



A BERDIE ELLIOTT ALL SAINTS MYSTERY

Marilyn Leach

All Hallows
Dead

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All Hallows Dead

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Dedication

To Diane Kawamura whose twenty-four years of
friendship, care, and laughter seemed but a few days.
Rest in Peace

And Deacon Dr. Greg Poole, whose suggestion for a
plot several years ago turned into this intriguing story.

What People are Saying

Berdie (Elliott) is at it again, solving a mystery in her own inimitable style. She delights; she confounds; she stymies, but she never disappoints. ~ Jane Choate, author of *Shattered Secrets*

Are you an Agatha Christie fan? Does the thought of an English village make you long to grab your passport and head across the pond? Are cozy mysteries your cup of tea? If you answered “yes” to any of those questions, you won’t want to miss Marilyn Leach’s newest release, *All Hallows Dead*. ~ Amanda Cabot, CBA and ECPA bestselling author

Berdie Elliott Mysteries

Candle for a Corpse
Up from the Grave
Into the Clouds
Enigma of Fire

Prologue

“Hang about lad, and you’ll soon see me in clover, the missus in a new house, and a certain woman of my acquaintance in a fur coat.”

“Get over,” young Tony bawled, creating echoes all through the empty ancient building. “If your certain woman’s in fur, she’s hardly going to be seen with the likes of you.”

The older fellow attempted to tap a finger against his rotund nose, though he rather caught his eye instead. His second go with the finger landed alongside his intended target. “You’re wrong lad. She won’t be able to get enough of me.” He winked. “Just ask Agnes, or Ruthie, or Linda.”

The young man shook his head. “How many pints have you had Mr. Dennison?”

The workman began a laugh that started in his belly and rolled up into his throat and finally out his bulbous lips. “Now that’s an indiscreet question I have no intension of answering.”

Tony was amazed at how Mr. Dennison could knock a few back and still manage to do his repair and renovation work with general success.

“I’m saving up, Mr. Dennison. Going to buy a mobile phone,” Tony said whilst they made way down the central aisle of an ancient deserted church.

"Wait for a bit and I'll buy one for you." Mr. Dennison gave musical voice to his high spirits. *Three maids of my desire, O hi,hi,hi, O low, low, low.*

The noise bounced from the cold stone floor, to the vaulted roof, from the side chapel where a shaft of light from the lancet window fell upon the seasoned kneeling rail, to the hand-carved candle pillars at the altar.

The boy took in the ladder nestled in the bell tower near a half-repaired puncture in the wall. "How soon will we have this finished?"

"Finished?" A frown upended the grizzled mason's giddy smile. "I've been at it for almost a month, all though with your help, end of the week I'd say."

"I work for the estate. Remember?" Tony blew out a quick breath. "I know the church is amongst their properties, but I've got plenty more to do besides this."

"That's right," a voice called from just inside the opened main door.

The boy turned on his heel to see the estate foreman. "Uncle Jack."

"Gate's down on the upper north meadow. We got word to fix it straight way."

Tony glanced at the stone mason. "You see? Fix it straight way."

"Off with you then, me laddy boy." The builder eyed Mr. Jack Slade and fired a verbal shot to the intruder. "Send him back in good time, mind you."

Mr. Slade jutted his chin. "The lad will take as much time as he needs to do a proper job."

Dennison smiled. "Ah, Mr. Slade, I'm not going to cross swords with you today. Too much good fortune coming my way."

Mr. Slade grunted.

Dennison chuckled.

"Take the four-wheel drive, Tony. Keys are in," the uncle-cum-boss directed.

Tony smiled. It wasn't often he got to drive the new vehicle. "You're not coming?"

"I'm on another errand for the family. You can handle the gate by yourself." He wagged a finger toward Tony. "No Mario Andretti stuff. Drive sensible."

"Right, Uncle Jack."

Tony raced out, jumped into the new vehicle, opened the driver's window, and in minutes, was speeding along the gravel road that took him to the turn off for the upper north meadow. What a purr, what steering, what an engine.

He couldn't keep himself from the temptation of the power that lay at his command. He turned onto the upper north track with more speed than caution and the vehicle fishtailed.

"Yeah!" Tony yelled. The energy thumped through his body. This was a man's machine. And the adventurous ride, bumping and heaving along the track, took just half the normal time to reach the upper north gate.

When he arrived, Tony slammed on the brakes. He took in the well-constructed gateway. It was right as rain. It wasn't down, not even open. Tony got out and gave the gate a swift kick. Then he pushed it with all his weight.

"Solid as a rock." He shook his head and looked about. "No. Someone just got the wrong end of the stick," he reasoned. "Oh, well."

He climbed back into the four-wheel drive with no

thought to pursuing the matter any further. He had done his bit.

"I'll take the long way back," Tony whispered to himself. He even considered going by his friend's house to take him for a ride but decided he might be conspicuously late getting back to the church. He ran a finger across the dash. "We'll make Andretti look like a school girl."

Even taking the long way, Tony flew and was back at the church in relatively good time, although it was certainly longer than taking the direct route. He came to a sliding halt, kicking dirt into the air. When he got out, his whole being still pulsated with the thrill of driving such a responsive machine.

