

MARTIN EDWARDS



Yesterday's Papers

"Martin Edwards writes terrific crime novels"
- Guardian -



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YESTERDAY'S PAPERS

by

Martin Edwards

Publisher Information

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Excerpt from *The Devil in Disguise* © 2012 Martin Edwards.

The chapter headings in this novel are taken from *Confession To Murder*.

Note from the author: In writing this book, I have been grateful for the help of friends and colleagues expert on the Liverpool and legal scenes. Nevertheless, this is a work of fiction and all the characters, firms, organisations and incidents described are wholly imaginary. So far as I know, they do not resemble any counterparts in the real world; in the unlikely event that any similarity does exist, it is an unintended coincidence.

Dedicated to Catherine

Where mystery begins, justice ends.

– Edmund Burke, *A Vindication of Natural Society*

Introduction

Like each of the Harry Devlin series, *Yesterday's Papers* is a title based on a song, from a 1967 album by the Rolling Stones. And like each of the others, it is an inspired choice. No other title would be so right for a story that rests on the legal documents filed away from a case of thirty years ago. Typically, too, there are more echoes of the title in the fact that from the beginning Devlin is offered assistance by a crime reporter from the local press. Moreover, the music business is central to the plot. The victim was the girlfriend of a pop singer at the heart of the Mersey Sound.

Layer upon layer. Martin Edwards knows the music scene of the sixties as if he worked for the Melody Maker. His Merseybeat stars, Ray Brill, Clive Doxey and Benny Frederick, co-exist in these pages with the Beatles, Cilla Black, Gene Pitney and John Barry. How appropriate that Liverpool solicitors store their old files in a disused pier ballroom known to Devlin as the Land of the Dead – and how pleasing that his visit there is heralded by a mangled saxophone rendition of A Hard Day's Night that would have John Coltrane turning in his grave, to say nothing of John Lennon. A wonderful concept, grippingly created.

Another rich seam is criminology. When I discovered the magic of reading, the first grown-up book I tackled at the age of nine (don't ask) was *The Life of Sir Edward Marshall Hall*, by Edward Marjoribanks, a colourful account of the cases this great barrister was involved in. I'm sure it influenced me to become a crime writer. How pleasing, then, to find my boyhood hero Marshall Hall mentioned in these pages. He died too soon to have featured in Liverpool's classic Wallace Case which is summarised in chapter two – but he would surely have secured an acquittal. The fictional crimes in the book get an extra cachet from references to the real murders studied by the odious Ernest Miller, the amateur criminologist who first approaches Devlin. As well as Wallace, other killers from Florence

Maybrick to Myra Hindley lurk within the text, reminding the reader that even in a story rich in humour, horrors may be expected, too.

Then there is Liverpool itself. Martin Edwards was the first crime writer to think of setting a series here. Thanks largely to the Beatles, we all have some grasp of the unique character of the city and its witty people, but it takes a long-term association for a writer to convey it in totality, as he has through this engaging series of books. It's a mark of his care for authenticity that he was once asked by an interviewer if he could name any gaffe he had made and he admitted to writing in *Yesterday's Papers* about a set of railings in Sefton Park that don't, after all, exist. *A set of railings?* I mention this because the confession is typical of the author's thoroughness. The descriptions of the city aren't set pieces. They are little more than glimpses – of the ferry terminal, the pierhead, the pubs, the courts where Harry earns his keep – yet they pinpoint the vitality of the place as well as its seediness.

I've almost done. If I go on much longer I'll be revealing secrets from the plot, which is brilliant, producing surprise upon surprise, like a master magician. But I can't finish without mentioning my favourite example of the author's inventiveness – a policeman called Wedding Cake. Read on and find out why.

Peter Lovesey

Chapter One

I killed her many years ago

‘Mr Devlin, I would like to talk to you about a murder.’

Harry Devlin stopped in his tracks on his way out of the law courts. For a fantastic moment he thought the man who had hurried to catch him up and lay a hand on his shoulder was an arresting officer.

Twisting his neck to see his assailant, Harry found himself staring not at one of Liverpool’s finest but at a scrawny old man in a soup-stained bow tie and a shiny blue suit. Although he was wheezing with the exertion, his bony grip was surprisingly fierce, as if he feared Harry was about to take flight. The thick lenses of his spectacles magnified the shape and size of his eyes and made them seem not quite human.

