

## **Praise for *The Deadly Daylight***

‘Quirky, dark and delightful, I loved trying to solve this truly engrossing mystery.’ **Shirley Marr, award-winning author of *A Glasshouse of Stars***

‘*The Deadly Daylight* is an engaging novel with a full cast of larger-than-life characters, and even I didn’t pick the bad guy! Harrier sets us up nicely for the next book in the series, and readers will be left wanting more.’ ***Books & Publishing***

‘*The Deadly Daylight* is a perfect-for-kids murder mystery. I loved spending time with Alice England, who cheerfully chooses coffins for everyone she meets, and Violet Devenish, who might finally have found a true friend. This is a fresh and curiously upbeat read with memorable characters, clever plot and satisfying ending. Prepare for secrets and friendships, life and death, quirks and cosy mystery.’ **Cristy Burne, author of the *Wednesday Weeks* series**

‘An engrossing, entertaining and enchanting novel, written with subtlety, sophistication and style, which older primary school and lower secondary readers, both girls and boys, should thoroughly enjoy. I loved it. I hope Alice and her friends have many more adventures in future Alice England Mystery series titles. Highly recommended.’ ***Magpies Magazine***

‘*The Deadly Daylight* is an intriguing mystery that explores lots of interesting ideas.’ **R. A. Spratt, author of the *Friday Barnes and Girl Detective* series**

‘I loved how the story kept me on the edge of my seat throughout the entire book. This book is great for people who love a bit of murder as well as a bit of mystery.’

**Ashlee, 11 years old**

‘Wow! This book was amazing. It had me hooked right from the start and it introduced me to the murder mystery genre. I can’t wait to read the next book in the series.’

**Josh, 10 years old**

‘A very suspenseful book. I knew that I would like it just from the title. I really liked how they explained what the title meant quickly and got straight into the action.’

**Stella, 10 years old**

‘If you liked reading *Agatha Oddly* and *Friday Barnes* you will love *The Deadly Daylight*. I really liked that Alice had to remember all the little details on the bodies at her Dad’s funeral home, it was very unique setting for a novel. It hooked me right from the start.’

**Ivy, 9 years old**

‘This is a wonderful book, full of plot-twisting events along with everyday drama too. The story hooks you right from the start by using a funeral home for the setting and including the unusual element of sunlight allergies. I really liked how the friendship between Alice, Violet and Cal helped solve the mystery.’

**Ruby, 11 years old**

# THE EERIE EXCAVATION

*An Alice England Mystery – Book 2*

ASH HARRIER



**PANTERA**  
PRESS



## CHAPTER 1

# A Complete Surprise

If she could skip, Alice would be skipping with excitement, but her weak leg meant skipping was not an option. She'd tried ballet once, but the wobbly left limb made her fall over at unexpected moments and she'd had to admit that ballet wasn't the activity for her.

Alice contented herself with walking. She went along Wharf Road towards the Quay, passing the moored white yachts and rusty fishing boats. Gulls twitched to and fro on gusts of wind, screeching with the fun of it. Alice had called both Cal and Violet last night to arrange a meeting at the Quay but she'd kept the reason for the meeting a secret, hugging it to herself like a delightful present.

Alice added a sort of a skip to her stroll and managed not to stumble. She'd been planning and researching for several weeks now and finally her efforts had paid off. All she had to do now was make the announcement to Violet and Cal, then spend the afternoon celebrating with her friends. *Churros*, Alice decided. Yes, that was the perfect celebratory food.

She took the pedestrian footbridge, then crossed the parking lot to a cluster of wind-battered buildings: the

Quay shopping mall. This was one of Alice's favourite places, especially since Violet and Cal liked it too. Violet loved the accessory shops and using the free wi-fi, Cal liked the arcade and sharing hot chips, and Alice enjoyed the *splat* of the ocean against the boardwalk and visiting the gemstone store.

Life had been lonelier before she met Violet Devenish and Cal Lee – when it was just Alice, her father and their funeral home. Although she was still happy enough on her own, she liked having friends. There was a lot more fun. And noise. Both Cal and Violet talked fast, made a lot of jokes and laughed frequently, which took a bit of keeping up. They weren't much alike, the three of them: Violet with her obsessive love of a Korean pop group called Moon Squad and YouTubers Alice didn't relate to, and Cal with his nocturnal gaming habits and pet python named Ziggy. But they seemed to click together anyway.

