Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Paths of the Dead

Written by Lin Anderson

Published by Pan Books

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Paths of the Dead

LIN ANDERSON

PAN BOOKS



First published 2014 by Pan Books
an imprint of Pan Macmillan, a division of Macmillan Publishers Limited
Pan Macmillan, 20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR
Basingstoke and Oxford
Associated companies throughout the world
www.panmacmillan.com

ISBN 978-1-4472-4566-7

Copyright © Lin Anderson 2014

The right of Lin Anderson to be identified as the
author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form,
or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the publisher. Any person who does
any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to
criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

The Macmillan Group has no responsibility for the information provided by
any author websites whose address you obtain from this book ('author websites').
The inclusion of author website addresses in this book does not constitute
an endorsement by or association with us of such sites or the content,
products, advertising or other materials presented on such sites.

1 3 5 7 9 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset by Palimpsest Book Production Limited, Falkirk, Stirlingshire
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way
of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated
without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than
that in which it is published and without a similar condition including
this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

Visit **www.panmacmillan.com** to read more about all our books
and to buy them. You will also find features, author interviews and
news of any author events, and you can sign up for e-newsletters
so that you're always first to hear about our new releases.

For Andy Rolph

1

The final hymn drew to a close and Amy took her seat. Around her, the bustle of a hundred people ceased and a silence of expectation fell.

She pondered again why she'd agreed to accompany her friend to a spiritualist church on a Sunday morning. She hadn't been inside a church in years. Any church. She still prayed, that habit had endured. Usually last thing at night, before she dozed off, she said the Lord's Prayer, more from habit than religion.

The minister had moved to one side and a young man took his place on stage. With his shiny cheeks and open-necked shirt, he reminded Amy of a rather earnest salesman, who'd recently tried to persuade Alan to buy a car he couldn't afford. She recalled how kind Alan had been to the man, and felt a sudden surge of love for her big student son. Second year at university studying engineering and doing well, even if he was always short of money. He'd turned out all right, despite not having a dad around. She smiled, thinking of Alan's amused expression when he'd heard where she was going that morning. 'Don't ask Aunt Bella to get in touch from beyond the grave. She terrified me when she was alive,' he'd said.

The medium moved nearer the front and gave them a tentative smile. *He looks so young*, Amy thought, *and gullible*.

He introduced himself as Patrick Menzies and wished them 'God Bless'. Then he explained that mediums like himself were able to communicate with those who had passed over. However, he couldn't summon the departed.

'They come to me,' he said, 'but only when they are ready, willing and able to do so.'

At this, the medium inclined his head as though listening to a silent voice just behind his left shoulder.

A ripple of excitement swept the room.

'This is it,' Doreen whispered beside her.

He spoke so quietly that Amy strained to hear. 'Yes. Welcome. I can hear you. God Bless.' He nodded a few times. 'Who do you want to speak to?' Pause. 'Yes. I understand.'

A small sob caused Amy to glance along the row to where a young woman was silently mouthing 'Please'.

The medium gathered himself and, opening his eyes, focussed on the audience. The tension in the room was palpable. It wasn't only the young woman who was desperate to be singled out.

Amy sat back in her seat. Alan was right. This was all nonsense. Yet she seemed to be the only person in the room who thought so. She checked on Doreen, who appeared as intent as the rest. Who did Doreen think might get in touch? Her mother, dead these past ten years? Amy heard an intake of breath from the young woman on her right as the medium began to speak.

'Is there anyone here called Amy?' His eyes swept the audience.

'I'm Amy.' Her young neighbour shot to her feet.

The medium looked puzzled, then turned and listened again. 'God Bless. Yes, I understand.'

The young woman interrupted this exchange in excited anticipation. 'It's my Gary, isn't it? Gary, can you hear me?'

Amy found her own heart pounding as all eyes turned from the other Amy to the medium.

'I'm sorry, I don't believe this is Gary coming through.'

'You asked for Amy. I'm Amy.'