Harry guessed the fellow was one of the city’s courthouse cranks who sat in the public galleries each morning and afternoon, watching scenes from other people’s lives distorted by the fairground mirrors of litigation. Most lawyers disdained the spectators as voyeurs, brushing by them in the corridors and on the stairs, but sometimes Harry would pause in passing to exchange a casual word. He could not resist feeling sympathy for anyone whose life was so barren that this place became a second home.

‘Want to make a confession?’ he asked and gestured towards a man in an overcoat striding past them towards the exit. ‘The detective sergeant there specialises in them. Don’t worry, he doesn’t need much. Just give him your name and he’ll invent the rest.’

The man released his hold and bared crooked teeth in a conspiratorial smile. His shoulders were stooped, his wrinkled skin the colour of parchment. In one claw-like hand he was carrying a battered black document case and his breath seemed to Harry to have the whiff of mildewed books.

'It is your help I need, Mr Devlin. No-one else will do.'

He enunciated each syllable with pedantic care, as if English was not his native tongue. But it was the urgency of his tone that quickened Harry's interest.

'Are you in some kind of trouble?'

'No, no. You misunderstand. The murder I am speaking of occurred almost thirty years ago. Nonetheless, I believe you are able - if you will pardon the phrase - to assist me with my enquiries.'

'Thirty years ago?' Harry shook his head. 'I sometimes screamed blue murder as a babe in arms, but I never committed it. Sorry I can't help, Mr...'

'Miller, my name is Ernest Miller. Let me explain. I am looking into one of this city's most notorious crimes. You will have heard of the case, I'm sure. The newspapers, in their melodramatic way, dubbed it the Sefton Park Strangling.'

'It rings a bell.' Harry sifted through old memories. 'Wasn't it a young girl who was killed, the daughter of a well-known man?'

'Yes, the case attracted a great deal of publicity in its day. Carole Jeffries, the victim, was only sixteen years old. More importantly, to secure her lasting fame in death, she was a pretty girl with a good figure and a taste for short skirts.'

'And I seem to remember the murderer was a neighbour of hers?'

'A young man named Edwin Smith who lived nearby was arrested, it is true. Before long he confessed to having strangled Carole, but twenty-four hours before his trial was due to open, he tried to anticipate his fate by hanging himself. In that, as in so much else during his short life, he failed. A warder arrived in time to cut him down and save him for the gallows. Even so, the day of reckoning was postponed. Although the court proceedings were expected to be a formality, the authorities were reluctant to hang a man with an injured neck.'

'The executioner preferred more of a challenge?'

'I see you indulge in black humour, Mr Devlin. The best kind, I quite agree. But I think you miss the point. In those days - we are talking of 1964, you will recall - the campaign to abolish

capital punishment was intensifying. The establishment dreaded a newsworthy incident.'

'Such as?'

Miller's tongue appeared between his teeth. 'They feared that a mistake might be made. If undue pressure were applied on the scaffold, there was a risk that the neck might snap and Smith would lose his head. Imagine, Mr Devlin, how the media would have feasted on that.'

Miller's eyes sparkled as he spoke, causing Harry to feel as cold as if he had stepped naked into the wintry streets outside, but something made him ask, 'So what happened?'

'The trial took place at the end of November and Smith was duly sentenced to death. However, as you will know, the law required three Sundays to pass before such a verdict could be carried out - and in the meantime the House of Commons voted to abolish capital punishment. As it happened, no hangings took place after the August of that year. Smith could certainly have expected a reprieve.'

'A lucky man.'

'Not so lucky as you may think,' said Ernest Miller. 'Having escaped the noose, Smith finally managed to kill himself in jail. Once again the authorities were careless - as they so often seem to be. He slashed his own throat on a jag of glass one night and severed the jugular vein.'

Harry bit his lip. His imagination was vivid - he had never quite decided whether that was an asset in a solicitor, or a fatal flaw - and Miller's words made his skin prickle. He could not help seeing in his mind's eye the sickening scene: the blood-soaked remains of a human being stretched across the concrete floor of a silent and unforgiving prison cell.

Gritting his teeth, he said, 'So where do I come in?'

'Smith's solicitor was Cyril Tweats.'

No wonder he was found guilty, Harry said to himself, the thought easing his tension. But all he said aloud was, 'I see.'

'You begin to appreciate my interest? I gather Mr Tweats retired recently and your firm took over his practice. Which is why I wanted to take a little of your time to talk about Carole's killing.'

'I don't quite...'