Tony whistled and spun the vehicle's key fob round on his finger whilst entering the church.

There, inside the entrance of the dark bell tower, Tony saw the double long ladder askew against the wall, but no workman on it.

"Silly sot probably went home." Tony half chuckled. At least he could put the ladder away for him.

He heard something skitter along the floor as he walked toward the ladder. A resident rodent no doubt.

Then he noticed it. There seemed to be a lump of some sort on the floor ahead, near the ladder. A crumpled dust sheet? Tony took a few steps forward and squinted. In a second, his breath caught in his throat.

"Mr. Dennison," Tony shouted. He dropped the key and ran to the man splayed out on the stone floor at the foot of the ladder.

"Mr. Dennison." Tony's hands shook as he bent down and touched the man's shoulder. He gave a

slight nudge. "Mr. Dennison?"

No response. He drew his hands back. Sweat beaded along his lip. He rubbed his fingers against his work trousers. Stomach protests crept to his throat. He swallowed. "Oh, dear God. Help. What do I do?"

He heard a sound: a gargled whine.

He bent down closely to Dennison's distorted face, scarlet wet pooled beneath his head. The odor of stale brew assaulted Tony's nose.

"Here," barely eked through Dennison's large lips.

Tony felt his pulse quicken. "Yes, Mr. Dennison, I'm here. I can hear you."

The man's finger tried to stretch and touch him.

The boy put his mouth near the pathetic figure's ear. "I'm getting help for you, Mr. Dennison."

The man's eye fluttered. "Here."

"Yes."

"Trustyn."

"Trustyn?" Tony felt a cold chill across his neck. He pulled back. He cast his eyes about the suddenly foreboding space. Every black corner became a threat.

A protracted sigh left the lips of Mr. Dennison, and his grasping finger went limp.

Tony swallowed. "No. You hold on, Mr. Dennison. You just hold on."

Tony stood up. *Trustyn*. How many times had he heard villager's tales of the sixteenth-century brother who inexplicably vanished, whose apparition was said to visit this church? He made the sign of the cross upon his chest.

"Help!" Thunderous echoes bounced a hundred pleas throughout the church as he began a sprint to the open church door. "Help." Stomach muscles tensed. His heart pounded. "Help, somebody, please."

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The miniscule security camera that Berdie Elliott eyed appeared remarkably out of place since it was attached to a thirteenth century pillar in this ancient building.

"And as you can see," a guide pointed out to visitors, "the narrow lancet window in the side chapel of St. Baldred Church is typical of the Norman style."

"The only Norman I knew wore baggy houndstooth trousers and clip-on bow ties as his typical Norman style," Lillian Foxworth whispered to Berdie.

Berdie Elliott leaned her more pudgy-than-lean body close to her best friend and lowered her chin. She raised her well-shaped brows, moved her tortoiseshell glasses down her nose a bit, and looked straight into Lillie's hazel-green eyes. "Is that supposed to be funny, or are you just bored?"

"Please, refrain yourselves," a nearby woman snapped. "These are historical facts." With a jerk of her chin, she gave her short, dark, page-boy hair a flit.

Berdie squeezed her lips tightly to avoid laughing, which would never do for a vicar's wife touring a thirteenth century church.

Lillie smothered a giggle.

"And I hope you all have enjoyed the tour of Saint Baldred's Church of Criswell Abbey. Are there any

questions?" The guide, who wore the long cassock and other garb of a church verger, glanced about the diverse group through his silver rimmed spectacles.

"So you're about the place a great deal of the time, doing your job to keep things tidy?" a woman in shocking pink leggings and gold-sequined coat directed toward the verger.

"Yes, madam, yes. That's what vergers do." He clasped his hands behind his back.

The woman squinted. "I know most of the abbey is in ruins, and I heard this church has a ghost."

Words buzzed among the group.

The woman who had snapped at Berdie and Lillie earlier rolled her eyes and crossed her arms over her rather broad chest.

Lillie tipped forward to murmur in Berdie's ear. "Speaking of style, no ghost in their right mind would stick round after spotting her in those shocking pink leggings."

Berdie felt a giggle coming on and choked it back.

"We've heard that odd things happen here," someone in the crowd said.

"There have been rumors," the verger answered with all seriousness. "There are those who say they've seen and heard peculiar things, particularly at night."

A few glanced about with grins, whilst others seemed to peer suspiciously up to the lofty ceiling.

"Rubbish." Berdie kept her voice low.

"Have you seen anything?" someone called out.

The verger tipped his head and smiled but said nothing.

"Do you have night tours?" another person asked.

"This is a church," ricocheted like a shot through the sanctuary.

Startled, Berdie put her hand to her chest. It was the large rakish woman who stood near her and Lillie that fired the words.

"This is a place of worship," she went on, "not a freak show to satisfy some sensational craving."

"Here, here," Berdie said under her breath and nodded, whilst others stared at the woman near her.

"My dear lady." The verger jutted his pointed chin. "I believe all here do realize we are in a sacred place. Questions expressed out of simple curiosity do not diminish anyone's reverence."

