



# Dumplings to Demon Dogs

Dumplings to Demon Dogs; is a collection of adult humour and mystery with a Norfolk twist.

LET'S START WITH THE SQUIT

## CHAPTER 1: The Curse of the Norfolk Dumpling

It was the first time ever that she had made dumplings, or swimmers as her mother called them but it sounded simple. *"Right my gal you just take some flour, put in some baking powder, a good pinch of salt and mix with water, then knead that into a dough, cut into swimmers and put them on top of the stew for half an hour."*

*"That'll fill him up and there won't be much of that bedroom nonsense after that. I would never tolerate much of that with your father, that's why you are an only child my dear. That's one of the secrets about being a good wife, make your man think that he is happy and he will be."*

The wedding was a simple affair in the village church, just a few close friends and some family. Then they went off to the back room of the Bell, for a few drinks. Then back to her mother's cottage for a slap-up meal. Well it was about as slap-up as they could afford. A big rabbit stew with lots of dumplings and a sherry trifle for afters.

Then when it got dark they went to bed. Dora had been waiting a long time for this but unfortunately her mother was right, it was just one of her annoying habits. After ten pints and a big plate of food he was out like a light and snored all night. So much for romance and passion!

The next day at first light he was off to work on the farm, it was harvest time and hard graft. He came in after 10 p.m. hungry and tired. He ate his stew and dumplings then fell asleep in the chair.

This went on for several weeks and Dora began to wonder why she had ever got married. He had become addicted to dumplings and she was still a virgin. Something had to be done but who could she ask for advice, certainly not her mother or the local vicar, it was far too embarrassing.

Thursday was market day in the nearby town and she travelled in from the village on the bus, it was like a gathering of the clans. The one day of the week when you could meet up with old friends and distant relatives. On that particular day Dora met up with an old school friend Enid.

They had a cup of tea together and Dora told Enid about her problem. "Oh I had the same thing with my Billy, he got addicted to dumplings and after that the only thing that he did in bed was sleep."

"So what did you do?"

"Well old Granny Treacle gave me a special recipe and it worked wonders, I shall write it on this postcard for you but promise not to tell anyone else." Dora slipped it into her handbag for safe keeping.

The Guinness was easy to get and the whelks and mussels came from the wet fish stall but the *horny goat weed* was more elusive. Anyway Dora followed the instructions; she boiled everything together and reduced the liquid down to an essence which she used in the dumplings.

It was getting late when there was a knock at the door. "Oh come in Dad you don't have to stand there knocking."

"Hello Dora just came to tell you that your husband will be really late tonight, the steam engine has broken down and he will have to wait for the engineer to come and fix it. Then they may go to the pub afterwards. Cor that stew smells really nice, your mother has gone off to a Church Council meeting and I haven't had my tea yet." Dora couldn't refuse him. "Come on then Dad you had better have some." He had never tasted dumplings like it before, and ate them all. "Well Dora I never knew that you could cook like that, those dumplings were delicious, much better than the one's your mother makes."

"Thanks Dad they are a bit special."

Late the next morning there was a frantic knocking on the cottage door. Her mother came in looking very dishevelled. "Morning mum, are you alright?"

*"Well not really Dora I have got problems with your father, he has been up all night, just won't leave me alone. I don't know what has got into him. He's like a rampant stallion. He said he had some special dumplings here last night, maybe they got him excited."*

"Well yes mum that's true he did have some of my special dumplings."

*"Oh right dear, can you give me the recipe?"*

## CHAPTER 2: The Legend of Todger Smith

That smell always reminds me of the old Norfolk legend of Todger Smith. When the chilly mist hangs like cheesecloth on the silent hedgerows. When the hoar frost twinkles under the steely light of a full moon. In that witching time between light and dark. It is then that the evil smell appears, just before you feel his eerie presence and see his ghostly form in the fading light. He wanders the quiet Norfolk lanes searching for Inky the road sweeper. But let's start at the beginning.

