

**AGNES SHARP AND THE  
WEDDING TO DIE FOR**

*By Leonie Swann*

MISS SHARP INVESTIGATES

The Sunset Years of Agnes Sharp  
Agnes Sharp and the Trip of a Lifetime  
Agnes Sharp and the Wedding to Die For

THE SHEEP DETECTIVES

Three Bags Full  
Big Bad Wool

The logo consists of the lowercase letters 'a' and 'b' in a white, elegant, cursive script font, positioned above a thin white horizontal line. This logo is centered within a solid black square.

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WEDDING TO DIE FOR**

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# DRAMATIS PERSONAE

## THE RESIDENTS OF SUNSET HALL

AGNES – ex-police, founder of the house share, and skilled butterfly wrangler

MARSHALL – ex-military, fan of firearms and of Agnes

EDWINA – ex-Secret Service, reptile fanatic, mad as a box of frogs

CHARLIE – vlogger of Charlie's Wacky World of Wonders fame; fabulous, brings a touch of glamour to the house share

WINSTON – uses a wheelchair; the house share's rock

BERNADETTE – the bride, blind and in love, but not blinded by love

JACK – former contract killer; currently Bernadette's fiancé

LILLITH – dead and in a tin, but still an important member of the house share

HETTIE – the house tortoise; fresh out of the fridge

OBERON – a boa constrictor, pursuing higher things

BREXIT – Sunset Hall's scruffy wolfhound

## THE OTHERS

CHRISTOPHER – good-looking man from the internet, Charlie’s beau

RICHARD THE LIZARD – not-very-good-looking man from the internet, houseplant nut, Agnes’s date

THE VERGER – Dominic: murder victim and paper hoarder

REVEREND BARNES – the Vicar of Duck End; rather fond of the sound of his own voice

BENJAMIN STOUT – private detective

COUNTESS CONSTANCE PURR – aristocratic owner of Fox-glove Manor, blue-blooded flamingo

DOROTHEA GRETCHEN – bookworm and unwanted houseguest

MOIRA, NORMA AND GILDA/HILDA – members of the knitting circle the Knitwits

MIA – a complicated young girl

JAMES – stripper for the more mature lady

THE SWEET POTATOES – a swing band: four men and a female lead singer

## MORE WEDDING GUESTS

SYLVIE – the home help

SYLVIE'S HUSBAND

THE NEW GARDENER

CHARLIE'S GRANDSON AND HIS PARTNER

MARSHALL'S DAUGHTER AND HER BOYFRIEND

NATHAN – Marshall's grandson

SPARROW – opportunistic burglar and friend to the house share

SPARROW'S PLUS-ONE

THE PHOTOGRAPHER



## PROLOGUE

Agnes felt strangely empty after the wedding. She placed her peculiar fascinators on the kitchen table, made some tea and manoeuvred a generous slice of wedding cake onto a plate.

Then she arranged the cup of tea, the piece of cake and a cake fork on a tray with a jug of milk and was about to get herself a sugar cube but decided against it in the end. The truth was: she was sick of the sight of sugar cubes. Finally, she glided up to the first floor with the aid of the stairlift, not to her room, but to the sunroom, which was of course deserted and completely devoid of sun at this time of day. It smelt a bit musty too.

Agnes clicked on a reading lamp and watched for a moment as the light cast ominous shadows onto the walls. The chair – a gravestone; the spider plant – a spider, no less. Even her own shadow appeared shifty and strange. She sighed, shaking off the bad mood like raindrops. She poured some milk into her tea and shovelled the first forkful of wedding cake into her mouth. Delicious. She realised she'd left the teaspoon in the kitchen, so she stirred her tea with

the cake fork, then took some paper and a pencil out of the games drawer.

She spent a long time staring at the empty sheet of paper, which seemed to glow in the light of the reading lamp. She had the urge to chew the end of the pencil, but that didn't seem wise, what with her fragile false teeth and all.

During her long life, Agnes Sharp had spent an inordinate amount of time dealing with murders – first in a professional capacity with the police, later privately in her spare time.

But she'd never planned a murder before.

It was no easy task.