The medium seemed perplexed by this and resumed his conversation with his silent visitor. Eventually, he said, 'I'm sorry, but this definitely isn't your Gary.'

The young woman gave a moan and slumped to her seat in despair. Amy felt a rush of sympathy, mixed with anger. How cruel to come here hoping desperately to talk with a loved one and for this to happen.

Meanwhile, the medium was cradling his head as though in pain. The minister hurried to his side and whispered something.

'No. No. I'm fine,' the medium insisted, straightening up again.

Amy was shocked at how white his face had become.

He looked upwards for a moment as though in prayer, then inclined his head to the left and listened.

'Oh no. That's terrible.'

The disquiet that resonated at his words silenced the murmurs surrounding the stricken younger Amy.

'I must ask the audience again. Is there an Amy in the hall?'

When Doreen touched her arm, Amy shook her head. 'It's nothing to do with me,' she said under her breath.

'It might be,' whispered Doreen, excited by the prospect.

Amy had no intention of raising her hand. She didn't want to hear some message from Aunt Bella, or anyone else for that matter.

'Please,' the medium pleaded, 'the Amy I seek is in the audience. Will she please reveal herself.'

Amy gripped her hands together and tried to ignore Doreen's whispered encouragement.

'Okay, I'll tell her. God Bless.' The medium turned to the audience once more. 'The spirit has asked me to say that it isn't Aunt Bella.'

Amy's heart stopped, and fear in all its forms swept over her. She opened her mouth to speak but no words came. Then she heard Doreen's voice.

'My friend's called Amy.'

The medium swung round and locked eyes with her. 'Are you Amy?'

'It can't be me you're looking for. I don't know anyone who passed on recently.'

The medium regarded her with concern. 'You know an Aunt Bella?'

'She died two years ago. My son Alan said I wasn't to speak to her,' she added, not knowing why.

'Your son's called Alan?'

'Yes. When I told him I was coming here this morning, he made a joke about his Aunt Bella. He said he hoped she didn't try to contact us. He was terrified of her when she was alive.' Amy's attempt at laughter died in the heavy silence.

The medium looked taken aback. 'You last spoke to Alan when?'

'An hour ago, just before I came here. He always comes over on a Sunday for . . .' Amy tailed off as she registered the medium's face. *He looks like a ghost*, she thought.

The medium, obviously distressed, was speaking to one side again.

'God Bless. Are you sure?' He turned his attention back to Amy. 'I am so sorry, Amy, but this *is* Alan I'm talking to.'

His announcement was followed by uproar in the hall. Amy shouted through it, 'That's nonsense. I spoke to him before I left.'

The noise abated as the audience strove to hear the medium's reply.

'Alan has asked me to give you a message.'

Amy rose to her feet, a rushing sound in her ears. She wanted the stupid man to shut up. She wanted him to disappear with his shiny cheeks and his ugly words. She shouted 'Stop it!' at the top of her voice, then turned on her heel and made for the door.

2

She was sitting in the minister's office, a cup of cold tea on the desk in front of her. Beside it lay her mobile. Amy had already left three messages for Alan, none of which he'd responded to. She'd tried the house phone as well, which wasn't answered either.

Alan has simply gone out, Amy told herself. It was Sunday after all. He often took the dog for a walk, or cut the grass for her. If the mower was running he wouldn't hear the phone. Maybe he was at the pub. He sometimes went for a pint on a Sunday, met up with some of his old mates, before the two of them had dinner together. The thought briefly consoled her. She glanced at the door, willing Doreen to appear and tell her she'd brought the car round and was ready to take her home.

But it was the medium who opened the door instead.

His shiny cheeks had reddened. *He looks like a clown*, Amy thought cruelly.

'Mrs MacKenzie. May I speak to you?'

'I think you've said enough.'

He seemed to shrivel under her glare. Amy wasn't naturally unkind and immediately felt a little sorry for him. He obviously believed in the rubbish he peddled, as did most of his audience. Since she had been part of that audience, he would assume she did too.

