



KILLED IN CORNWALL

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CHAPTER ONE

With thick grey hair cropped straight at chin level and a dark blue skirt and cotton blouse encasing her solid frame, Doreen Clarke might have been sixty rather than almost a decade younger. 'I'm off now, Cyril,' she called from the kitchen door of her bungalow in Hayle, her voice more quietly pitched than usual. 'I'm meeting Rose for coffee before I do the shopping.'

Cyril looked up from the tomato plants he was pinching out. Since he had been made redundant from the mine, several years before the very last one had ceased to operate, plants and vegetables had become his obsession. No longer able to dig tin out of the ground, he now spent most daylight hours tending things he had put into it.

'Give her my best then.' He studied his wife's tear-stained face. 'Don't take on, love. It had to 'appen at some point and she was over seventy.'

'I know. I'll be all right. It's just that I'll miss her.' Doreen blew her nose and stood taller, hating her weakness to show. 'I'll see you later.'

Cyril frowned. There must be something he could send over to Rose Trevelyan. The strawberries weren't quite ripe yet, it was too soon to pull radishes and it would be another week or so before the runner beans were ready for picking. 'I'll just cut a few of these for her.' He indicated the old-fashioned roses with their heady scent which the hybrid, disease-resistant varieties lacked. Well-oiled secateurs snipped ten long thorny stems from the bush. Their pinkish white buds were already fragrant and insect free; any aphids were squeezed between Cyril's thumb and forefinger on a daily basis. He handed them to Doreen who placed them lengthways in her wicker shopping basket.

'I'll see she gets 'em,' she said as she squinted over her husband's head. The first two weeks of June had been scorching, no hint of cloud in the arc of sky the colour of cornflowers. Now it was oyster grey with patches of mist rising from the Hayle estuary. 'I'll be back about one.' Doreen took her waterproof jacket from one of the hooks on the back of the kitchen door, twitched the net curtain at the window next to it then went out to her car and started the engine. She tried not to think about Phyllis Brown.

The weather worsened as she drove towards Penzance. Descending towards the dual carriageway, she saw the mist rolling landwards off the horizon, obliterating the wide curve of land on the far side of the bay until it finally obscured St Michael's Mount. She flicked the wipers to clear the windscreen of moisture.

It was Saturday. Every Saturday since she was a child she had gone to Penzance to shop. In those days she had ridden over with her mother on the bus and, if she had

been good, was given sixpence for niceys, sweets she wasn't allowed to eat until the afternoon; sherbet lemons which, in the summer, stuck together in the white paper bag, halfpenny chews which blackened her teeth or a couple of ounces of butterscotch which the confectioner broke from a block with a hammer. They had been good days but hard work for her mother. Doreen had a small car which conveyed her to her various cleaning jobs and the supermarkets where she bought food she could put in the freezer. Gone were the days of scrag end of meat which simmered with vegetables for hours until it was rich and tender, days when she had also made her own bread. Since Cyril was made redundant she had had to go out to work herself and there wasn't the time, nor did she have the inclination to cook as she used to.

The weekend traffic was surprisingly light. It was too early for the long queues of late July and August. Doreen turned into the car park at the top end of Penzance. She bought a ticket, stuck it on the windscreen, locked the car then walked down Causewayhead to meet Rose. Only delivery vehicles were permitted to use the unpaved road during business hours. Outside the shops on either side of the cobbled incline were displays of goods; hardware and ironmongery, flowers and plants and stalls of vegetables, brightly coloured and mounded high, organic or otherwise. Doreen ignored them. Coffee first, shopping later.

Rose was sitting at a table in Carwardine's, a cafetiere of strong Sumatran coffee in front of her. She smiled as Doreen, bundled up in her unsightly waterproof, her basket over her arm, approached her table.

‘Tiz a real mizzle out there. Typical June weather.’ In her usual fashion she spoke without the preface of a greeting. It was as if she had so much to say that time would be wasted on such formalities.

Rose nodded. Mizzle. The word was more than local dialect, it had a distinct meaning; more than mist but not quite rain, a fine precipitation which penetrated clothes insidiously and was so typical of West Cornwall. But it did wonders for skin and hair.

The cafe was steamy and overwarm but it was still too early for it to be busy. ‘What would you like?’ the waitress asked once Doreen was settled in her chair.

‘Tea for me, please, and a nice toasted teacake. These are for you,’ she continued, dismissing the waitress and reaching into her basket for the flowers. ‘My Cyril’s real fond of you, not that he’d ever say so.’

‘They’re lovely. Please thank him for me.’ Rose could picture him, wrapped up against the weather, the cap he always wore as a substitute for his miner’s helmet perched firmly on his head, his gnarled, calloused hands ingrained with soil as he worked away in his garden where not an inch of ground was wasted. ‘That reminds me, do you know anyone who’d be prepared to have a go at my garden? It’ll only need a couple of sessions. The lawn really needs some sort of treatment and the trees at the back are so out of hand they’re blocking the light.’