She allowed herself another bite of cake and put her remaining grey cells to work. Eventually, she put the blunt pencil to paper and began to write.

# 1

## KETCHUP

The anaemic afternoon sun streamed into the room at an awkward angle, forming pale puddles of light on the stone tiles. Outside, a few birds tentatively attempted their spring songs, but in Sunset Hall's utility room it was still quiet and wintry. One lone fly had prematurely taken to the cool air and was stubbornly launching itself at a windowpane, presumably in search of a little warmth.

Edwina lay lifeless on the floor, her face small and scrunched up, as if she'd just sucked a lemon, her hands contorted like claws. A red fluid oozed out of the corner of her mouth, and the same fluid was already forming an impressive puddle on the tiles.

Not far from her, next to two balled-up socks meant for the washing machine, lay the murder weapon, a pair of equally blood-smeared garden shears.

Charlie, who had dropped the washing basket in fright, stared at the horrific sight in astonishment.

'Edwina?'

Being so unaccustomedly lifeless made her housemate look smaller than usual, more fragile and, for the first time

that Charlie could remember, really old. A haggard little old lady in a lilac tracksuit, her hair short and hedgehog-like, her sheep slippers too big and ridiculous. no time to die was emblazoned on her sweatshirt.

The fly abandoned the window and inspected the red puddle.

Charlie surveyed the scene for a while, then she crouched down next to her friend and stuck her finger in the pool of blood.

Thick and tomato-red.

Charlie sniffed it.

‘So, that’s where the ketchup went,’ she murmured.

The fly buzzed, clearly experiencing a sugar rush, but Edwina didn’t move an inch and looked even deader than before, if that was possible.

Charlie continued mercilessly. ‘It’s hamburgers today, Edwina. Have you forgotten already? Hamburgers and chips. And you know what we all think of chips without ketchup, don’t you? Not a lot!’

The meals in their retirement house share might be monotonous, but there were a few things you could usually rely on. One of those things was ketchup.

Edwina opened one eye; it was alert and alarmingly blue.

‘Go away!’ she hissed. ‘It’s a surprise!’

‘I was surprised,’ said Charlie.

‘It’s not for you,’ muttered Edwina. ‘It’s for Agnes! To cheer her up!’

The blue eye shut again.

‘Cheer her up . . .’ Charlie shook her head and started to pick up the laundry scattered around the utility room.

‘Agnes likes murders,’ said Edwina stubbornly.

‘But not yours!’ Charlie hissed. ‘Now I’ve got ketchup stains on my blouse, and they’re a bugger to get out!’

Dead Edwina shrugged.

Charlie tipped the laundry into the drum and started the machine. It was true that Agnes had been acting a bit strangely recently. More strangely than usual, that is. Stressed. Absent-minded. Unusually confused. An interesting murder might provide a remedy, but it wasn’t as simple as Edwina imagined.

‘Could you call Agnes?’ Edwina was sticking to her guns.

Charlie put her hands on her hips. ‘Fine then. But it’s the last time!’

‘Agreed!’ Edwina crowed with delight and licked a bit of ketchup from her lips.

The remaining residents of Sunset Hall were sitting in the lounge together: Agnes, Winston, Marshall, Brexit the wolfhound, and Oberon, the house boa constrictor. They were all trying to get cosy despite the smoky fire in the hearth – with varying degrees of success.

Marshall, who was in an unusually good mood even though he had his left arm in plaster, was single-handedly cleaning one of his many firearms. It was a bit of a slog. Winston had manoeuvred his wheelchair underneath one of the reading lamps and was attempting a crossword. Agnes, the founder of the house share and owner of Sunset Hall, was knitting something shapeless in a dubious swampy green, swearing like a sailor every now and then. Brexit was dreaming, his paws twitching.

Oberon was the only one who seemed to be approaching the business of relaxing in a professional manner, basking contentedly beneath his heat lamp in the terrarium.

Charlie pushed open the door and dramatically placed her hand on her forehead, managing, despite the unkempt hair and ketchup on her blouse, to look fabulous as always.

‘Edwina’s dead!’ she announced.

