

© 2020 Cheryl Denise Bannerman. All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author.

Print ISBN: 978-1-7353352-6-1

This is a work of fiction. All of the characters, names, incidents, organizations, and dialogue in this novel are either the products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously.

Family Ties, Missing Organs, & Champagne

An Anna Romano Mystery Series

Book Three

Cheryl Denise Bannerman

Chapter 1: Once Upon a Happily Ever After

Anna

Once upon a time there was a young lady, and yes I can say ‘young’, who lived with her seven cats and was a very successful mystery author. One day, in the middle of a horrible kidnapping case, she met a handsome detective. (Quick sidebar: I can’t say what one thing it was that caught my eye, but he had the most captivating features. Six foot four, lean and in shape, but not too muscular, with these intense green eyes that a girl could get lost in.) Anyway, after dating for several months, the young lady and handsome detective fell in love and moved in together. All of her cats loved him and soon they were living happily ever after.

In case you are just joining in on the fun, my name is Anna Romano, and that ‘once upon a time’ story was about me.

But, who am I kidding, that stuff just happens in books and movies, right? Well, actually, I’m kind of living the fairytale now. John and I are getting along great and my babies do love him. So, what’s my complaint? I guess it would be that John works too much. I mean, I love the freedom and space he gives me to write and attend all of my author events, but I would like to spend more time with him.

Today is an exception. Albeit, it’s a normal day for me, picking up cat litter, groceries, and soil from the local nursery; but for John, it’s a day of NOT solving murders and napping peacefully on a mild, breezy afternoon. It’s been many months since I accidentally stumbled upon those two dead bodies in the Atkinson case, and everyone has gone on with their lives. Even though Chatty Cathy messaged me for weeks after the case was closed, pestering me for a new story, I’ve managed to stay out of trouble. Moreover, my book about the Atkinson case, *A Killer Charity Ball to Die For*, was a bestseller, which my publicist, Shirlene, was very happy about.

However, as I head back home with the windows down, enjoying the sunshine, the cool breeze, and a bag of cheetos, while listening to a soft rock station, I can't help but wonder what excitement lies ahead. You know what they say about the 'calm before the storm'.

As I pull up to the house, I see Ms. Martinez and Mr. Craigly smiling and laughing in front of his house and TatorTot, my Persian, sitting in the window waiting for me, and smile to myself.

It seems as if love is in the air. Life is good.

Chapter 2: Itching for Attention...and a Nap

John

Today is quite the luxury, a day off. I'm laying on the couch, enjoying a cannoli, and flicking through channels on the TV. It doesn't happen often, that's for sure. But when it does, it's pure heaven.

The past few months have actually been kind of peaceful. Anna has not stumbled upon any dead bodies recently, nor has she tried to maneuver herself into the middle of my murder investigations, and I'm left to do my detective work on my own. Just the way I like it.

I'm very pleased with our living arrangement and have actually grown quite fond of her babies. Waking up to Anna's sweet face every morning is wonderful. And, of course, her cooking is phenomenal. What more could a man ask for? It's the perfect life, for now. The 'M' word hasn't come up yet; but, I'm sure it will soon.

Anna is off doing her normal shopping routine and I was going to enjoy a nap, but then I thought about those cannoli in the refrigerator. And Tiny and Petra were itching for some attention, so I lost track of time. Just when I was about to hunker down, the phone rang. It was my parents.

"Mom, Dad, how are you? Is everything okay?" I asked.

"Yes, everything is fine. Can't we just call to see how you and Anna are doing? Why does there have to be an ulterior motive?" they responded, almost talking over each other. And, I can imagine both of them crowded together around the speaker phone on the kitchen wall.

I was already suspicious. Perhaps it's just a hazard of the job. For the next thirty minutes, they went on and on about how Anna and I are not getting any younger and we need to make a decision about the next step in our relationship. Then the conversation moved on to their desire

for grandchildren. I can't believe I'm saying this, but I'd much rather be playing with the cats right now than endure this conversation. As if on cue, Petra jumps at the phone, like she's trying to swipe it out of my hands. I whisper a stern 'stop!' and pointed a serious finger, and she curls up on my belly purring.

"I'll be sure to discuss all of this with Anna and get back to you. Thank you so much for calling," I faltered, trying to get them off the phone and go back to my lazy day off.

"One more thing before you go, sweetie," my mother added in a loving voice. "Your father and I think it would be a good idea if you spent more time with your brother. You know how much he looks up to you."

Looks up to me? Despises me, more like, for getting my life together and joining the force, while he continued his life of crime. Running around, getting into trouble, is fun when you're in high school, but once it goes past twenty-five, it's just pathetic. I'm tired of bailing Scott out of 'this predicament' or 'that debt' every few months. I wish Mom and Dad would just wash their hands of him, once and for all. They deserve to enjoy their retirement in peace. Let Scott dig himself out of whatever hole he has dug this time and straighten out his own life.

Just then, I heard a tap at the front door. Tiny was the first one to leap from the couch to the foyer. Anna peeked her head in and gestured she needed help with the bags. This was just the escape I needed.

"You're absolutely right! I will definitely try to do that. But, I'm afraid I have to cut this short, Anna needs my help bringing in some bags of soil from the car. You know how much she loves her gardening. Can I call you guys back later ?" I bargained.

I didn't wait for their reply and hurried off the phone as quick as I could, without being disrespectful, of course.

I slipped on my shoes and headed out to the car to carry the bags from the trunk. Anna was engrossed in a conversation across the street with Ms. Martinez and Mr. Craigly. I smiled and waved as I unloaded the trunk and headed back inside.

With the groceries unpacked, and Anna settling back into her gardening, I grabbed a beer from the fridge and headed back to the couch to finish enjoying my day off. I settled on an old western on TV and eventually drifted off to sleep.