‘It’s a bit of heavy work you want then. Let me think.’

The waitress returned with a tray. Doreen poured her tea, added milk then blew on it. She took a sip, buttered her tea-cake and began to chew.

Rose's granite house was on the road between Newlyn and Mousehole. It stood on the top of a steep drive. With no buildings on the opposite side of the road she had an uninterrupted view of the whole of Mount's Bay. The main garden was at the side. It had been levelled atop a brick and earth wall. A narrow path ran from the drive around to the front where a few shrubs flourished and a small wall was the only protection from a drop down into the road. Behind the house, between it and a granite cliff, grew a tangle of brambles over which towered two trees and an evergreen which had never stopped growing. To clear it would take proper equipment and someone who knew how to use it. Doreen, who seemed to know everyone in West Penwith, was bound to come up with a suitable person.

'Dave Fox, that's your man,' she said with a decisive nod which caused crumbs to fall from her lower lip. She brushed them from her skirt.

Rose poured more coffee and stirred it. Dave, not David. David had been her husband's name, the man she had met soon after coming to Cornwall straight from Art College. They had enjoyed over twenty happy years of marriage, a marriage which was childless although they never knew why, unless the illness which had finally killed David was in some way responsible. Rose had done her grieving. Those first two years were the hardest of her life. There were still moments when shadows of that grief took her unawares and tears would fill her eyes, but they were, at last, becoming fewer. 'Do you have his telephone number?'

'Not on me, but I can let you have it. He can turn his hand to most things, can Dave. He's been working for the

Petersons, where I go on Wednesdays. They're not bad, not for newcomers, and they pay well.'

High praise indeed, Rose thought. To Doreen, newcomers were alien. Anyone who had crossed the Tamar Bridge to live in Cornwall was not to be trusted for at least ten years. But the mines had all closed, the government was doing its utmost to put an end to fishing and farmers were under the cosh. Only tourism was left. Many youngsters had to move away to find work and the houses they would have lived in were sold at over-inflated prices to those who could afford them. Rose regretted the changing way of life. 'Sorry, Doreen, I was miles away. Is something the matter?' Only then did she see that her friend was upset.

'It's Phyllis, Phyllis Brown. I heard this morning that she died last night.'

'Oh, Doreen, I'm so sorry.' She reached across the table and patted her plump hand.

'I expect it was a release for her, she'd been ill a long time.'

'What'll Nathan do?'

'I've no idea. His aunt's with him at the moment. I felt I should go and see 'en but I didn't like to intrude too soon.'

Rose had met Phyllis several times, before and after she was bedridden, but Nathan, the son, she had only seen on two occasions. He was an unexpected child, born illegitimately when Phyllis was thirty-six. No one but Phyllis knew who the father was.

Doreen shook her head. 'He was devoted to her, heaven knows how he'll cope on his own. He can cook and that, but it's just that she was always there.'

Rose didn't know what to say. She had known men like Nathan, men who stayed at home with their mothers out of duty or pity or fear, men who had sacrificed their own happiness until it was too late to know how to find it. She poured the last half cup of coffee aware of how much Doreen would miss Phyllis. Despite her many cleaning jobs Doreen always had time for her friends. 'If there's anything I can do, just ask.'

'There is something. Would you come to the funeral with me? Cyril didn't really know her and he's got a thing about funerals lately. Probably reminds him of his own mortality.'

Rose sipped the last of her coffee. She felt tired. It had been a long week and there was a longer one to follow, culminating in an exhibition in Bristol. 'Of course I'll come. Just let me know when it is.'

Doreen nodded. 'Here, you'd better have this for the flowers.' She handed Rose a plastic carrier bag. 'Wrap it round the stems and tie it or you'll prick yourself.'

Rose, used to her friend's non-sequiturs, did so. 'Please thank him for me.'

'I will. Now, where's my list? Cyril wants me to get 'im some of that new denture stuff he saw advertised on TV. He's a real mug for they adverts, he believes everything they say, does Cyril. Still, if it keeps 'en happy. Got much to do yourself, maid?'

'A couple of bits and pieces then I'm getting my hair cut.'

'Not short, I hope?' Doreen looked horrified. Rose's naturally wavy auburn hair hung to her shoulders. That morning it was held back in a wooden clasp. A few tendrils,

made wavier by the moisture-laden atmosphere, curled around her neck. Although Doreen dressed and acted as though she were a refugee from the 1950s, she recognised Rose's attractiveness. She was small-boned and dainty, with youthful movements and a pretty face but it upset Doreen that she mostly wore jeans or a denim skirt when she would look lovely in a nice frock.