'I wonder,' said Miller. 'Your case has been adjourned until tomorrow morning. Perhaps you might allow me to buy you a drink and give you an idea of the information I am seeking. And if, at the end of half an hour, you decide I am wasting your time, well, no hard feelings. What do you say?'

Harry hesitated. He knew how much work in the office awaited his return; if he missed the last post, the following morning the sight of a mound of unsigned correspondence would reproach him like the grubby face of a neglected child. Besides, he had been repelled by the impression of pleasure Miller had given in lingering over the phrase *He slashed his own throat on a jag of glass one night and severed the jugular vein*. It was easy to visualise him salivating as he waited for a judge to don the black cap.

He glanced back over his shoulder towards the ground-floor lobby. The judicial roulette wheel had stopped spinning for the day, leaving losers to sulk in their cells whilst winners walked free to celebrate in style. His clients, Kevin and Jeannie Walter, had already disappeared, whisked off to the city's priciest restaurant by minders from the newspaper which had spent so much money to buy their story. He had last seen their barrister, Patrick Vaulkhard, in the robing room, taunting his opposite number about cover-ups and corruption. One of the bent coppers in the case was hanging around at the bottom of the open-tread staircase, waiting for his colleagues. With his hands in his pockets and his eyes fixed on the floor, he seemed deep in thought. If he had any sense, he was making plans for an early retirement.

Harry found himself recoiling from the prospect of ending the day back behind his desk. He was not by nature indolent, but a long afternoon in court had left him in a Philip Larkin mood: why should he let the toad of work squat on *his* life? The letters could wait: a

drink would do him good. In any case, surely no harm could come from a brief conversation, however unappealing his companion?

He began to move towards the revolving door. 'Why not?'

'Splendid. I am most grateful for your co-operation.'

Outside a raw wind nipped at Harry's cheeks and knuckles. On the far side of Derby Square, harsh lights from the office blocks burned in the dirty darkness. Queuing commuters stamped their feet and tried to keep warm as they waited at bus stops for the procession of maroon double-deckers with bronchitic engines moving in sombre ritual along James Street. The snow of early morning had turned to slush, treacherous underfoot. Harry's shoes slid as he crossed the road at speed, trying to dodge the spray thrown up by a passing juggernaut.

At the corner of North John Street he waited for his companion to catch up. When at last he made it through the traffic to the safety of the pavement, Miller bent his head. 'Not - not as young as I was,' he panted.

'None of us are.'

Miller's breath was coming in shallow gasps and he seemed unsteady on his feet. The legacy, Harry guessed, of too many days, weeks and months spent in cramped surroundings, poring over faded type and living life at second hand.

He gave him a minute to recover before asking, 'So what is your interest in the Sefton Park murder?'

'I live on my own, Mr Devlin. My wife died ten years ago; I have no family and few outside interests. Since finishing work, I find I have a lot of time on my hands, and I need to occupy myself somehow. Crime has always fascinated me. Now I like to indulge my curiosity. The Sefton case is a superb example of its kind. It has all the classic ingredients.'

Miller lowered his voice, as if afraid that homeward bound shoppers might overhear, and ticked the items off on his fingers. 'A good-looking girl, forward for her years. A famous father and a pop musician boyfriend. A sudden brutal slaying - and a mystery. Police investigations carried out under the remorseless spotlight of the

press and television. A suspect hounded without pity and brusquely condemned. And, above all, a grave injustice.'

His eyes gleamed and Harry again felt a chill of distaste. But he could not resist putting the question for which, he had no doubt, Miller was waiting.

'Who suffered the injustice?'

Miller studied Harry's expression before nodding, as if satisfied by what he found there.

'I spent much of today listening to your case from the back of the court. You must be happy with the progress your counsel made. The judge made it plain he is unsympathetic to the police, and no wonder. Your client, Mr Walter, was convicted of a crime he did not commit. He must be hoping for massive compensation.'

'We'll have to wait and see.'

'From all I have heard, you care about justice, Mr Devlin.'

If there was a hint of irony in the words, Harry was content to ignore it. Life as a lawyer in Liverpool had taught him to grow a thick skin. 'It's a rare commodity,' he agreed. 'Worth seeking out.'

'Forgive me for saying so, but I suspect most lawyers care more about their fees. However, let that pass. I would value your co-operation, since you have access to the files of Edwin Smith's solicitor. It is too late for Smith, but you may yet help me to prove he suffered a grievous wrong.'

'Did he protest his innocence at the trial?'

'On the contrary, he pleaded guilty.'

'Yet you're suggesting the confession was false?'

