

# Neville Sharp Must Die

Winner #nevillesharpmustdie 2021

by

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Neville took the key out of his pocket and put it in the lock. It turned easily. He'd expected more resistance considering no one had opened that door since Gran's funeral.

It felt odd letting himself in to the bungalow. He'd never actually been here before as Gran had moved here after he had started his prison sentence. Yet here he was in Bickering on Sea; in a bungalow he didn't know yet surrounded by Gran's furniture and knick- knacks so that it felt strangely familiar.

Neville took one of Gran's china dogs off the mantel piece and sat in the armchair next to the fireplace. His eyes pricked with tears as he looked at the ornament. Gran had been his biggest supporter; she had stood by him when no one else had. Mum had got fed up with Neville and his antics and had gone off with her new boyfriend when Neville was 13 years old. Neville had stayed with Gran. He wished that he hadn't caused her so much anguish. He'd been in and out of trouble most of his teenage years, petty theft, drugs, mixing with the wrong crowd, skipping school, but it was the fire that he and Sam Grant had started at the old school building that had led to him being sentenced to 3 years at her majesty's pleasure. Even then Gran hadn't deserted him. She'd made the journey to visit him as often as she could.

Gran had said that it had been a blessing in disguise and reluctantly Neville agreed with her, for it was unlikely that outside of prison he would have been diagnosed with ADHD and started on the medication that had set his life on a new course. Once his brain could think straight and his concentration improved, Neville discovered a passion for books and had started to read anything he could get hold of. Miss Smith in the education centre had noticed his enthusiasm and had encouraged him to take the creative writing course. Nobody was more surprised than Neville himself when the manuscript for his book had been accepted for publication by a small publishing company owned by a friend of Miss Smith.

Gran had known about his book being accepted for publication and Neville felt a sudden wave of sadness that she wasn't here to be able to actually hold a physical copy when it was published – she would have loved that.

Neville put the china dog back on the mantel piece and walked around the bungalow. There were two bed rooms and one looked out towards the sea and would, Neville thought, make a perfect study for working on his next project. He had so many ideas and was keen to start. It seemed like there had been so many stories locked inside his head and now they were all clamouring to get out, to be written down and shared with others. However, there was something that he needed to sort out as a matter of some urgency before moving on to the next story.

In her last telephone call to him, Claudia, who was the representative from the publishing company who was dealing with Neville, had said, in her plummy accent “Darling, there is just one final yet rather important matter that we need to address. Neville Sharp sounds like a train spotter, it really doesn't fit with the genre of your book and of course if the readers google your name, they're going to come across a rather unfortunate list of your past misdemeanours. I'm sorry sweetie but Neville Sharp must die. We need a new name”.

Neville wondered what Gran would have thought about this, but he knew that she would have supported him whatever he decided. Maybe this was his chance for a new start. Gran had said as much when she had bought the bungalow. She had wanted him to come out of prison to somewhere where people didn't know the old Neville, where he wouldn't be judged for his behaviour in the past.

Neville wondered what he thought about it. So many of the ideas for his stories were inspired by things he had experienced. He didn't want to lose Neville completely. He would have to give it some thought and quickly.

Neville suddenly had the urge to get outside, to clear his head and he unlocked the back door and stepped into the garden. He breathed deeply, shut his eyes and filled his lungs with the salty air. It was invigorating! He could understand why Gran had moved here. He was glad that she'd got to enjoy it for a couple of years but full of regret that he hadn't been with her.

It was a crisp February morning and clumps of snow drops nodded in the breeze. Lots of other green shoots were emerging from the ground, the promise of daffodils and tulips, all the early signs of Spring that Gran was so thrilled about each year. Neville realised he was going to have to learn a lot about gardening if he was going to keep it the way Gran liked.

Neville looked at his watch. It was 11.45 and he was starting to feel hungry. He knew that there were some cans of food in the pantry but he didn't fancy that for lunch so he decided he would head along towards the town centre, maybe find a café where he could stop for a while and a shop to buy a few provisions. He popped his notebook and pen in the pocket of his jacket so he could jot down some ideas for his new name while he waited for his food at a café.

Checking that the door was properly locked he stowed the key safely in the zipped pocket of the inside of his jacket, next to his note pad and pen. As soon as he turned out of the garden gate he wished he had worn something warmer. The air was biting cold with the breeze from the sea and he pulled his jacket tighter across his chest and hunched his shoulders against the icy wind. Whilst walking as fast as he thought was reasonably acceptable without drawing undue attention to himself, he powered his way along the sea front, his hot breath creating misty clouds with each exhalation.

It wasn't long before Neville came to a more populated area. There were some beach huts on the right all closed for the winter and looking most forlorn, to the left he saw a sign for a café. It looked cosy and inviting.

It was only as he opened the door to the Old Railway Tea room and the warmth from inside greeted him that he realised how very cold he was.

There were only a couple of older people at a table in the corner and Neville went and sat down at a table in the window. He read the menu and decided that he would have soup of the day. That would warm him.

Neville was looking out towards the sea and didn't hear the waitress arrive at the table to take his order. He started when she spoke. He turned to see a young waitress, smiling at him. She was probably about the same age as him, early twenties. Her name badge said she was Greta. She took his order and disappeared behind the counter.

Neville took out his notepad and started jotting down some ideas.

Greta soon returned with a steaming bowl of soup and Neville relished each comforting spoonful. He had returned to his notepad when Greta came to take his bowl away and ask if he wanted anything else. Neville ordered tea and a scone and just as Greta was about to leave the table, she glanced at his notepad. “Are you doing anagrams?” she asked, “I love anything to do with words”.

Neville smiled “Yes I am. Me too”.

Greta continued “Are you visiting Bickering, I haven’t seen you in here before?”

“Well, it’s my first time in here, but I’ve just moved into my Gran’s old home so I’ll be around for a while”

Greta put the dirty crockery back down on the table “You’re not Violet’s grandson, are you?”

“Yes I am” said Neville not quite sure what was coming next “Did you know her?”

“Oh I loved Violet” said Greta. “She was a regular in here and I used to pick up some bits of shopping for her sometimes and drop it in to her on my way home. She was always talking about you and how proud she was that you were writing a book. She was such a lovely lady. I do miss her”

“Me too” smiled Neville.

It was getting dark when Neville arrived back at the bungalow. He’d grabbed a few bits of shopping on his way back but most of his time had been spent chatting to Greta about Gran.

Before the publishing company closed for the day, Neville rang Claudia.

“I’ve got a pen name for the book “he said “Ellis V Harpen”

“Perfect, wonderful job” replied Claudia.

I'm pleased with that, thought Neville as he sat in front of the fire at the end of the day. I've kept me and I've got Gran with me. Right in the middle of everything. She'd like that.

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