Inkerman Mathias Black, *Inky* to his friends and the locals, was a road sweeper of renown in the lanes of North Norfolk. Inky was a simple man, a man of the country, a follower of the seasons. He had only two goals in his life, two burning ambitions. Firstly to marry the woman of his dreams, the Nit Nurse, Ethel Bradshaw. He had been in love with her since she clutched him to her ample bosom and ran her steel comb through his hair, while he stood in the nit line at the village school. She was a picky woman, but that had been a great asset in her job. She had retired now but Inky still longed to be trapped by her bosom and to be combed by her again. But there was a problem, her ample chest was sort of promised to Todger Smith who was the chief loader on the Honey Cart.

To achieve his first goal Inky had to achieve his second, and that was to raise his status by getting promotion from road sweeper to Honey Cart loader. He had been on the waiting list for 20 years and was first reserve and occasionally called out to emergencies. Like the night when the wheel came off and the whole load spilled onto the road. That night Inky was there in a flash, well a slow prolonged flash. You see he already had the shovel for the job, and was well experienced at using it.

Inky was not a fast mover, very few sweepers were. Some thought him old before his time, just because he had an old person's shuffle. Some believed that he had always walked like that. He carried the burden of life on his bent back and round shoulders. His balding head was always covered with the greasiest flat cap in Norfolk, but it concealed a secret. Inside it just near the peak, Inky kept a supply of well chewed gum which he found on the roads. Downwind Inky had that fusty smell of stale sweat, he was probably unaware of it and nobody ever mentioned it, as most people had distinctive aromas in those days.

He always wore the same scruffy jacket, a sort of black tweed thing, and under that his working waistcoat or Wescut as he called it. His baggy trousers were supported by the obligatory red braces which bowed around the overhang of his stomach. He sported a piece of binder twine around the waistband for double security. Inky's workday boots always went out polished, and there was more binder twine around his ankles to stop the rats from running up his legs and biting his privates. And his shirts, well they were proper shirts, greyish white collarless constructions with feint blue stripes and proper *shut tails*.

Inky had been slowly pushing the same brush up and down the same lanes for over 30 years. During that time it had 17 new heads and 12 new handles, so as brushes go it had seen some action. Its operator Inky also had the same shovel from new. This was a brute of a thing which was designed to outlast him. You can always recognise a sweeper's shovel by the bow in the handle; this is caused by the constant leaning of the sweeper. In fact sweepers were renowned for it, it is even rumoured that some could sleep while shovel leaning.

Old sweepers who argued about who should sweep up what could duel at dawn, and just one well aimed blow from a heavy shovel could and often did prove fatal. On happy occasions such as sweeper's

weddings it was traditional for colleagues to come from miles around to form a shovel arch for the bride and groom.

Inky smoked the biggest briar pipe that had been seen in those parts. When asked what he was filling it with his reply was always the same, *"thas country bacca boy."* Country bacca was a weed which grew in the hedgerows. Inky cut it and hung it up to dry in his shed. He referred to lighting the monster pipe as, *"stokin har up."* And after a few minutes you could only see the whites of his eyes, but the clouds of smoke were wonderfully effective in killing flies. This made him a very popular first reserve as a Honey Cart loader, and he had a plan.

Todger Smith on the other hand was not permanently stuck in bottom gear, he wasn't designed that way. He wore fancy shirts with collars. He had a silver chain hanging from his waistcoat and on the end of it his pride and joy, a 5 bob watch. And to display his status in the Honey Cart hierarchy he wore a bowler hat. You see Todger didn't believe that he was from peasant stock. His mother had been a scullery maid at the big house and his father, well he wasn't quite sure about his father but he liked to think that he may have been the old squire. That's why he got this job and the responsibility that went with it. He knew that you only had to miss one bucket and you would be right in it.

