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...

The House at Sea's End

Written by Elly Griffiths

Published by Quercus

All text is copyright © of the author

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

First published in Great Britain in 2011 by Quercus
This paperback edition published in 2011 by

Quercus
21 Bloomsbury Square
London
WC1A 2NS

Copyright © 2011 by Elly Griffiths
Map copyright © Raymond Turvey

The moral right of Elly Griffiths to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher.

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

ISBN 978 1 84916 365 1

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places and events are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Typeset by Ellipsis Digital Limited, Glasgow
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

CHAPTER 1

March

The tide is out. In the early evening light, the sands stretch into the distance, bands of yellow and grey and gold. The water in the rock pools reflects a pale blue sky. Three men and a woman walk slowly over the beach, occasionally stooping and looking intently at the ground, taking samples and photographs. One of the men holds something that looks rather like a staff, which he plants into the sand at regular intervals. They pass a lighthouse marooned on a rock, its jaunty red and white paint peeling, and a beach where a recent rock fall means that they have to wade in the sea, splashing through the shallow water. Now the coastline has transformed into a series of little coves which appear to have been eaten out of the soft, sandstone cliff. Their progress slows when they have to clamber over rocks slippery with seaweed and the remains

of old sea walls. One of the men falls into the water and the other men laugh, the sound echoing in the still evening air. The woman trudges on ahead, not looking back.

Eventually they reach a spot where the cliff juts out into the sea, forming a bleak headland. The land curves away sharply, leaving a v-shaped inlet where the tide seems to be moving particularly fast. White-topped waves race towards jagged rocks and the seagulls are calling wildly. High up, on the furthest point of the cliff, is a grey stone house, faintly gothic in style, with battlements and a curved tower facing out to sea. A Union Jack is flying from the tower.

'Sea's End House,' says one of the men, stopping to rest his back.

'Doesn't that MP live there?' asks another.

The woman has stopped at the far side of the bay and is looking across at the house. The battlements are dark grey, almost black, in the fading light.

'Jack Hastings,' she says. 'He's an MEP.'

Although the woman is the youngest of the four and has a distinctly alternative look – purple spiky hair, piercings and an army surplus jacket – the others seem to treat her with respect. Now one of the men says, almost pleadingly, 'Don't you think we should knock off, Trace?'

The man holding the staff, a bald giant known as Irish Ted, adds, 'There's a good pub here. The Sea's End.'

The other men stifle smiles. Ted is famous for knowing

every pub in Norfolk, no mean feat in a county reputed to have a pub for every day of the year.

'Let's just walk this beach,' says Trace, getting out a camera. 'We can take some GPS readings.'

'Erosion's bad here,' says Ted. 'I've been reading about it. Sea's End House has been declared unsafe. Jack Hastings is in a right old two and eight. Keeps ranting on about an Englishman's home being his castle.'

They all look up at the grey house on the cliff. The curved wall of the tower is only two or three feet from the precipice. The remains of a fence hang crazily in midair.

'There was a whole garden at the back of the house once. Summer house, the lot,' says Craig, one of the men. 'My granddad used to do the gardening.'

'Beach has silted up too,' says Trace. 'That big storm in February has shifted a lot of stone.'

They all look towards the narrow beach. Below the cliffs, banks of pebbles form a shelf which then falls steeply into the sea. It's an inhospitable place, hard to imagine families picnicking here, children with buckets and spades, sun-bathing adults.

'Looks like a cliff fall,' says Ted.

'Maybe,' says Trace. 'Let's get some readings anyway.'

She leads the way along the beach, keeping to the edge of the cliff. A sloping path leads from Sea's End House down to the sea and fishing boats are moored higher up, above the tide line, but the sea is coming in fast.

'There's no way off the beach this side,' says the man whose grandfather was a gardener. 'We don't want to get cut off.'

'It's shallow enough,' says Trace. 'We can wade.'

'The current's treacherous here,' warns Ted. 'We'd better head straight for the pub.'