'I don't believe in this stuff,' she said. 'I just came along with a friend.'

He'd picked up on the conciliatory tone and as a result felt able to enter the room properly and shut the door.

'It would help *me* if we talked.' His request sounded completely sincere.

Amy contemplated the idea that he might be suffering from a mental illness. If that was the case then she shouldn't be mean to him.

'You'll have to be quick. Doreen's just gone to get the car.'

He glanced at the mobile on the desk. 'Have you called your son?'

'He's out at the moment.' Amy said this as though she knew it for definite. 'What do you want to talk about?'

'This is very difficult. I don't want to alarm you, but Alan gave me clear instructions.'

'Stop this!' Amy shouted angrily and rose to her feet. 'There is nothing wrong with Alan. He was in perfect health when I left him—'

The medium interrupted her before she could reinforce this further.

'I'm so sorry, Mrs MacKenzie. Alan told me to tell you to go to the police. I think your son may have had a violent death.'

Amy felt the hysteria rise and there was nothing she could do to stop it. 'You're mad, or ill. I don't know which. I'll go to the police all right, but it will be to make a complaint about you – and this place.' As the final words emerged, the door swung open and Doreen appeared.

'Take me home,' Amy cried as she pushed past her

friend, desperate to get away from the shiny red cheeks and the soft mouth that had uttered those terrible words.

Doreen made one attempt to speak on the way home, but Amy swiftly cut her off. She had no intention of repeating what the medium had said in that office. Her anger at the man was growing swiftly into fury. How dare he tell her those things. How dare he tell anyone that he could speak to the dead. It was appalling that a church allowed him to appear like that, frightening people. All the time she raged internally, a small but insistent voice reminded her that the medium had known about Bella. How could he have known about her sister? How could he have known about her conversation with Alan about Bella? The thought brought a chill to her heart and a desperate need to get home. To open the front door and call Alan's name. To see him emerge from his old room and ask her why the hell she was looking so worried.

When the car drew up outside the house, Doreen quickly offered to come in with her, but Amy wouldn't hear of it.

'I'll give you a call tomorrow. Let you know what time I'm coming round on Friday,' she said.

Doreen nodded, playing along with Amy's attempts at normality.

She waited on the front step until Doreen drove away, before slipping her key in the lock.

'Alan, I'm back,' she shouted. When the dog didn't come running and Alan didn't answer her call, she said out loud, 'He's out with the dog,' as though that settled everything. When she found a note on the table in the kitchen telling her he'd gone out with Barney and would be back around

five, she said *I told you so* to herself. After she put the kettle on, she tried Alan's mobile again. When she heard its ring tone coming from the sitting room, she felt absurdly pleased. Alan had a forgetful nature and had left his mobile here more than once before. Beginning to feel less concerned, Amy spooned two large scoops of tea into the teapot and added hot water. This cup of tea she would definitely drink.

She was fine until four thirty. She'd busied herself until then doing tasks she would normally have left until Monday. When Alan visited, they usually spent time in the garden. Him cutting the grass and her pottering. Occasionally they went for a pub lunch. In fact, had she not agreed to go with Doreen to that silly church, they might well have been walking back from the Cumberland Arms at this very moment. Amy *tsked* in annoyance.

By five thirty she had started to pace the house, pretending to do things that didn't need doing. The chicken she had stuffed and roasted had been lifted out and was now rapidly cooling. The roast potatoes Alan loved had been cooked to a crisp, the broccoli turned to mush. By six o'clock Amy had taken to standing at the front window, looking out periodically, trying to conjure up Alan's tall figure, Barney at his side, coming along the road. She would give him a good telling-off when he did arrive, she decided. Especially if he'd stopped off for a pint and not called to warn her he would be late. *But he doesn't have his mobile*, she remembered.