'No, just the ends trimmed.' Rose tried not to smile. Doreen, only eighteen months older than herself, had a tendency to mother her.

'Well, I'd best be off, too. 'Tis my turn to pay.'

'Thank you.' Doreen was not well off but she had pride. Rose respected that. She picked up the roses and the bag containing the books she would change on the way home now that the library stayed open on Saturday afternoons.

Doreen tutted. 'All that reading. It can't be good for your eyes. Give me the telly any day.'

Rose hid a smile. Doreen had an irrational fear of microwaves – she said she was sure they would give you radiation sickness – but some modern technology, it seemed, was perfectly acceptable.

'I'll give you a ring with that number,' Doreen promised as she zipped up her jacket and went to the desk to pay.

They walked to the end of Causewayhead together. The mizzle had eased and patches of blue sky were appearing between clouds. They crossed to the Greenmarket. Doreen said goodbye and walked along towards the local chemist's, Rose went to the greengrocer's. Her appointment was not until eleven forty five. She stood gazing at the huge array of summer fruit and vegetables displayed on the pavement

outside Tregenza's and was, as always, tempted to buy more than she needed. From the baker's on the other side of the road came the appetising smell of pasties and newly baked bread. Greengrocer's and pasty shops, Penzance had more than its share of both.

Having finished her shopping Rose walked down The Terrace in Market Jew Street. Curved steps with metal rails led down to the road which ran steeply down the sea. Fingers of watery sunlight now rippled on its surface and small boats could be seen in the distance.

For the next hour Rose sat impatiently whilst her hair was washed and trimmed and blow dried, a ritual which took place only twice a year. She had never been able to understand women who went regularly and actually enjoyed the experience.

The girl attending to her had given up trying to make small talk and got on with the job. Rose was grateful and tried to think about work.

Once, photography had been her mainstay, now she rarely took personal commissions although she continued to produce colour prints for Barry Rowe, a man she had known for almost three decades. He turned them into postcards. Barry owned a shop in the town which sold these postcards along with greetings cards, maps and souvenirs, all produced by local artists. Rose also painted small watercolours which were reproduced as notelets and cards left blank for personal messages. Wild flowers, woodland scenes, a disused mine stack or engine house standing out against the rugged Cornish scenery, these were subjects which sold well. But her main work now was in

oils, dramatic work, capturing wild, winter seas or the treacherous coastline. She had even ventured into portraits and had never been more satisfied.

Geoff Carter, a local gallery owner, had staged her first one-woman show and now she was to co-host another in Bristol where she would be one of five artists. Twelve paintings had been required. Rose had worked very hard to produce them and was now in the process of choosing frames. This was the hardest part; framing could make or break an oil.

She sighed. On top of that was the class she took on Wednesday evenings and for which she had to prepare. This was another of Geoff Carter's ideas. He had persuaded Rose to take the overflow from another tutor who also used the annexe to his gallery for this purpose. To her surprise Rose enjoyed passing on her technique and skills although talent was a different matter since few of the students possessed much of it. But the classes had been a success and this was her third term.

'There you are, Mrs Trevelyan.' The girl held a mirror behind Rose's head. She glanced at the image reflected in the mirrored wall in front of her and nodded. Good, she didn't look any different. 'Thank you.' She handed the girl a tip, wrote out a cheque and left.

The sky had brightened further. There was no longer any dampness in the air and the warmth of the sun could be felt once more. St Michael's Mount was visible again, starkly rising out of a cobalt sea, the castle, the home of Lord St Leven, seemingly balanced atop an almost triangular rock. Rose stood looking at the view, drawn, as always, by the

indescribable colours which had brought so many artists to the area over the years. It was the narrowness of the peninsula, surrounded by water, which caused the quirks of light, the startling clearness of the air, the shades of blues and greens which seemed impossibly unreal unless you were there to witness them for yourself.

She retraced her steps, her calf muscles working hard as she walked back up Market Jew Street. Crossing the road she turned left, passing the Acorn theatre which was housed in an old chapel, before she turned left again and bypassed the sub-tropical gardens where succulent plants with enormous flowers towered over her. She continued on through the narrow lanes lined with pretty cottages or Georgian houses until she came to the library. She handed over her books, chose four more, then made her way down Morrab Road to the Promenade.

A group of boys skate-boarded along its wide surface and used the steps of the shelters to attempt manoeuvres none of them were able to complete. Their wheels clattered in her wake. There were several dog walkers, a few elderly couples taking a stroll and a smattering of tourists enjoying a holiday before the schools broke up and accommodation would be hard to come by. Many local working women would be shopping or doing their housework on Saturday afternoon. How lucky I am, Rose thought, I can work whenever I want.