There was a lot of folklore surrounding the Honey Cart. This iconic contraption was a way of life in the rural Norfolk and a general talking point in the days before proper entertainment. *"Blast me boy did yew hear the Honey Cart last night, late agen?"* And the collection time was often the highlight of the week, it was steeped in tradition. It was thought to be unlucky for a single woman to see the Honey Cart after dark on a Friday. Now that could well be because she might be on the throne when they collected the bucket. If this did happen she had to get an old wool sock, not a washed one, pour on some liquid paraffin put in half an onion and wrap it around her neck, and keep it there till the next full moon. *"Thas right boy."*

It was one of those summer nights almost dark; the Honey Cart was loaded and coming down Little Snoring hill. Just as it reached the bottom bends the wheel came right off and the whole load was spilled over the road. The local Bobby was sent for. Police Constable Sherbert didn't see it at first until he skidded in it, and fell off his regulation issue pedal assisted bicycle, bending the frame and damaging the reflector. His accident report made messy reading.

Police Constable Sherbert classed this as an emergency and as Inky was first reserve and the only man in the village with a proper shovel, he was called for. Inky arrived and immediately stoked up his big briar pipe to disperse the flies, and then he made a wonderful job of clearing the road.

This action was recorded in the constable's messy note book and Inky was soon recommended for promotion to junior loader.

Inky still had designs on the Nit Nurse and now he was one step closer to her accommodating chest. But there was one remaining obstacle, Todger Smith. It was a few weeks later one dark evening when Inky and Todger were about to return to base with a fully loaded cart. There was a terrible accident, it is believed that Todger slipped and fell into the cart and he couldn't swim. There was a Police investigation, the cause of death was obvious but the case was never resolved, did he slip or was he pushed?

On bright winter evenings in the lanes of North Norfolk, when the chilly mist hangs like cheesecloth on the silent hedgerows. When the hoar frost twinkles under the steely light of a full moon. In that witching time between light and dark. It is then that the evil smell appears, just before you feel his eerie presence and see his ghostly form in the fading light. That's when the ghost of the Honey Cart loader wanders the quiet Norfolk lanes searching for the road sweeper.

## CHAPTER 3: John Silver

John Silver was, contrary to popular belief, short and fat. He was in his mid-forties, had a ruddy complexion and a bushy beard. He wore a dark blue uniform and the obligatory cap with a little bit of gold braid and an enamel badge at the front. John was a bit short sighted and wore rimless glasses, he certainly wasn't a pirate. He had a full complement of eyes and legs but he did have a parrot called Fifi. She had been rescued from a massage parlour near the railway sidings down by the docks in King's Lynn. Fifi had a basic but interesting vocabulary and a somewhat colourful turn of phrase.

From an early age John's ambition had been to travel in space, yes he wanted to be an astronaut. So why had he ended up as a lighthouse keeper? Well it's a long story.

Saint Mildred's Light was on a desolate rock about 10 miles off the rugged North Norfolk coast, where it guarded the entrance to Vinegar Middle Sound. The lighthouse was built in 1870 but was in desperate need of modernisation. The lamp still used paraffin and rotated by clockwork, it was wound with a huge brass key which hung on a big nail at the top of the spiral stairs. There were two enormous brass pendulums which swung constantly inside the tall building. John had become quite adept at dodging these, but on cold and wet nights he still found it difficult to come to terms with the journey to the outside loo. This was situated at the other end of the rock, some 100 yards from the front door. He was always in fear of it being washed away while he was in residence. Perhaps this was the cause of John's constipation.