Trace ignores him; she is photographing the cliff face, the lines of grey and black with the occasional shocking stripe of red. Ted plunges his staff into the ground and takes a GPS reading. The third man, whose name is Steve, wanders over to a point where a fissure in the cliff has created a deep ravine. The mouth of the ravine is filled up with stones, probably from a rock fall. Steve starts to climb over the rubble, his boots slipping on the loose stones.

'Careful,' says Trace, not looking round.

The sea is louder now, thundering in towards land, and the sea birds are returning to their nests, high up in the cliffs.

'We'd better head back,' says Ted again, but Steve calls from the cliff face.

'Hey, look at this!'

They walk over to him. Steve has made a gap in the pile of rubble and is crouching in the cave-like space behind. It's a deep recess, almost an alleyway, the cliffs looming above, dark and oppressive. Steve has shifted some of the larger stones and is leaning over something that lies half-exposed in the sandy soil.

'What is it?'

'Looks like a human arm,' says Ted matter-of-factly.

Detective Sergeant David Clough is eating. Nothing new in that. Clough eats almost constantly throughout the working day, starting with a McDonald's breakfast, moving on through several Mars Bars and a Pot Noodle for lunch, through a sustaining sandwich and cake at tea time before treating himself to a pint and a curry for supper. Despite this, Clough's waistline is admirably trim, a fact he attributes to 'football and shagging'. Recently, though, he has acquired a girlfriend, which has cut down on at least one of these activities.

Clough has had a trying day. His boss is on holiday and Clough was secretly hoping that this would be the week when a serial killer stalked Norfolk and was caught personally by super-policeman David, soon to be Sir, Clough. But, instead, he has had two break-ins, one taking and driving away and one old dear found dead on a stairlift. It's not exactly *Miami Vice*.

His phone rings, blasting out an irritating jingle from *The Simpsons*.

'Trace! Hi, babe.'

Detective Sergeant Judy Johnson, who is (under protest) sharing a desk with Clough, makes gagging motions. Clough ignores her, ingesting the last of his blueberry muffin.

'Dave, you'd better come,' says Trace. 'We've found some bones.'

Clough leaps into action, grabs his phone and dives for the door, yelling for Judy to follow him. The effect is slightly ruined by the fact that he has forgotten his car keys and has to come back for them. Judy is still sitting at the desk, stony faced.

'What do you mean "follow me"? You don't outrank me.'

Clough sighs. It's typical of Judy to raise objections and ruin their only chance of action this week. Ever since she was promoted last year she's been getting above herself, in Clough's opinion. Okay, she's a good enough cop but she's always picking him up on detail – a piece of paperwork left undone, a date missed, a phone call unrecorded – paperwork never solved a crime, Clough tells her in his head, though not in person; Judy is fairly formidable.

Now he tries to fix his face into an imitation of the boss at his most impatient.

'Human bones found at Broughton Sea's End. We'd better get going pronto.'

Still Judy doesn't move.

'Where were they found? Exactly?'

Clough doesn't know. He was too busy swinging into action to ask questions. He glowers.

'Was that Trace on the phone? Did she find them?'

'Yeah. She's doing some sort of survey of the cliffs and what have you.'

'An archaeological survey?'

'I don't know. All I know is they've found some bones, human remains. Are you coming or are you going to ask questions all day?'

Sure enough, by the time that they arrive at Broughton Sea's End, the tide is coming in and it's too dangerous to go down onto the beach. Clough shoots Judy a reproachful look which she ignores completely.

Trace and Steve are waiting for them at the top of the cliff, near the entrance to Sea's End House. The sea has reached the bottom of the sloping path, the waves breaking with a smack against the stone. On the far side of the cove, the cliffs rise up, dark and straight, cut off now by the tide.

'You were a long time,' Trace greets Clough. 'Ted and Craig have gone to the pub.'

'Irish Ted?' says Clough. 'He's always in the pub.'

Judy gets out her notebook and double checks the time before writing it down. Clough is finding her incredibly irritating.

'Where exactly did you find the bones?' she asks.

'There's a gap in the cliff,' says Steve. 'A sort of ravine.' He's a wiry weather-beaten man with grey hair in a pony-tail. Typical archaeologist, thinks Clough.