She hadn't been able to eat her own meal, the gnawing sensation in her stomach having nothing to do with hunger. By seven she was frantic and could no longer pretend normality. Using Alan's mobile, she called everyone in his contacts list, asking if they had seen him. Most of

them sounded bemused to have been phoned by Alan's mother. None professed to having seen him that day, except a girl called Jolene who admitted she'd been with him that morning. She sounded mildly embarrassed at revealing this and Doreen wondered if she was a girlfriend, but was too worried to ask.

'If he gets in touch, tell him to call me,' she said.

'I thought he was coming to see you today,' the girl said, sounding wary.

'He did. He took the dog for a walk and isn't back yet,' Doreen told her. She knew she sounded like a fussing mother, so left it at that and hung up.

Doreen called her at seven thirty.

When Amy heard her voice she almost put the phone down. Rightly or wrongly, she found herself blaming Doreen for what had happened in the church. And for what was happening now.

When Doreen asked outright if Alan was okay, Amy told her he had gone for a walk with the dog.

'He was in when you got back?'

'He left a note.'

'But that was hours ago. Have you called him?'

'He left his mobile behind,' Amy told her.

There was a short silence while Doreen decided what to say. 'Maybe you should call the police. Just in case.'

Amy didn't answer, although inside her head she was screaming.

'Do you want me to come round?' Doreen asked.

'No,' Amy said sharply. She could not bear to look at Doreen, to remember her eager face as she'd urged her to respond to the medium's call. Amy put the phone down.

She stood for a moment, her instinct yelling at her that

something was wrong. Terribly wrong. A suffocating pain clutched her chest, her head swam, no air filled her lungs. She sat down heavily on the chair beside the phone table. *Please. Please*. She felt the pain and despair that had swamped the other Amy when it hadn't been her Gary, and knew then that neither of their prayers had been answered.

She stuck it for another hour before she made up her mind to go out and look for him. Anything was better than sitting around here worrying. Being midsummer, it was still light. Amy put on her coat even though the evening was warm and lifted her handbag. She was at the gate when she realized if Alan came back he would wonder where she was. So she went back inside and wrote him a note, telling him she had his mobile and to please call it when he got home.

Outside she hesitated again, with no idea which direction to take. She tried to think where Alan would go with the dog, then a thought struck. If something had happened to Alan, surely Barney would have come home alone? The idea seemed a distinct possibility which relit her hope.

Now where would he head? Probably the country park. Even as she acknowledged this, Amy knew what she was doing was pointless. The park was huge. There was no way she could find him there, yet she kept on walking in that direction.

She was nearly at the entrance when the mobile rang. She grabbed for it, her heart leaping.

'Alan? Where the hell are you?' It was the young woman Jolene from earlier.

Before Amy could interrupt, the girl went on. 'I've had your bloody mother on the phone. And you were supposed to meet me at the flat half an hour ago.'

'It's not Alan,' Amy finally managed to say.

There was a strangled sound of embarrassment then Jolene said, 'He's not shown up yet?'

'No. I've gone out looking for him.'

'Could he have gone for a drink with one of his old mates?'

'I don't think so. We always eat at the same time when he visits and he wouldn't be late without calling.'

'He is usually good about that,' Jolene conceded. 'What do you think we should do?' Her tone was verging on fearful, which Amy immediately registered.

'You think something's happened to him?' Amy said.

'There's bound to be a simple explanation, and if he doesn't have his mobile, he hasn't been able to contact you.'

It was the same excuse Amy had been using to quell her own fears. 'You don't understand. That man at the spiritualist church told me Alan was dead,' she blurted out. 'And he knew about Bella. How could he know about Bella?' She was babbling now, but couldn't stop herself.

'I don't understand.' Jolene sounded shocked.

Amy had reached the park entrance. The summer evening had brought local residents out to enjoy the late sunshine. The scene looked so normal. If anything had happened to Alan in the park, surely someone would have helped him? A collie was running and fetching a ball. Just as Barney would have done. Amy felt a catch in her throat. 'I'm going home to wait for him,' she said and rang off.

When she got back, the house was in darkness. Once inside, she picked up the house phone and began by calling all the hospitals with Accident and Emergency departments. When she had no luck there, she called the police.