Alice turned onto the boardwalk where the new bubble tea shop had gone up – and there was Violet. She was sipping an enormous, bright-green drink, the straw tucked in under the shade-veil she wore over her face to protect her from the sunlight. Violet waved.

'Hello, Violet,' Alice said when she was within earshot. 'What flavour is that?'

'Pear and aloe. It's a bit sweet, but nice.'

Alice could imagine. She had explained to Violet after trying her second flavour of bubble tea that the lumpy syrups were not for her. Violet had been astounded. Even Cal seemed to like bubble tea – yes, he only drank it when Violet couldn't finish one and gave it to him to polish off, but he certainly liked it.

'Cal's not here yet – no surprise,' Violet added. 'He's in training.'

‘What do you mean, in training?’

‘You know, with the school holidays coming. He won’t have to worry about getting to school in the morning, so he can stay up as late as he wants. He’s probably getting into practice.’ Violet took a long slurp of her drink.

‘Hey!’ It was Cal, his long black coat flapping in the breeze, his adored pet snake curled around one sleeve. He waved with his free arm.

‘Hello, Cal,’ said Alice.

‘Hey, Zombie Queen, Ultra-Violet.’

Alice smiled. She loved her nickname. ‘Let’s get churros,’ she said. ‘I have an exciting announcement to make.’

Violet raised her eyebrows and Cal nodded, adjusting the python. ‘Not so tight, Zig.’

They bought a box of churros to share and walked down to the beach. The day was cool, despite being late spring, and rain had been threatening all morning. Even so, children were paddling in the little beach, squealing at the cold or plunging their plastic spades into the sand like small gravediggers. A few teenagers were on the pontoon in their swimsuits, being loud and daring one another to do risky things.

The three friends sat down on a quiet part of the shore.

‘What’s your big announcement?’ asked Violet, manoeuvring a churro in under her veil to take a bite.

‘Well, Violet, your situation with your mother has been on my mind for some time, especially since she refused to let you attend the K-Pop camp you were so excited about.’ Violet made a sour face. Alice had expected that. ‘I have sympathy for you, but I also understand her hesitation. It’s only been a few months since your mum agreed to relax

a bit about your allergy to UV light. I suspect she needs more time before she'll let you to go away for a week without her supervision.'

'You talk so weird, Alice,' Cal said around his churro.

'Yes, you often tell me that.' Alice was only slightly derailed by his interruption. 'Anyway, I realised that Luanne's main concern was probably that no one else at the camp would understand your allergy or exactly how dangerous it is for you to be exposed to sunlight. It also occurred to me that, if there was someone else there who could be trusted to keep an eye on you, your mum might feel more comfortable about letting you go.'

'Yeah, obviously. But no one I knew wanted to come with me,' Violet reminded her.

'Amy did,' said Cal.

'But her family already has some boring vacation booked.'

Alice waited for them to become quiet. 'Violet, I spoke to your mother and—' She paused for effect. 'She has agreed that you can go away to camp on the holidays, with me as your allergy buddy.'

Violet's mouth fell open, her light blue eyes shining with sudden comprehension. '*What?* Are you for *real?*'

'It's true.' Alice couldn't help smiling. 'And Cal, I haven't forgotten about you. There was a free spot for one camper who couldn't pay the fee. I worked with your mother to apply, and you were successful. Congratulations, Cal – you're coming to camp with us.'

Cal looked stunned, although not quite as ecstatic as Violet. In fact, he didn't look ecstatic at all. 'Um, sorry Alice. I can't go. I need to look after Ziggy. Mum won't go anywhere near him.'

Alice nodded. ‘I anticipated that as well. The president of the Damocles Cove Reptile Owner’s Society has agreed to care for Ziggy. He thought Ziggy would actually be fine without you for the week of the camp, since they only need feeding every seven to ten days, but I was adamant that Ziggy should have proper supervision.’

Cal frowned. ‘Adam who?’

‘Adamant. It means absolutely firm on a matter.’

Cal still seemed unsure. ‘Uh, thing is, Alice, I’m not really into K-Pop ...’