Miller cleared his throat. The strange shining eyes belied his deliberate manner. He was like a small boy, Harry thought, brimming with private knowledge and unable to restrain his excitement at making a disclosure.

'I am. And that is, for me, the fascination of the murder of Carole Jeffries. I do not pretend to have embarked on any moral crusade. I cannot even claim to share your devotion to seeing justice done. But I find murder irresistible - and perfect murder most of all.'

'No-one ever described the Sefton Park Strangling as a perfect murder.'

'You miss the point, Mr Devlin. If you accept that Smith was innocent, the conclusion is unavoidable.'

Miller showed his crooked teeth again.

'The true culprit escaped scot-free.'

Chapter Two

but I shall never forget the day of her death,

‘Shall we drink to crime?’ asked Miller as he returned to the table they had found in a pub called the Wallace. He handed Harry a pint in a dripping glass and, breathing heavily, squeezed past him into a corner seat designed for an agile midget.

Harry lifted his glass. ‘The perfect toast for this place. The architect should have been blacklisted by the Health and Safety Executive.’

The Wallace’s design and decor combined elements of the Liverpool Bridewell and an ersatz Gothic crypt. Half a dozen tables were crammed into a space no bigger than a police cell and the tiny stained-glass fanlights and dark carved wood panelling were enough to give a church mouse claustrophobia. The pub was squashed between a bank and a building society and the furniture had not been screwed to the floor - a sure sign that the landlord’s sights were set on the white-collar trade. Harry was back to back with a balding executive who puffed at a fat cigar while pouring rum and blacks down his secretary’s throat. There was less risk of death through passive smoking than of suffocating from an excess of duty-free aftershave and discount store perfume.

‘Is this not one of your regular haunts, Mr Devlin? Well, I cannot blame you, although the beer, as you are about to discover, is excellent. But since we are speaking of miscarriages of justice, I thought it a suitable setting for our discussion.’

Harry gestured towards the mahogany-framed sheets of yellow newsprint which hung from the picture moulding. ‘Because it takes its name from the Wallace case?’

‘Do you know the story?’ The question seemed to be rhetorical, for Miller continued without waiting for a reply. ‘In 1931, an insurance agent called James Wallace was sentenced to death for the brutal murder of his wife with a poker. The judged summed up in

Wallace's favour, as you will note from the trial report above your head, but the jury took a harsher view. Although the conviction was quashed on appeal, Wallace only lived for another couple of years. For once the cliché was correct - he died a broken man.'

Harry stretched in his chair. The beer was as good as Miller had predicted and he was starting to relax. 'One evening,' he said, 'Wallace was playing chess in a cafeteria not fifty yards from where we're sitting. A man who gave the name Qualtrough telephoned and asked him to call the next day at a fictitious address in Mossley Hill. When Wallace gave up the wild-goose chase and made his way home, he found his wife's battered corpse lying in the parlour.'

Miller beamed. 'It is good to talk to a knowledgeable man. So often people seem unaware of Liverpool's remarkable murderous heritage.'

'You can't blame the tourist board for concentrating on its Beatles trail and the Albert Dock.'

'Yet it is so easy to forget, Mr Devlin. There are lessons to be learned from the Wallace case. The ambiguous nature of circumstantial evidence, the ruthless tunnel vision of investigating policemen, the unpredictability of juries. It is far too tempting to believe that certain facts admit of only one explanation. I call it the Sherlock Holmes fallacy, a vice which detective fiction encourages. I do not know whether you have ever heard what Raymond Chandler said of the Wallace case...'

'He described it as unbeatable.'

'Again, I am impressed. You are well read.'

'A misspent youth. And adulthood, come to that.'

'But Chandler was wrong, was he not?' Miller leaned across the table, stabbing his forefinger at Harry to emphasise the point. 'Fifty years later, the Wallace case was solved.'

'Although the guilty man escaped justice.'

'My point entirely. So much of the fascination of these mysteries lies in the fact that one person killed another - and lived on for many years thereafter, untouched by the law, untroubled even by the clammy breath of suspicion.'

'And you believe that to be so with the strangling of Carole Jeffries?'

'I do. The first person I spoke to about the case was Edwin Smith's mother. She was widowed more than forty years ago and her son died by his own hand in circumstances she must have considered to be of the utmost shame. Yet she is still alive, although very frail. I visited her in Woolton, in the residential home where she has spent the last eighteen months. She is eighty-five but for the past thirty years she has clung to the notion that a terrible mistake occurred. She accepts that her son was weak; she told me that he always craved the limelight. That, she believes, is why he confessed to the crime. Yet she is adamant that for all his faults, he was no murderer.'

