

*Death
at
The Granby Arms*



A Whodunnit

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Dramatis Personae

Beattie Cable: Licensee of The Granby Arms for the past eighteen years. She is not married, but after bringing up Margaret (her younger sister) from a baby, she looks upon her almost as a daughter. She is a serious-minded lady and her interest in life is the running of The Granby.

Margaret Cable: Has helped to run The Granby Arms for the past two years. She was previously employed by a law firm, but left to help Beattie when her sister was having staff problems. She is very fond of her sister but is a different personality. She has a relaxed approach and a dry sense of humour.

Aubrey Fox (aka Foxy Aubrey): A ruthless local businessman who has recently acquired The Granby. He is having it altered with a view to turning it into a profitable residential hotel.

Denis Johnson: Runs a small electrical business and is currently rewiring The Granby. He has a girlfriend, Carol, who is leaving her present job to help with the business. They plan to marry soon.

George Walmsley: Is an ex-policeman, now working for Leddington Security. He has been engaged to advise on security at The Granby.

Carol Marshall: Denis's fiancée. She has a small child by a previous liaison, though has not revealed the father's true identity to Denis.

Death at The Granby Arms

ACT ONE

It is an evening in February. The scene is a small room at the rear of The Granby Arms, an old coaching inn situated on the main road through the town of Leddington.

Denis is sitting at a table, a pile of papers and a half empty glass before him. He is sorting through the papers and muttering to himself. Margaret enters, stage left.

MARGARET: (CHEERFULLY) Still at it, I see, Denis. You should relax when you come in here. That's what pubs are for.

DENIS: There's nothing I'd like better but I want to get this stuff sorted before Foxy arrives. It's time he realised just how much he owes me. Oh, and there's a security bloke coming to look over the place. But I expect you know all about that.

MARGARET: No, I haven't heard a thing. I'm sure Beattie hasn't either or she'd have mentioned it.

DENIS: Well Fox was on to me about it yesterday. He wants me to show this chap round, but he should have kept you informed as a matter of courtesy.

MARGARET: Since when has Aubrey Fox ever been courteous? Especially to employees like us. Since work started upstairs, all sorts of people have been coming and going. We never know who's in the place.

DENIS: I suppose you're right. He's not very good on communication, or on settling bills, either. All the work I've done for him over the past few months and all he's paid for so far are a couple of small items amounting to less than fifty quid!

MARGARET: And what about the rest? Do they add up to much?

DENIS: As far as I can see from this lot (WAVING THE PAPERS) the total is over eight thousand.

MARGARET: You're joking! Foxy owes you eight thousand pounds?

DENIS: That's right. Anyway, I've had about enough. He can start paying up or find some other mug to do the work.

GEORGE APPEARS, STAGE LEFT.

GEORGE: Excuse me, I'm sorry to interrupt. A lady called Beattie told me I'd find Denis Johnson the electrical contractor, in here. I'm George Walmsley from Leddington Security.

DENIS: (RISING, AND EXTENDING A HAND) I'm Denis Johnson. I've been expecting you.

GEORGE: (SHAKING HANDS) How do you do.

DENIS: (GESTURING) This is Margaret Cable, Beattie's sister. They run this place together.

MARGARET: (SHAKING HANDS) Beattie is the actual licensee. She's been here a long time, but I didn't arrive until a couple of years ago.

DENIS: I'm sorry you've been dragged out at this time of an evening. Would you like a drink?

GEORGE: Well, later, if you don't mind. When we've finished.

DENIS: OK. Have a seat while I tidy this lot up. They're all bills for Aubrey Fox, the chap who owns this place. He's supposed to be coming here later and I want to find out what he intends doing about them (GATHERING THE PAPERS INTO A PILE).

GEORGE: (TAKING A SEAT NEARBY). Yes, I heard he was coming. So the bills are for work you've done here, are they?

DENIS: A bit more than that. A lot date back well before I started on The Granby.

MARGARET: Foxy does that sort of thing. He's been taking advantage of Denis's good nature.

DENIS: Well it is partly my fault, I suppose. I've been concentrating on getting the work done, with the result that the paperwork has been rather neglected. That's the trouble with running your own business. There are too many things to think about.

GEORGE: It sounds as if you need help.

DENIS: You're right, I do. But I've been hanging on until Carol - that's my girlfriend - is free. She's going to look after the clerical stuff, but right now she's still working out her notice in her present job. You'll probably be meeting her later. She said she'd call in.