Alice was momentarily baffled, then she chuckled. ‘I’m sorry, Cal – maybe I didn’t explain myself properly. It’s not K-Pop camp we’re going to. It’s *archaeology* camp. There’s an actual, real archaeological dig happening and they’ve invited a small number of high school students to come and help with the excavations.’ She looked at both her friends’ shocked faces, barely able to contain her excitement. ‘We’re going to spend a *whole week* digging in a forest for historical objects!’

They didn’t seem as excited as she’d hoped. In fact, Violet appeared extremely disappointed.

‘Archaeology camp?’ Her nose was screwed up like she’d smelled something unpleasant.

Cal was only slightly more positive. ‘It doesn’t sound *too* bad, I guess. There’ll be other kids there?’

‘Yes, of course,’ Alice assured him. ‘Including us, there’ll be seven students assisting a lead archaeologist, and two postgraduate researchers.’

Cal stuffed the last churro into his mouth. ‘I’ll miss my computer.’

‘Your mum thought a break from gaming would be good for you,’ Alice said.

Cal just rolled his eyes. ‘Will they at least have wi-fi?’

Alice wasn’t sure. ‘I’ll get back to you on that. Perhaps they do in the guesthouse where we’re staying.’

‘We’ll be staying in a guesthouse?’ Violet looked cautiously interested.

‘Yes, an old tower on the coast, over two hundred years old.’ Alice considered whether to tell them the next bit. Yes. Honesty was always best. ‘About the house. It has a bit of a reputation.’

Cal pulled a face. ‘Bed bugs? I’m out.’

‘No, of course not.’ Alice ran her fingers through the sand, working out the best way to say it. ‘Some people might find the tower’s history disturbing. The whole area has a strange history. It’s known as rather a mystical place.’

Cal’s eyebrows rose. ‘A mystical place? Like, magical?’

‘In a way. There’s a history of witchcraft. And the guesthouse, Malkin Tower, is—’

Violet gave a small shriek, her eyes lighting up. ‘*Malkin Tower?*’

Alice was startled. ‘You know of it?’

‘TommyPotts did a full episode on that place! It’s cursed!’

Alice had been talked into watching a couple of TommyPotts’ videos in the past. She found them grating and sensational, but knew he was popular with the kids at school and Violet’s latest favourite YouTuber.

Violet had turned to Cal. ‘Did you see that episode?’

He frowned. ‘Was that the one about the two witches casting spells on each other? And the haunted bottle things?’

Alice was pleased they’d heard of Malkin Tower. ‘That’s just what we’re investigating – evidence of rituals

in Pendle Woods and the practice of magic in the olden-days. The lead archaeologist, Professor Adeline Grey, studies the history of witchcraft. She's a respected scientist. The current owners, the Demdikes, own a big section of the woods around the Malkin Tower.'

'The Witching Woods,' Violet supplied.

'Otherwise known as Pendle Woods.' The gleam of interest in her friends' eyes gladdened Alice's heart. 'Rituals were supposed to have gone on in those woods. People have found a couple of artefacts, but no one's ever done a proper excavation there. That's our project. We'll learn how to excavate objects that may be over two centuries old.'

'What have people found so far?' Cal asked.

'Clay figures, bottles and other old carved items.'

Ziggy the python had taken a constrictive hold on Cal's arm, which meant for the next couple of minutes Cal had to try to convince the snake he was not prey. Violet was silent, sitting with her knees up and gazing across the water with her chin resting on her arm. Alice waited.

'It's not what I had in mind when I said I wanted to go to camp these holidays,' Violet said at last. 'But I suppose it sounds sort of okay.'

When Cal had removed himself from the mortal danger of his python's tiny coils, he added that he would *really* miss his computer, but agreed that archaeology camp sounded sort of okay.

Alice was surprised that her efforts to set her friends up with a fascinating week of science and history hadn't conjured anything more than an 'okay'. But she supposed it would have to do.



## CHAPTER 2

# The Question of Superstition

At home, in the embalming room, Alice sat perched on the stainless steel bench. She leaned back against the hospital-green wall and watched her father work.

He was dressing a body for the next day's funeral. Thaddeus England was always methodical, fetching one neatly laid-out spotted sock at a time and easing it onto the foot with a delicate touch. Last of all came the smart black Mary Jane shoes.

The body belonged to Ms Olivia Heffner. Alice liked her style of dress. Olivia had favoured retro fifties fashion and her family had arranged for her to attend her own funeral in a cream and black polka-dotted frock, soft cardigan and chiffon headscarf. When Thaddeus stepped back, that was Alice's cue to take over. She slipped off the bench and fetched a large envelope containing a red beaded necklace with matching earrings and a diamond ring. There was also a well-loved baby doll.