'Wouldn't any mother say the same?'

'I can understand your scepticism. Yet I believe she is right.'

'Why?'

'Please forgive me, Mr Devlin, if I do not put all my cards on the table in this first conversation. Besides I am still at the stage of piecing the facts together.' He opened his document case and slid from it a thin red file. Fanning out a sheaf of papers, cuttings and handwritten notes, he said, 'As you can see, I have already collected a good deal of material concerning the case, but I have yet to begin the rigorous analysis that a solicitor would consider appropriate.'

Depends on the solicitor, reflected Harry, thinking of Cyril Tweats. Aloud, he said, 'What's your objective? Do you plan to write a book?'

Miller's laugh reminded him of a seagull's keening. 'Dear me, I have no literary ambitions at all. Although I have written - well, one or two little personal things - I can assure you I have no ambition whatsoever to see them published. I leave creative fiction to second-rate CID men with an imperfect grasp of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act. My research is conducted out of interest, nothing more.'

'How long have you been working on this project?'

As if to give himself a few seconds to frame his reply, Miller put the papers back in their wallet, which he carefully replaced in the

shabby case. 'Oh, a short time only. I - I had been casting round for a suitable subject for my enquiries. Of course, I hoped for something local, as I do not care to travel far afield. And nothing mundane would do, it had to be out of the ordinary. But even though, quite apart from Wallace, Liverpool is not lacking in murder stories, I discovered that most of the best had been - if you will excuse my choice of words - done to death.'

'So you hit on the killing of Carole Jeffries?'

'As I said, it boasts many appealing features.'

If Miller felt his adjective unfortunate, he gave no indication of it and Harry did not doubt that he was in the presence of a ghoul. Yet the man's deliberate and excessively formal way of speaking had a hypnotic quality and Harry found himself hungering to know more. 'Refresh my memory.'

'Guy Jeffries,' said Miller, with pedagogic gravity, 'seemed in 1964 to be a man who had everything. He was handsome and knew it, his wife Kathleen was a tall, striking brunette and their only daughter, Carole, was extremely pretty. They were a close family. Kathleen had been a brilliant undergraduate at the time she met Jeffries, but after marrying and starting a family, she gave up any thoughts of a career and dedicated herself to looking after Carole and supporting Guy as his reputation grew. Guy, for his part, although universally regarded as a charmer, does not seem to have looked at another woman after his marriage. Everyone was aware that he doted on Carole. They were, then, that rare thing - the perfect family.'

Miller permitted himself the glimmer of a smile. 'Yet as we are all too painfully aware, life is never perfect. On a bleak February night, Carole was murdered and the happy family destroyed forever.'

'About Guy,' said Harry. 'Wasn't he a writer?'

'Yes, your memory is excellent. He wrote a couple of seminal works on socialism in the sixties, although by profession he was a lecturer. His subject, political philosophy, might sound dull to you and me, but he had the gift of making it come alive for both students and readers. Shortly before the tragedy occurred, the University was buzzing with rumours that a new Chair was to be endowed by a

charitable foundation and that Guy Jeffries would be the first to occupy it.'

'How old was he?'

'He had recently celebrated his fortieth birthday. The appointment would have made him one of the youngest professors in the University's distinguished history.'

'It didn't happen then?'

'No. So much in Jeffries' life came to an end when his daughter was killed.'

'Is he still alive?'

Miller shook his head. 'He died in 1979, by his own hand. It is said that he never recovered from his distress at Carole's death. I looked up his obituary in *The Times*: reading between the lines, he must have had a nervous breakdown and I gather he later turned to drink to drown his sorrows. Extraordinary, is it not, how one act of shocking violence can change so many lives?'

Harry remembered the death of his own wife, Liz. She too had been murdered and there had been times during the past two years when he had felt as though he would never recover from the loss of her - even though they had been living apart before she was killed. Friends meaning to be helpful would tell him that life must go on, and they were right, although their homilies made him grind his teeth in silent rage. All the same, he could imagine the horror Guy Jeffries must have felt, could understand how the death of his child might rob any man of the love for life.

Brusquely, he said, 'It was February, you say, and therefore as cold as hell, if the weather was anything like it is now. What was Carole doing in the park?'

'She had told her father she wanted to go for a short walk there. It had been a misty and miserable day and she wanted to blow away the cobwebs.'