"Patronizing swine." Words trickled in a hushed tone from the lips of the annoyed female that only Berdie and Lillie could hear.

Berdie averted her eyes from Lillie, who struggled to keep her poker face. Laughter was desperate to escape, but Berdie fought and kept it at bay.

The discontented woman, who wore a camel colored cardigan buttoned to her chin, squeezed her already crossed arms so tightly Berdie wondered that she could breath.

"Now, anymore questions?" The verger rubbed his slender hands together, shot an irritated glance at the disapproving woman near Berdie, and then eyed the crowd with a smile. "Very well. If you would, we'll make our way to the Watergate Alehouse, our local pub just 'cross the church garden, for a spot of lunch. The pub, as some of you know, has quite a history. It is partially housed in the original brew house of Criswell Abbey."

Murmurs of approval rippled throughout.

"The Watergate has a good selection of locally sourced food and ales. Lamb and Ale stew is today's special I believe."

“Now we’re getting to it.” Lillie’s lovely face, ringed with short black curls, had a satisfied glow.

The crowd began to shuffle toward the open church door, Berdie and Lillie following after.

Berdie inhaled the Northumbrian afternoon air as she and Lillie stepped out onto the pathway that led through a well-managed garden. Prominent cloud-pruned yews formed a grand hedge all cross the church’s front. Just beyond, assorted fall flowers danced in a slight autumn breeze along the edges of herbaceous borders that surrounded the neatly trimmed lawn. Set farther back, the elegant skeleton of the Criswell Abbey ruins sent the mind imagining the former grandeur of it all. Berdie loved Northumbria; the wild and wonderful northern most county of England, gateway to Scotland. It supported many amazing sites, such as this one.

Berdie pushed back several strands of her bobbed red-brown hair that had blown forward with the gentle wind.

“This church garden is so much grander than our little plot back in Aidan Kirkwood.” Lillie glanced upward. “Oh look.” She pointed to an owl perched on the roofline of the church.

“Yes,” Berdie said absently. Her focus was on the unhappy woman who stood at the edge of the garden, arms still firmly crossed over her chest. The verger took deliberate steps toward the awaiting female whilst the rest of the group, like hungry cattle, made their way to the pub.

Berdie tried to listen to the two conversing, but all she could make out were agitated voices accompanied by finger pointing, scowls, flared eyes, thrust chins, and obviously acrimonious dialogue.

"Isn't it lovely?" Lillie queried.

"I shouldn't think so. It looks a skirmish to me, complete with plenty of bile."

"Barn owls have bile?"

"What?" Berdie turned to see that Lillie's gaze was locked on the wild bird, now taken to flight. "No, not the owl. The verger and Mrs. Snappy over there." Berdie pointed.

"Yes, I've often been on the receiving end of that woman's tongue and it's no fun, I can assure you," came from behind Berdie.

She whirled round to face a tall man with thick greying hair, intense brown eyes, a smart tweed jacket, and an assuming posture that flirted with a devil-may-care edge.

"Well I never." Berdie let go a laugh.

"Berdie Elliott, I wondered if that wasn't you."

"Edward Cavendish."

The man stepped closer and smiled.

Lillie beamed. "Hello."

Berdie pulled herself from her somewhat stunned state of mind. "Ned, or should I say Edward, this is my friend, Lillie Foxworth."

He tipped his head toward Lillie. "Good afternoon." He grinned at Berdie. "Alas, school days past. It's Edward now."

"Edward was a fellow journalism student at our university," Berdie told Lillie. "Perhaps you remember him?"

"Journalism?" Lillie tipped her head. "I'm afraid we music students were too busy in the practice hall to get out much."

"And, to my surprise," Berdie went on, "as my career in investigative journalism developed, Edward

became my boss, editor-in-chief at the *Daily Standard*."

He uttered a soft chuckle. "I don't know of anyone who's truly Berdie's boss."

"That's quite right. Well spotted." Lillie laughed.

Berdie went a bit pink. "Fancy meeting you in a Northumbrian church garden."

"I dare say there aren't too many newspaper editors hanging about church grounds anywhere," Lillie said, "even gardens as lovely as these."

"Not an editor anymore." Edward dipped his chin. "Owner."

"You own the *Daily Standard*?" Berdie couldn't contain her surprise.

"And the *Evening Financial*. I lost patience with the leadership's lack of bottle, and my constant butting of heads with the managing board, so I bought the brand, fired the lot, and brought in people I trust."

"You never have done things by halves." Berdie shook her head. "When was this? I know I'm out of the loop, but I should have thought I would have heard."

"I can still be admirably discreet." Edward wore a hint of a smirk on his lips. "When I choose to be."

"Your family was from around this area if I remember correctly."

He waved his hand cross the grounds. "Welcome to my home."

"You own the church?" Lillie's eyes grew round.

"In a manner of speaking. The former abbey grounds are owned by my family. So, yes, it includes the estate church."

"You own all this?" Lillie glanced from church, to the gardens, to the abbey ruins, and to the large manor house.

"The pub as well. Frightful, isn't it?" Edward