MARGARET: Carol is coming in, is she Denis? That's good. We can have a bit of a gossip! And when are you two getting married?

DENIS: Soon, or so I'm told! We have pencilled in a date but I'm sure you'd rather hear all about it from her. Anyway, we may have to change our plans if Fox doesn't pay some of the money he owes me.

GEORGE: Does she know much about the electrical business?

DENIS: Carol? As a matter of fact, nothing. She can't even wire a plug. But that doesn't matter. Paperwork is paperwork in any business. She runs an office at her present job, so she's quite capable of getting things organised and keeping the books straight. And she has the right sort of attitude. She says I should have a proper contract with Fox and regular part payments instead of accepting work bit by bit.

GEORGE: She sounds like a sensible lady. So what work are you doing here?

DENIS: Mainly rewiring. There are two floors above this, with bedrooms on each.

GEORGE: And I presume you're rewiring down here as well?

DENIS: I am. Mind you, Foxy wanted to save money by leaving this area alone. But the ground floor wiring is old and dangerous. I told him I wasn't prepared to do half a job and if that's what he wanted he could give the work to someone else. I certainly wasn't prepared to run the new stuff from upstairs into that old fuse system in the bar.

MARGARET: You're right about it being dangerous. I look after the routine operations and I've had more than one shock. Beattie is so terrified, she won't touch any of the electrical equipment except that new till in the bar and she hasn't much choice about that. Anyway, I don't think we'll need to worry about it much longer. When all the alterations are finished, Foxy will be looking for someone else to take over.

DENIS: (SURPRISED) Why should he do that? This is a well-run pub.

MARGARET: Thank you, Denis, but it's going to be very different, isn't it? I mean, it won't just be a pub any more, it'll be a hotel. There'll be people here twenty-four hours a day, bedrooms to be attended to, and Foxy is planning a new dining room, complete with high class chef. I don't think we'll be good enough for him.

DENIS: I don't see why not. You two know the place, you're good with people, and as far as providing meals is concerned, well you do that now, don't you?

MARGARET: We do, but steak pie and chips in the bar is hardly *cordon bleu*, is it?

DENIS: It's jolly good, all the same. Has Fox actually said he wants you out?

MARGARET: Not in so many words, but knowing him, he'll expect the whole thing to run like clockwork right away. I think he'll be looking for someone with hotel experience.

DENIS: He'd be making a big mistake. Anyway, what would you do if it did happen?

MARGARET: It wouldn't worry me at all. I know I can go back to the law firm I left two years ago. They keep asking me if I'd like my old job back, and I really loved the work there. But for Beattie it would be different. She's older than me and this place has been her life. It still is.

GEORGE: Has she said anything about it?

MARGARET: Well if the worst comes to the worst, she says she's hoping for enough redundancy money to start again somewhere else.

GEORGE: Will she get enough for that?

MARGARET: (LOWERING HER VOICE AND LOOKING ROUND) Will she? Fox

isn't called Foxy for nothing! I can't see her getting a bean. Not off him!

DENIS: Don't you? There are laws about all that now. She should get something.

MARGARET: I wouldn't bank on it. Where there's laws there's loopholes, and Foxy will find one. When he does, he'll disappear like a rat up a drainpipe!

GEORGE: So that's the sort of employer he is, then?

MARGARET: It certainly is. (MOVING TOWARDS THE DOOR) Well, I'd better get back before Beattie comes looking for me. One of us will pop in later to see if you want any more drinks.

SHE EXITS, STAGE LEFT.

DENIS: (GAZING AFTER HER) This place won't be the same if those two have to go.

GEORGE: I can imagine. What surprises me is why she came here in the first place if she was so happy in her previous job.

DENIS: Well, it's not so surprising if you know something about their background. When Beattie was ten years old and Margaret just a few months, their mother walked out on them and left Beattie literally holding the baby. Looking after Margaret meant that she missed out on a lot herself, but she did it without complaint. So when Beattie was having a bit of staff trouble here, Margaret didn't hesitate to help out.

GEORGE: I see. So they're obviously very close.

DENIS: Yes. Although Beattie is the licensee here, she treats Margaret as an equal in every way.

GEORGE: (RISING AND WALKING ROUND TO EXAMINE HIS SURROUNDINGS). Right. I can certainly understand Beattie's reluctance to leave here. It's quite an attractive old place.

DENIS: Have you been here before?

GEORGE: No. I'm new to the town and as a matter of fact, this is my first job for Leddington Security.