'You sound unconvinced.'

'The picture I have of Carole does not suggest to me a fresh-air fanatic. It was already dark: of course, the clocks had not yet gone forward. I find the idea of a health-giving stroll implausible. But

Guy Jeffries seems to have had no hesitation in believing what his daughter told him.'

'When was her body found?'

'Close on midnight. Jeffries was working in his study when Carole left the house and Kathleen was out, attending a seminar in Manchester. There had been one caller at the house earlier in the day, another upwardly mobile man of the people by the name of Clive Doxey.'

Harry raised his eyebrows. He had not been aware that a celebrity of the present day was involved in the story. 'Nowadays Sir Clive?'

'Yes, another doughty campaigner against injustice.' Miller smiled slightly. 'Doxey left before Carole went for her walk, however, and Jeffries failed to realise she was still missing until his wife returned. At first they assumed Carole must have decided to visit a friend, possibly a girl called Shirley with whom she worked. And there was her boyfriend, a pop star of the day whom she had met through her job at Benny Frederick's photographic studio and shop in Victoria Street.'

'And that's the same...?'

'Yes, today Benny Frederick runs a thriving business specialising, I believe, in the field of corporate videos. You may have come across it yourself. But thirty years ago he had taken over his father's old firm and started making a name for himself with his portraits of many of the stars of - ah - the Swinging Sixties.'

Miller was unable to disguise the mockery in his voice. He spoke as though he was describing a risible alien culture. 'Nevertheless,' he added, 'Guy would have expected Carole at least to leave a message. He and Kathleen rang around her friends and, drawing a blank, became alarmed. The girl had mentioned herself that the boyfriend would be out of town that night and so there was no question of her having sloped off with him. Finally Kathleen called the police. The Jeffries were an influential couple and their concern was taken seriously. A constable came round and his first thought was to check the park.'

'Hadn't Guy already done so?'

‘Only in a cursory way, it seems. In any event, looking methodically under every thicket, the policeman soon discovered her corpse.’

‘Was it hidden?’

‘The killer - presumably - had pulled it into the bushes, but made little attempt at camouflage. The young policeman must have had an eagle’s eyes to discover poor Carole in darkness, but her body would have been found the next morning in any event.’

‘And the ligature? Was that left on the scene?’

‘Carole’s own scarf was knotted around her throat. The murderer seems to have made no attempt to remove it. As you may know, that is not uncommon in strangulation cases. One can guess that she was no longer a pretty sight. “Purple lips and ears, froth and blood-staining about the mouth, the tongue forced outward, the hands clenched” - *these are the typical signs of asphyxia*. I quote, of course, from that eminent pathologist, Sir Sydney Smith.’

Even at thirty years’ remove, Harry found himself repelled by the picture Miller was sketching and by the relish with which he was sketching it. *Murder fascinates everyone*, Harry thought, *because of the hints it gives of the darkest recesses of the human soul*. But the act of killing and its physical consequences seemed to him obscene, and to exult in them, he felt, was akin to drooling over a pornographic film.

He drained his glass. His earlier mood of cautious tolerance towards Miller was evaporating. Yet he felt impelled to satisfy his curiosity. ‘How long did it take the police to fasten on to Edwin Smith?’

‘They picked him up within twenty-four hours.’

‘And the boyfriend, what about him?’

Miller pursed his lips in disapproval. ‘Ray Brill - that was what he called himself. Perhaps it was a pseudonym, I am not sure.’

Harry reached back into his memory and his treasury of pop music trivia. ‘Of the Brill Brothers? Is that the man?’

‘Again you are well informed. Yes, that was the name of his - ah - duo.’

‘Was he ever a suspect?’

‘A good question. In the press reports which I have seen, he expresses shock and horror at the outrage. Yet one would expect nothing less from a cruel and ruthless killer - if such he was.’

‘And Smith hired Cyril Tweats?’

‘His mother did, yes. The family had money and I gather that Tweats was a popular defence solicitor of the time, but if I may be blunt, the choice of representative was not a happy one.’ Again he spoke in a knowing way that gave the impression he had something else up his sleeve.

Sharply, Harry said, ‘And what made you approach me?’

‘When I discovered that the firm of Tweats and Company no longer exists, I called at the office of the local law society. They told me Mr Tweats had sold his practice shortly before Christmas to you and your partner, Mr Crusoe.’

‘Have you spoken to Cyril himself?’