'How did you find them?' asks Judy.

'I was investigating a rock fall. I moved some of the

bigger stones and there they were, underneath. The soil was probably dislodged by the landslide.'

'Are they above the tide line?' asks Judy. Across the bay, the first waves are breaking against the foot of the cliffs.

'At present we think they're protected by the debris from the rock fall,' says Trace.

'Spring tide though,' says Steve. 'It'll be a high one.'

'If we clear away the rocks and dig a trench,' says Trace, 'the sea'll get them for sure.'

They watch as the water advances, incredibly quickly now, joining rock pools together, submerging the sea walls, turning the little bay into a churning pool of white.

Trace looks at her watch. She hasn't made eye-contact with Clough since he arrived; he doesn't know if she is pissed off with him for being late or just in professional, archaeologist mode. It's a new departure for him, going out with a career girl, much less a girl with punk hair and a pierced tongue who wears Doc Martens. They met when Trace was involved with another case involving archaeologists and buried bones. Clough remembers how strongly he felt drawn to Trace from the very first when he saw her digging, her thin arms quilted with muscles. Even now he still finds the muscles (and the piercing) incredibly sexy. For his part, he just hopes that the six-pack compensates for the fact that he hasn't read a book since he got stuck halfway through *Of Mice and Men* for O-Level English.

'Are you sure they were human bones?' Judy is asking.

'Pretty sure,' says Trace. She shivers slightly. The sun has gone in and the wind is rising.

'How old?'

'I don't know. We'd need Ruth Galloway to have a look.'

Trace, Clough and Judy exchange looks. They all have their own memories of Ruth Galloway. Only Steve does not react to the name. 'Isn't she the forensics girl? I thought she'd left.'

'She was on maternity leave,' says Judy. 'I think she's back at work now.'

'Should be at home looking after her kiddie,' says Clough, rather ill-advisedly.

'She's a single mother,' snaps Trace. 'Presumably she needs the money.'

'How did you come to be on the beach?' asks Judy hastily.

'We're doing a survey for the university on coastal erosion. We're surveying all the north-east Norfolk beaches. We've made some interesting finds as well. Palaeolithic hand axe at Titchwell, a Roman bracelet at Burgh Castle, lots of shipwrecks. Steve was examining the cliffs here when he saw the rock fall. The bones were in the gap behind. It looks like they were buried fairly deeply but the earth got dislodged when the stones came down.'

'How come you're discovering these things?' asks Judy, as they walk back along the cliff path. 'If the sea's advancing, wouldn't it cover everything up?'

Clough is glad she has asked this. He'd wanted to but was scared of looking stupid in front of Trace.

'Tides change,' says Trace shortly. 'Sand gets moved; parts get silted up, other parts uncovered. The pebbles get pushed further up the beach. Things that were buried become exposed.'

'Like our bones,' says Steve. 'They may have been buried well above the tidal line but the water's getting closer, it's wearing the earth away. Then part of the cliff came down on top of them.'

'Did you get a good look at them?' asks Clough.

'Not really,' says Steve. 'Tide was coming in too fast. We didn't want to get stranded on the wrong side of the beach. But, just at a glance, I'd say we were looking at more than one body.'

Clough and Judy exchange glances. 'Definitely human?'

'In my humble opinion, yes.'

'We found something else too,' says Trace, whose opinions are never humble.

They have reached the pub. Its sign, which, rather tactlessly, shows a man falling off a cliff, creaks in the gathering wind. They can see Ted through the window, raising a pint to his lips. In the yellow light from the window, Trace holds out something that looks a bit like loft insulation, a small ball of fluffy, yellowish fibres.

'What is it?' asks Judy.

'Cotton wool?' suggests Clough.

'Whiffs a bit,' says Steve. There is, indeed, a strong sulphuric smell coming from the material.

'Fantastic,' Clough rubs his hands together. 'The boss is going to love this.'

'Where is Nelson anyway?' says Trace.

'On holiday,' says Clough. 'Back on Monday. He'll be counting the days.'

Judy laughs. Nelson's dislike of holidays is a byword at the station.