As Alice held the doll, gazing at its brown glass eyes and worn-off eyelashes, she found that it held a secret little story about Olivia that only Alice could see. Whenever

this happened, Alice called the object ‘resonant’. Nobody but her father knew she had this gift.

Olivia had been given the doll during a long stay in hospital when she was six years old. She had a condition that affected her lungs. Olivia had grown into a gentle, smiling young woman who adored children and babies. She had taught in a kindergarten and her dearest wish had been to have several children of her own, but her illness meant she was unable to have a baby. It also meant her life would be much shorter than usual. Ms Heffner was recently engaged to be married, and had been looking into adopting children, but her disease had caught up with her and she died in her sleep at twenty-eight years of age.

It was a sad end for the family and the fiancé, but Alice could tell that Olivia Heffner had been a resilient woman who led a good life. The funeral service was bound to be well attended. It had become popular over the past few years to call funerals a ‘celebration of life’. Alice privately thought that only very few funerals really celebrated the lives of the dead – sometimes because the dead hadn’t lived particularly celebration-worthy lives. But for Olivia Heffner, it should and would be a celebration. Lots of tears, but plenty of good memories, especially for the kindergarteners who would always remember their kind teacher.

She clasped the necklace around Olivia’s neck, then poked the earrings through her pierced lobes. The ring was last, slipped onto the third finger of the left hand, which rested on Olivia’s stomach. Alice considered the doll. How could she place it in the casket without ruining the attractive effect of Olivia in her delightful spotty dress? She tried the doll propped up in one corner, then the other.

Finally, she reached for Olivia's arm. 'Excuse me,' she said.

The arm was heavy and cold but not stiff. Alice tucked the doll into the crook of Olivia's arm and rested the hand with the ring on the doll's lace dress. She stood back next to her father, and they observed Olivia together in silence.

'Beautiful,' Thaddeus said after a few moments.

Alice nodded. 'She was a lovely woman, inside and out.'

Her father gave her a sidelong glance. He hadn't known for very long about Alice's ability to sense things about the dead, and he still didn't know specific details of *how* she knew those things. They didn't talk about it. Alice preferred that, although she hadn't worked out why.

'So, only two more weeks of school,' he said, pulling off his medical tunic to reveal a shirt covered in jolly little watermelons.

'Yes.' Alice followed him out of the embalming room, through the funeral parlour and into their home at the back of the building. 'I can't wait for archaeology camp. It's going to be strange being away from home for so long, though.'

'Strange for me, too. You've never been away for more than a night.' He paused, which usually meant he was preparing to drop one of his puns. 'Having you away camping for a week is going to be *intense*.'

Alice thought about it. 'Intense – in tents?' He nodded, smiling. 'We're not sleeping in tents, Dad.'

Thaddeus sighed, obviously disappointed that his pun hadn't met her standards.

'Have you ever been to Malkin Tower?' she asked.

'No. I've heard of it, though.' Thaddeus washed his hands carefully at the kitchen sink, then checked on the chickpea dhal he had going in the slow cooker. 'It's quite a

famous place in these parts. The witch stories, and all that. Are you staying *in* the tower?’

‘Yes. The owner, Mr Demdike, has turned Malkin Tower into a guesthouse now. The students will be sharing group rooms for girls and boys.’ Alice opened the fridge to search for a snack.

‘Will other families and tourists be staying there as well?’

‘No, we’ve got the whole place to ourselves.’ She gazed into the fridge. ‘I don’t think Malkin Tower is in high demand, to be honest.’

‘Why not? Because there aren’t any swimming beaches or amusements in the area?’

‘No, not exactly. The main problem is the online reviews. Malkin Tower has a reputation for being haunted, cursed and having terrible plumbing.’ She selected an apple, for want of anything more interesting.

Thaddeus nodded. ‘Of course – the curse. I didn’t know about the plumbing.’

‘Malkin Tower’s a very old place, so plumbing issues are to be expected,’ said Alice. ‘But the curse is just mythology, of course.’

‘Remind me of the story, Alice,’ said Thaddeus. ‘It’s been a long time since I heard it.’