DENIS: (ANXIOUSLY) You're first! You mean you're new to the security game?

GEORGE: (AMUSED) Don't worry! I was with the police in Reading before this and I spent the last three years on security.

DENIS: (RELIEVED) Oh I see. Well, The Granby Arms is an old coaching inn. A seventeenth century listed building which can't be altered in any major way, particularly the outside. But approval has been given for some changes to the inside, and at the moment, the builders are in, working on the new bedrooms upstairs. Obviously, I have to fit in with what they are doing, and before we get too far, we'd like the benefit of your advice on security.

GEORGE: Fine. I'll have a look upstairs, but probably this floor will be the most important. For instance, I noticed on the way in, that the locks on your main doors need updating.

DENIS: I'm not surprised. Anyway, we can start at the top first. The stairs are that way (INDICATES STAGE RIGHT), but a new staircase is being put in at the front of the building and that will become the main one.

GEORGE: I saw it as I came through the front hall. I had a look behind the dustsheet.

DENIS: That's it. They've knocked a hole through the wall and it's been covered to keep the dust out. Really, the place should have been closed down while all this is going on. It'll have to be closed, anyway, when work starts on the ground floor, but Foxy's trying to squeeze as much money out of it as he can. I don't know why. He already owns half the businesses in town so he's not short of a bob or two. Anyway, shall we get started? (RISES TO HIS FEET) We'll go up the old stairs and come down the new ones into the front hall. Just a word of warning. The new staircase is in place, but there are no handrails yet. I wouldn't like you to fall down the stairwell!

GEORGE: A good thing I didn't have that drink after all, then! Are there any lights at the top?

THEY MOVE TOWARDS THE EXIT, STAGE RIGHT.

DENIS: Yes, there are. I'll switch them on as we go up.

THEY EXIT RIGHT. THE STAGE IS EMPTY FOR A SHORT WHILE, THEN VOICES APPROACH, STAGE LEFT. BEATTIE ENTERS.

BEATTIE: Margaret said Denis is in here, going through some papers. (PAUSING ON THE THRESHOLD). Oh, he's gone! He must be showing that security chap round. (MOVES IN, FOLLOWED BY CAROL). Anyway, he shouldn't be long. Can I get you a drink while you're waiting, Carol?

CAROL: Er, no thanks, Beattie. I'll wait till Denis gets back. By the way, we've fixed a date for the wedding. It's June the fourteenth.

BEATTIE: (PLEASED) Have you, dear? I'm delighted. Denis is a good man. I hope you'll both be very happy!

CAROL: Thank you. It's going to be a very quiet affair but I hope you and Margaret will be able to come.

BEATTIE: Well of course, we'd love to, if we can manage to get away from here.

CAROL: I hope you can. I feel so lucky. Denis has been great about taking on Robbie. He says he'll be a good father.

BEATTIE: I'm sure he will. How old is Robbie now?

CAROL: He's just turned three, but he's known Denis since he was quite tiny. I can't see any problems there.

BEATTIE: I'm sure you're right, and Denis is as solid as a rock. Well, I'm afraid I'll have to dash off now, dear. We're a bit busy in the bar.

**SHE TURNS TOWARDS STAGE LEFT JUST AS AUBREY FOX ENTERS.
HE IS SWAYING SLIGHTLY AS IF HE'S BEEN DRINKING.**

FOX: I'm pleased to hear it! Keep that till rattling along. Good evening, Carol.

BEATTIE: Oh, it's you! I only wish the till did rattle. The new one squeaks. Why you had to go changing the old one for that electric horror, I'll never know. It takes me twice as long to operate.

FOX: You'll get used to it. It records information, that's the whole point.

BEATTIE: Which means you don't trust us, I suppose. Anyway, never mind that now. What I want to know is what's going to happen to Margaret and me?

FOX: What do you mean?

BEATTIE: You know perfectly well what I mean. Where will we be when this place opens as a hotel?

FOX: I've told you before, I haven't decided. As soon as I do, I'll let you know.

CAROL: That's hardly fair, Aubrey. I know it's nothing to do with me, but Beattie and Margaret work hard to make The Granby a success. They shouldn't be kept in the dark.

FOX: You're quite right, Carol, my dear. It hasn't anything to do with you. What's more, I don't want to discuss it any further. I've come to see Denis Johnson and meet some security fellow. (TO BEATTIE) So perhaps you'd get me a drink. The usual.

MARGARET APPEARS AT THE DOOR, STAGE LEFT.