‘As yet, no, for two reasons. First, when I asked about you and your firm, I was told you have something of a name for digging into cases where the truth has yet to come out. I gather you have a weakness for a mystery, but people seem to think you are a man who strives to see the right thing done. Frankly, I hoped you would sympathise with my own instinct to investigate and be willing to offer a little practical assistance.’

‘Flattery won’t necessarily get you everywhere. What was the second reason?’

‘Any approach I may make to Mr Tweats will need to be judged with delicacy. I have to say - I trust I do not offend you - it seems possible that, if Edwin Smith pleaded guilty, he did so as a result of receiving less than the best advice.’

‘I won’t pretend Cyril was a latter-day Marshall Hall, but I’m not clear about exactly what you’re looking for.’

‘I have taken pains to trace the present whereabouts of the main surviving actors in the drama. Guy is dead, of course, and so is Edwin Smith’s barrister. The detective who headed the inquiry is a sick man, by all accounts, and Carole’s mother a semi-recluse. But

I plan to talk to as many people as I can over the course of the next few days. I hope to hear from Smith's former girlfriend, and perhaps I'll catch up with the young man Carole was courting at the time of her death. Meanwhile, I have gone as far as I can in researching the case through paperwork available to the public. I cannot hope to gain access to the police records. But there will, I expect, still be an office file somewhere in your archives. I would be interested to see it. There is just a faint possibility that it may contain information which helps me in my quest.'

'To decide whether Smith was innocent?'

'And, if he was, perhaps to gain a clearer idea of who might have been guilty.'

'You'll be lucky.'

'Indeed I may,' said Miller. His teeth glistened in the harsh yellow light as he added, 'Think of it, Mr Devlin. To discover the truth now, after all these years, wouldn't that be a prize? Think of old Mrs Smith and what it would mean to have her son exculpated at long last. And that is not all. Who knows, one might even have the opportunity to identify the person who took advantage of Smith's scapegoat role and succeeded - yes! - in getting away with murder.'

The man was *enjoying* himself, Harry felt sure. Never mind the convicted man's mother: he was treating his enquiries as a game. And in that moment, Harry made up his mind about Ernest Miller. He was too shrewd to be dismissed as a meddling old fool with a bee in his bonnet; there was nothing blind or self-deceiving about his confidence that Smith had not committed the crime. Yet Harry sensed he was a man who, for all his bookish air, would like to take his pleasure recklessly. A man who might relish it all the more if the game he was playing became dangerous.

Chapter Three

when I broke forever with the past

'I'm making no promises,' Harry said to Miller as they stood on the doorstep of the Wallace.

'I would not expect them. After all, you are a lawyer.' Miller gave a thin smile. 'I hope only that I have said enough to tantalise you, to make you anxious to know rather more about the killing of Carole Jeffries, even after thirty years.'

'I can't even be sure we'll still have the original papers. And if we do...'

'Naturally, I understand there is the question of professional confidentiality, although on this occasion, since the client has long been in his grave, I anticipate no practical objection. However, you may have other qualms about making any disclosures to me. As successor in practice to Cyril Tweats, you may be conscious of the risk of being tarnished by potential criticism of the way he handled Edwin Smith's defence.'

Harry shrugged. 'I'm not worried about that. But even if we do have the old file, it may cast no light on the case.'

Miller bowed. 'Of course. But if you do discover any relevant information and feel able to share it with me, you have my address and telephone number. I hope to hear from you. In the meantime, *au revoir*, Mr Devlin, and thank you for listening.'

Harry watched him walk away in the direction of the taxi rank, a frail old man with a taste for death. He found Miller easy to dislike, but not so easy to ignore. What exactly caused him to doubt Smith's guilt? It must be more than an old woman's blind faith in her son's innocence. Was it a snatch of gossip founded on fancy, or something more substantial, something a court might accept as evidence? Harry felt sure Miller did know more about the case than he was

yet prepared to reveal and, almost to his dismay, he found himself itching to learn what it was.

‘Penny for ’em,’ said a voice in his ear.

Turning to face the man who had spoken, Harry said, ‘Whatever makes you believe my thoughts could be published in a family newspaper?’

Ken Cafferty smiled broadly, as he often did. He was chief crime reporter on one of the city’s local papers and his cherubic appearance and amiable manner often induced indiscretions from people who had meant to keep their mouths shut and soon had cause to wish they had done so.

‘I’m always more interested in the bits we leave out of our stories than in those we print. Not so much the stuff that’s libellous, but all the true stories the man in the street simply couldn’t bring himself to believe.’