Alice sat down at the kitchen table. ‘Well, it all started with two matriarchs who lived in separate houses across the woods – the Chattoxes and the Demdikes.’ *Matriarch* was a new word to Alice, meaning the woman in charge of a family or community. It had an impressive sound and she was glad of an opportunity to use it. ‘They offended each other and the Chattox woman used witchcraft to curse the Demdikes with bad luck.’

Thaddeus had sunk into the chair opposite, his watermelon-patterned shirt a spot of brightness against the dark tones of their home. ‘Wasn’t there a child who went missing from Malkin Tower, or something like that?’ he asked.

‘Yes, I believe so. A few children, actually.’ Alice munched her apple. ‘I haven’t read much about that because I’m mainly interested in the artefacts. The professor who’s in charge of the project says that the Pendle Woods are full of relics of witchcraft.’

He watched her across the table. ‘I hope you’ll be safe, what with bad plumbing, curses and hauntings.’

Alice stared. ‘I never thought of you as superstitious, Dad.’

He smiled. ‘I’m not. It’s just that, the older I get, the more I realise how little people know about ... otherworldly things.’ His smile slipped away and he glanced up at the photo on the wall behind her. It was a picture of Alice and her twin sister as newborn babies.

Alice’s fingers went to the two pendants on the chain at her throat – her own and Victoria’s. She released it, then took another bite of her apple.

‘I don’t believe in curses,’ she said firmly. ‘I believe in science, and the science of archaeology is why I’m going on this camp.’ She leaned forward and looked into her father’s eyes. ‘You have nothing to worry about, Dad.’

His smile returned. ‘Yes, you’re right. I don’t believe in curses, either. I just hope none of the other kids on the camp find it too discombobulating.’

‘I wouldn’t worry about that, Dad. Kids are very hard to discombobulate, these days. This is a chance to be scientific about the history of Malkin Tower, and even debunk the

stories about the curse. Then maybe the reviews will improve – provided the owners also fix the plumbing.’



Two weeks later, the Damocles Cove High School students were released for the summer break by their acting principal, Ms Goodwill. She stood at the school gate, her curly hair pinned back by sunglasses atop her head, radiating positive energy and braving the fierce sea breeze.

‘Do productive things, Erin!’ she called as teenagers slouched past with heavy backpacks and cynical expressions. ‘Remember, we’re all lifelong learners, Matthias! *Thinking* never takes a holiday, Chelsea. Read every day, Bianca! Spend time outdoors, Vanessa! Swim in the sea, Alfie! Look at art! Unplug! Explore!’

Violet and Cal had their heads ducked to avoid eye contact. Ms Goodwill was better than Mr Prince, the brawny ex-principal who’d recently left in disgrace, but no one wanted to be the target of Ms Goodwill’s special brand of sunny kindness. Alice rarely remembered to do the head-down trick, however, and Ms Goodwill’s gaze landed on her.

‘Alice! And Violet and Cal! What do you three have planned for the school break?’

Alice paused, happy to talk about their imminent adventure. ‘We’re going to archaeology camp.’

Kimberly Larsson and Jasmine Pang exchanged a look, then burst into giggles. Violet went pink, Cal ignored them, and Alice wondered what was so amusing.

But Ms Goodwill stared at her rapturously. ‘This is what I mean!’ she cried. ‘This is just the sort of thing I

love to see my students doing during term breaks. Where's the camp being held?

Violet and Cal waited a short distance away as Alice told her all about the camp. Ms Goodwill nodded, her curls bouncing like preschoolers on moon-hoppers.

'I know the Pendle Woods well! One of my best friends comes from there – Jenny. I spent a few vacations at her old family home when I was a girl. She lives here in Damocles Cove now, but I know exactly the spot you'll be excavating in, because her property includes part of those woods.'

'Is she a Demdike?' asked Alice. 'Was it Malkin Tower where she lived?'

'No, not Malkin Tower – Jenny's family lived in Gothor Hall on the other side of the woods.'

'Oh, she's a Chattox?'

'Yes.'

'Are the Chattoxes friendly with the Demdikes, these days?' Alice asked curiously.

'Er ... I'm not too sure.' Ms Goodwill's face was unusually serious for a few moments, perhaps remembering her childhood visits. She shook herself. 'Well, it sounds absolutely wonderful! You three have a fabulous time and I can't wait to hear all about it when you get back.'