticed his expression. "Sorry, 'fraid I'm a vegetarian," he said. "If you want any meat in it, you'll have to barbecue that seagull back there and slice it in." He chuckled, as if to himself. "I expect you do that sort of thing all the time out in the bush in Australia, hey?"

Scott cocked an eyebrow. "Ah, no time for that. I'm sure there's a few sand beetles runnin' round here I can rustle up. That should flavour it up a bit."

Red's face suddenly dropped. *Urgh! No way!*

Scott gave him a wry look.

*Oh!* "Crikey! I thought you were serious for a minute there," he said, raising a hand to his chest.

"Nah! I prefer my beetles *roasted*," Scott replied.

Red's eyes widened, then he realised Scott was still joking. *The sod!*

"And just so you know," Scott added, "we don't have seagulls out in the bush. They're *coastal* birds, mate."

"Err... Thanks. I'll make a note," Red replied sarcastically.



*I'm not sure this guy's cut out for this gig*, Scott thought. "Look, you *do* know we're going to be around a few other deceased animals before this shoot is over, right?... You'll be filming me spear-fishin' again this afternoon."

Red let out a sigh. "Don't remind me! I never wanted to work on this show in the first place. The whole summer spent out in back-of-beyond locations with some bushman? No offence, but it's not exactly *my* cup of tea. I'd rather be in the city where it's all happening." His jaw tensed then. "Must say, I wasn't too pleased when big boss Frank passed me over for a documentary he was producing on horror writers. Gave the gig to Gordon the Gecko instead."

"Gecko?"

"Oh, that's not his *real* name... I just call him that 'cos he looks eerily like a lizard. Sycophantic oaf doesn't even *like* horror!" He tucked his knees up and rested his arms on them. "Oh, it's just not fair! I would've had an all-expenses-paid trip to America if I'd done that documentary – it's just one of those bucket list jobs you'd give your right arm for, you know? I tried to tell Frank I'm a fan of Stephen King – so I know my stuff – but he didn't seem to listen, and..."

Scott held up a hand. "Hold on a tick! You read horror books and you can't stand the sight of a dead bird? One with no blood on it, I might add."

Red shrugged. "What can I say? I'm a mass of contradiction. That's what Mum always says, anyway."

*That's one helluva contradiction*, Scott thought but didn't say.

"Anyway, you do know it's illegal to kill seagulls over here, don't you?" Red went on. "We could get in trouble. If anyone sees us, they might report us."

"Come on! No one's gonna call in the cops!"

"Oh, it's not the *cops* I'm worried about," Red replied. "It's our director, Sally. If she finds out, she'll have our guts for garters."

Scott gave him a look. *Really?*

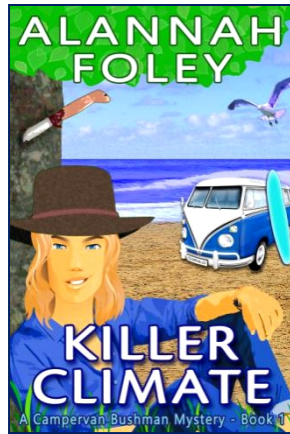
"She's a hard taskmaster at the best of times," Red said, "but she's a bit more uptight than usual at the moment – and I don't fancy getting in her firing line, either."

"Yeah, all right, keep your shirt on," Scott said. "I'll dispose of the bird later – no one needs to know."

"Just as well. I've had enough excitement for one day, thanks very much," Red said. *If Sally gets wind of what we've been up to*, he thought, *I can kiss goodbye any chances of getting picked for plum jobs in the foreseeable future*. Sally's flair-ups were bad enough to contend with. But in the end, what mattered was the fact that bad news always leaked back to big boss Frank – sooner or later.

Red heaved a sigh and munched on his sandwich. *Gordon the bloody Gecko! Wonder what he's doing now? Probably having a whale of a time, sipping back coffee with the likes of Dean Koontz and batting round ideas for macabre plot-lines. Meanwhile, here I am in the middle of nowhere watching Dennis the Menace here take pot-shots at seagulls.*

When was the nightmare going to end?



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## **ABOUT the Author**

### **Alannah Foley... aka 'The Pyjama Writer'**

Raised in the UK, Alannah lived in her Aussie birthplace for five years in her twenties, where mozzies regularly used her for target practice. She managed to return to Old Blighty devoid of shark or snake bite, however, and currently lives in picturesque Cornwall with her cycling-obsessed partner.

Alannah is a multi-genre author who has published mysteries and other works of fiction as well as travel tales about her capers in a campervan and adventures Down Under. She also enjoys writing satirical portraits of life's foibles (some still in the pot!).

When she's not writing, Alannah likes to hit the trails on her bike, take walks in nature, and go kayaking – basically, anything that will get her butt out of the chair for a while that doesn't involve going to a sweaty old gym.

Find out more about the author and where she got her Pyjama Writer nickname on her website at [www.thePyjamaWriter.com/about](http://www.thePyjamaWriter.com/about).

## CONNECT with the Author

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You can find social media and blog links on the author's website. However, if you want **the** best place to find out what Alannah is up to, why not join her **VIP Readers Group** and get her newsletter, **The Inside Scoop**?

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## **OTHER TITLES by Alannah Foley**

Alannah Foley is a multi-genre author who has written mysteries and other fiction as well as travel tales and humorous portraits of life's foibles. Basically, it's a bunch of maverick titles that won't fall in line – so you never know what she's going to come up with next... And there's still more in the pot!

To see what's currently on her shelf, visit the link below...

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