It was one of those cold and windy evenings; he judged it to be at least a force 5 with a heavy swell. John was upstairs trimming the wick. *Ding Dong, Ding Dong*. "Who the Hell is that at this time of night?" John trundled down the 147 stairs, carefully dodging the pendulums as he went. *Ding Dong, Ding Dong*. He unbolted the strong oak door and was met by an icy blast. "Who are you?" The forlorn stranger stared back at him with pitiful eyes. She looked like a drowned rat as she offered him a soggy piece of cardboard. The crashing waves were causing a dense salt spray which dripped off her Souwester and ran down the inside of her oil skins, then emerged through a hole in her ageing sea boots. "You look frozen, haven't you seen the notice on the door?" "Oh yes **SEAVIEW**," she stammered, "I've got the right place." "No not that one, this one," he tapped it with his sooty wick trimmer. "Look it definitely says **NO COLD CALLERS** and who are you anyway?" John asked again "and what are you doing here on a filthy, cold night like this?" "Espresso Pizza delivery," she stuttered. "But I ordered that 3 days ago." "Yes sorry about that Mr Silver but there is a strong onshore wind and the sea is running high and when I couldn't find you I called on two other lighthouses. Then I got lost, then one of the oars broke and I kept rowing round in circles, but I have finally made it, here I am."

"Excuses, excuses. Alright then where is my Pizza?"

"Sorry Mr Silver, I got hungry and ate it."

"You got hungry and ate my Margarita, so why did you come then?" "It's more than my jobs worth not to deliver, so I've brought you the empty box. And while I am here Mr Silver can I use your loo?" An annoyed John pointed a sooty finger towards the far end of the rock and she followed his directions.

While she was enthroned John began to feel pangs of regret at his short temper, which somehow matched his stature, so he decided to make it up to her. When she returned he invited her in. "Come in, can I make you a cup of tea?" "Oh thank you so much that will be wonderful."

"Sorry I am out of milk and tea and the water is a bit salty but it should be warmish. Take off your wet oilskins and warm your hands on the light."

So she did, and they started chatting. "Sorry about the Pizza Mr Silver, after three days of rowing I was quite hungry."

"Oh please call me Long John and what's your name?"

"My name is Deirdre, Deirdre Dreadnought. You see that was my first delivery, I think that it was a trial run, none of the others wanted to do it. I am only doing this job while my other business picks up." "Oh really what sort of business do you have?"

"I am a worm-digger," she said with pride, "Rag Worms, Lug Worms, even Peeler Crab when it's in season. But that's not really what I wanted to be." "Go on Deidre tell me about your ambitions." "Well Long John I actually wanted to be an astronaut but I failed the medical." "Failed the medical why was that then?" "They were advertising for men." "Well would you believe it Deidre; I also wanted to be an astronaut."

The couple chatted for half the night. Then John spotted a light on the sea, it was heading straight for them. He switched on the radio and cranked the big handle.

"Approaching vessel this is Mildred will you please identify yourself." "Hello Mildred this is Super Tanker Big Bertha, will you change your course by 30 degrees to starboard." "No Big Bertha you change your course by 30 degrees to port." "No sorry Mildred we are a Super Tanker it takes us too long to change course. You change course, we insist." "Big Bertha this is Mildred you change course, we insist. Argue if you want to, the choice is your but we are a lighthouse!"

Both John and Deidre watched transfixed as Big Bertha ran into the end of the rocky island demolishing the outside loo and crushing the Pizza delivery rowing boat and its one remaining oar. As they stared through the rain and spray they saw some of her cargo spilling into the choppy sea.

It wasn't until first light and high tide the next morning that Big Bertha managed to free herself from the rock, leaving a lot of flotsam in the form of 5 gallon cans. John and Deidre collected these and found that they all contained aluminium paint. This gave Deidre a wonderful idea. "I know John we both

wanted to be astronauts, let's paint the lighthouse like a space rocket and pretend that we really are astronauts."

"Yes brilliant," replied John, and that's what they did.

As soon as they had finished the painting it showed up on Russian radar. The Russians had nothing of this size and were very impressed, it is believed that this led them to scale down their nuclear programme and invest heavily in the space race. This act in itself was a determining factor in ending the cold war and establishing European stability. So the course of World history may well have been changed by the incompetent navigational skills of the master of Big Bertha, the actions of Long John Silver the lighthouse keeper and the dreams of Deidre the worm digger.