‘Headlines we never see, like “Low Pay Unit Demands Higher Fees For Lawyers”?’

‘Now I don’t mind a little invention, but I draw the line at outright fantasy. Anyway, I can sniff an exclusive already. I’ve caught Harry Devlin standing outside a pub with no apparent intention of going inside.’

‘I staggered to the exit after I ran out of oxygen.’

‘I’d have thought after a few pints you wouldn’t bother about that kind of thing. Personally, I don’t mind the Wallace. I like anywhere so cramped that there’s no alternative but to eavesdrop. Anyway, what were you up to, celebrating the Kevin Walter verdict in advance?’

Harry shook his head. ‘I’m not counting my chickens. No, someone’s been bending my ear about a trial that dates back to the sixties.’

‘Don’t tell me they’ve finally decided to appeal?’

‘It’s an old murder case, dead and buried in more ways than one. There’s a suggestion that the wrong man may have been found guilty.’

'I sometimes wonder how any crimes are ever committed, given the number of innocents around who are unlucky enough to keep being convicted. But let that pass. A miscarriage story always sells papers. Who did the system stitch up this time?'

Harry wondered how much he should tell the journalist. He could see no harm in selective disclosure. Miller had not sworn him to secrecy and Ken might have ideas of his own about the case. His encyclopaedic knowledge of Liverpudlian crime was all the more impressive in view of the sheer volume of the subject matter. He claimed his years in the job had brought him face to face with more villains than Her Majesty's Inspector of Prisons ever saw.

'A young girl called Carole Jeffries was killed.'

'The Sefton Park Strangling,' said Ken promptly.

'Ten out of ten. You know the case?'

'Before my time, of course, but I've heard about it. Every now and then we dig something up from the archives to fill a few paragraphs on a slack day. If there's a mugger roaming round that part of the city, say, or we're doing a feature on famous Liverpool murders. Lazy journalism, admittedly.' He winked and added, 'I do it a lot.'

'Any chance I might have a look at the material you have?'

Ken clicked his tongue. 'Strictly classified, you should realise that. More than my job's worth, and all that.'

'You mean it will cost me?'

'With such a cynical mind, you should have become a reporter. As a matter of fact, I'm starving. I've spent the day on the trail of a crooked builder at a property developers' conference. It would have been easier to hunt for a particular twig in Delamere Forest. Buy me a meal and I may force myself to overcome my professional scruples. I should say this kind of information must be worth a table for two at the Ensenada.'

'I had a burger and chips in mind.'

'My old dad used to work for *The Sun*, and he taught me everything I ever learned about media ethics,' said Ken sadly. 'He must be spinning in his grave at the thought of my selling my soul - for less than the price of a Chateaubriand with champagne,

that is. He knew his worth and we always lived well on it. But the traditional values are dead, I suppose. I'll settle for the junk food, you old skinflint.'

As they headed towards the city centre, Harry asked, 'Ever heard of any doubt that the right man was caught in the Sefton Park case?'

'Never. Wasn't there a guilty plea? As I recall, there was no mystery. All the excitement lay in the fact that a gorgeous young girl had died and her father was famous. The main thrust of the coverage was that the bastard who killed the little girl should have swung for it.'

'A distinct absence of liberal hand-wringing about whether all the niceties of procedure had been observed in persuading him to cough?'

'We're talking about the days when people thought *Dixon Of Dock Green* was a documentary. Are you suggesting - perish the thought - that the police beat a false confession out of whatshisname?'

'Edwin Smith. No, at this stage I simply don't know.'

'So what's your interest?'

'Smith died in jail, but one or two questions have been raised about whether the verdict was right.'

'Who's been bending your ear?'

'Sorry,' said Harry with relish. 'I'm not able to name my sources. You of all people will understand that.'

The orange neon of the welcome sign above the burger bar made a vivid splash in the evening darkness. The place was packed with people queuing for service from youngsters wearing paper kepis and badges emblazoned with smiley faces. The air was thick with the smell of fat and the sound of catarrhal Scouse voices chanting carefully rehearsed phrases like 'Hi, how may I help you?', 'Two triple whammies with fries!' and 'Have a nice night!'

Harry bought the food and drink, then slid a hot polystyrene package across the formica surface of the table Ken had chosen. 'Thicken your arteries with that.'

Ken poured brown sauce over his burger with as much delicacy as if he were coating strawberries with cream. 'So what information are you looking for?'