Ahead was Newlyn harbour. The masts and upright beams of fishing-boats loomed above the harbour walls like teepees stripped of their hide. Behind them the houses sloped up in tiers. She reached the end of the Promenade,

descended the steps to the beach then joined the narrow path which would take her to Newlyn. To her left was the brilliant blue sea; to her right Bolitho Gardens where the fronds of the palm trees tapped in the gentle breeze. With the sun shining overhead she might have been in France or Spain.

Rounding the corner by the Newlyn Art Gallery, she thought about what Doreen had told her and the repercussions Phyllis's death would have for Nathan. Rose was not sure whether the house was rented or privately owned, neither was she sure what Nathan did for a living. Probably nothing, she realised. Someone had had to be at home on a full time basis to look after Phyllis.

Her books and shopping were becoming heavy. Rose would be glad to be home. She had given herself the day off – after a hectic week she deserved it. On Monday her paintings would go to the framers where she would negotiate a price, then she would scout around for post-card scenes. It was also time to plan her next watercolours. They would become part of Barry's stock next year as this season's cards had already been printed at his works in Camborne.

Halfway up the hill she stopped for a rest. Placing her bags on the ground she leant on the railings and looked down over Newlyn Harbour. Below, stretched in a short line on some rubber tyres strung together and floating in the water, half a dozen cormorants stretched their wings like Las Vegas showgirls in feathered costumes. The afternoon stretched ahead of her, as did the evening. Laura Penfold, married to a fisherman and Rose's best friend, had declined an invitation to supper because Trevor had landed

that morning and they were going out for a meal. Lazy, idle solitude, Rose decided. Food and wine and a book. A treat. She picked up the bags and continued walking.

By the time she reached the top of the drive her fingers were red where the handles of the plastic bags had dug into them. With relief she unlocked the kitchen door at the side of the house and stepped inside. She plugged in the kettle, unpacked the shopping and hung some washing on the line strung between a tree and the shed. She had put it in the machine before she went out that morning. Nothing smelt nicer than cotton sheets which had dried outside in the salty sea air.

She made a mug of tea, picked up an apple and one of the library books she had chosen that morning then went outside to sit on the wrought-iron garden bench.

An hour later she was half dozing in the increasing heat of the sun when the telephone disturbed her. Rose went to answer it.

‘I thought I’d ring before I forgot. My memory’s like a sieve these days.’

Doreen, of course. Face to face or over the phone she still began without preamble. Even when leaving a message on the answering machine no introduction was given. ‘I’ve got Dave Fox’s number. The gardener. It’s a mobile.’

Rose jotted it down. ‘Thanks, Doreen. I’ll ring him straight away. Did you thank Cyril for the roses?’

‘I did. He said . . .’

‘Sorry, I can’t hear you.’ One of the helicopters which serviced the Isles of Scilly was flying overhead. Rose could actually see the pilot.

‘Must go. Cyril’s waving to me through the window. Why he can’t come in to speak to me, I don’t know. Bye, Rose.’

He dare not come in, Rose thought, not if he’s got muddy boots. The cleanliness of Doreen’s kitchen floor was a matter of great pride. It was odd, she was equally as houseproud of her own bungalow as of the large properties she cleaned. It was beyond Rose to whom housework was something to be endured as infrequently as possible.

She picked up the phone again and dialled Dave Fox’s number. It was a long time before he answered. Having given her name Rose explained what she wanted doing. ‘Do you have the necessary equipment? I’ve only got basic tools.’

He said that he did and that he could come on Tuesday if that was convenient. ‘I charge by the hour, by the way.’ He named the price.

‘That’s fine, and Tuesday suits me.’

‘I’ll be there between nine and nine-thirty.’

‘Do you know how to get here?’

‘I’ll find it.’

Rose went back to the garden. Dozens of small, white-sailed yachts had appeared. Some sort of race was in progress. A rowing-boat with an outboard motor chugged past, a lone man on board standing at the tiller. The engine spluttered and black fumes belched from the stern before it resumed its steady course across the bay towards Mousehole. Overhead seagulls swooped. Rose was oblivious to their noisy calls which were part of coastal living. She was wondering what sort of man Dave Fox was.

He was well-spoken with the faintest hint of an accent she couldn't place. A newcomer? If so he had managed to impress Doreen Clarke. Rose had often been told that her curiosity went even deeper than the innate need to know possessed by the Cornish.

Well, I'll find out on Tuesday, she realised as she picked up her book and began to read.

By the fourth chapter she found she was thinking of Nathan Brown rather than the plot in which another son was motherless. It was always assumed that women were the carers, the ones who devoted their lives to a parent or spouse, but Rose was aware that many men also did so, men like Nathan, who had a gentleness about him, a gentleness hidden beneath a gruff exterior. Rose had never been able to decide whether this was due to a natural reserve, whether he had been cowed by an overbearing mother or whether, simply, like Trevor Penfold, he did not believe in wasting words. She hoped his future would be a happy one once he had done his grieving.