‘Again!’ Agnes put down her knitting, clearly annoyed.

‘She means well,’ said Winston, without looking up from his crossword.

‘What is it this time?’ asked Marshall, with feigned interest. ‘Hanged in the loft? Drowned in the bath?’

‘I hope it’s not “drowned in the bath” again!’ Winston muttered. That scenario caused quite a flood last time, largely because Edwina had kept topping up the warm water post-mortem.

‘Stabbed in the utility room!’ Charlie rolled her eyes. ‘With some garden shears. And you can all forget about ketchup on your chips now!’

Agnes struggled out of her chair. Her stiff joints and cantankerous hip made it a rather difficult undertaking.

‘I think I should see for myself.’

In a fit of vanity, she ignored her walking stick and padded along the hall towards the utility room, haunted by a cloud of grim and rather fundamental thoughts.

Had the pensioner house-share thing really been a good idea? In theory, it was about supporting one another, sharing their sunset years with like-minded people in a dignified manner, and easing one another’s passing if necessary. In practice, there were snakes, ketchup-smearred housemates and unimaginative pseudo-murders to grapple with. And a real murder thrown in every now and then for good measure.

It was far from dignified!

But, as is so often the case, the realisation came a couple

of years too late. The house was already full of pensioners and creatures great and small, and if Agnes didn't get a move on, Edwina was going to catch a cold into the bargain.

She pushed the door to the utility room open and groaned. Edwina really had gone to town with the ketchup. Agnes stepped closer and felt Edwina's pulse happily beating away. Then she took the garden shears in hand.

'Stabbed,' she said loudly. 'Puncture wound between the ribs, straight through her heart. Murder weapon: garden shears. Why the victim is bleeding from her mouth is therefore unclear.'

Edwina sat up, beaming. 'I thought it looked better that way.'

'Hmm,' said Agnes.

'And who was it?' asked Edwina hopefully.

'How should I know?' Agnes muttered. She knew exactly what Edwina was getting at, but she didn't want to play along.

Edwina spread her ketchup-splodged arms. 'Brexit!'

The wolfhound! Again! It looked like everything was Brexit's fault, in the house share and in life.

'Brexit's snoozing in the lounge!' said Agnes sternly. 'He's got an alibi.'

'But . . .' Edwina broke off and lowered her hands. 'You're not happy at all!'

'I . . .' Agnes groped for words. 'I'm a bit down, that's all.

It's got nothing to do with murders.' Well, almost nothing.

'But it's spring!' cried Edwina, nimbly jumping up. 'How can you be down when it's spring?'

Agnes looked at her enviously. If only she were as agile. Or at least half as agile. Even a tenth of her agility would

have done Agnes some good. Was it too late to start yoga at her ripe old age? Probably.

‘Someone should tell the weather,’ she muttered, disgruntled.

‘I tell the weather every day,’ Edwina reassured her, wiping ketchup from her mouth with a cloth. ‘The weather promised to improve. But what about you? You’re not improving.’

That was the strange thing about Edwina. On the whole, she was what less-informed people might call ‘confused.’ Nothing but nonsense and hundreds of hare-brained schemes in her head, and an unhealthy obsession with reptiles to boot. But sometimes she hit the nail on the head. It was most annoying.

‘What’s wrong with me?’ snorted Agnes. It was meant to sound assertive, but came out as a strangely pathetic whine.

Edwina patted the back of Agnes’s hands with her sticky fingers.

‘Well, it’s the verger, isn’t it? He was murdered and you still don’t know who did it. Nobody knows. But it’s not so bad, Agnes. You don’t always have to know everything.’ She nodded wisely.

A few months back, Agnes had discovered the verger hanging in the church bell tower. Not a pleasant sight on the way home on a Friday afternoon. Murder, Agnes had quickly realised, but instead of getting stuck in as she usually would have, she had packed her bag, overwhelmed, and gone on holiday. It was no secret that it was playing on her mind. Yet the dead verger was the least of her worries at the moment.

She lowered herself onto a stool, sighing.

‘It’s not the verger,’ she admitted. ‘It’s this stupid wedding.’