

## Praise for The Brighton Mysteries

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*Sunday Times*

‘Full of fun and expertly plotted, this is in many ways a cosy read but there is real depth to the way the characters cope not only with changing times but changes in themselves as they mature’ *Sunday Express*

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‘Elly Griffiths’ series set in post-war Brighton are entertaining diversions full of period detail, smart plotting and likeable characters’ *Mail on Sunday* Thrillers of the Month

‘Brighton remains as alluringly seedy as ever’ *Irish Independent*

‘In trademark style, Griffiths’ plotting is intriguing, multi-layered and full of rich detail, each character is honed to perfection, the social backdrop is immaculately researched, and the frustrations of young women constrained by outdated notions of a man’s world are perfectly portrayed’

*Lancaster Guardian*

## Books by Elly Griffiths

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*The Janus Stone*

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*A Room Full of Bones*

*Dying Fall*

*The Outcast Dead*

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*The Dark Angel*

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*The Blood Card*

*The Vanishing Box*

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*Return to the Italian Quarter*

*The Secret of Villa Serena*

Elly Griffiths is the bestselling author of *The Stranger Diaries*, the Dr Ruth Galloway Mysteries and The Brighton Mysteries. Elly was born in London and worked in publishing before becoming a full-time writer. She has won the CWA Dagger in the Library and has been shortlisted three times for the Theakston's Old Peculier Crime Novel of the Year, while *The Stranger Diaries* was a Richard and Judy Book Club pick. Elly lives near Brighton with her archaeologist husband, their two grown children and their cat, Gus.

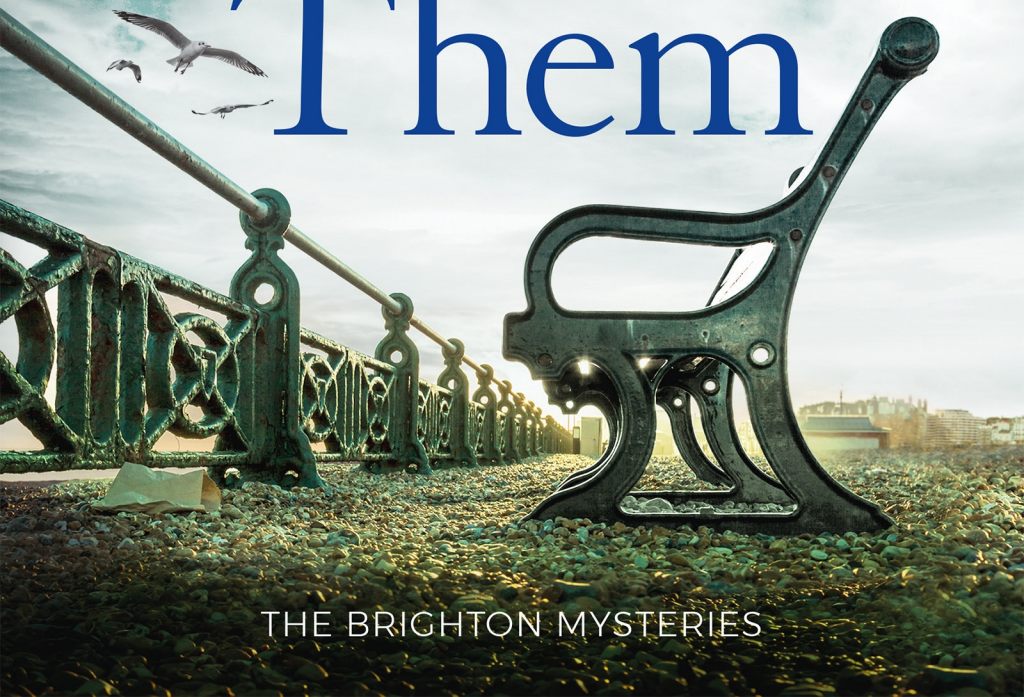


'Griffiths manages to juggle humour, homicide and  
nostalgia in a delightful read'

*THE TIMES*

# ELLY Griffiths

## Now You See Them



THE BRIGHTON MYSTERIES

ELLY  
Griffiths

Now  
You See  
Them

THE BRIGHTON MYSTERIES

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## CHAPTER 1

May 1964

At first Edgar thought that he wasn't coming. They were all there in church: Edgar and Emma, Bob and Betty, Queenie in the front pew sobbing into a lace-edged handkerchief. Even Mrs M was there, her hair white now but striking as always in a black cape with a fur collar. Ruby had caused a stir when she entered the church, followed, as ever, by Joe. There were even a few photographers waiting outside, just for the chance to snap the star of *Ruby Magic*, the nation's favourite TV show. Ruby swept up to the front to sit with Queenie, who welcomed her with a hug. 'Isn't she lovely?' said someone. Edgar looked at Emma but her face was expressionless.

And then, as the wheezy music started up, a door banged at the back of the church and Edgar knew. The photographers must have known too because there was a shout outside, something like, 'That's him.' Edgar couldn't

resist looking round and there he was, in the blackest suit with the thinnest tie, taking off his hat, unchanged by the last eleven years. Max.

The music stopped and started again. The undertakers began their slow journey to the front of the church. On top of Diablo's coffin was a wreath of red roses and his disreputable old panama hat. The sight of it brought unexpected tears to Edgar's eyes. He remembered his first sight of the old magician – he'd seemed ancient even then – on Inverness station, wearing the hat and drinking from a hip flask. Max had been with him, wearing last night's dinner jacket, and absent-mindedly shuffling a deck of cards.

'Captain Stephens? We've been sent to meet you. I'm Max Mephisto. This is Stan Parks, otherwise known as The Great Diablo.'

'Dearly beloved.' The vicar was as creaky as the church organ. 'We are here to mourn our friend and brother Stanley.'

Diablo was never Stanley, thought Edgar. He had clung to his stage name long after retirement, much as he'd stuck to the vocabulary; everyone was 'darling' or 'dear boy', non-showbiz types were 'civilians'. But Diablo himself had fought in the First World War and sometimes surprised you by coming out with that vernacular too, referring to 'gaffs' or 'gasps' or 'copping a Blighty'. He'd never married, although there had been girls aplenty, and had no children. 'Not that I know of, dear boy.' Edgar

could see the familiar leer now. Diablo had spent the last fourteen years of his life with Queenie and she had nursed him devotedly towards the end. The other mourners were mostly old pros in moth-eaten coats and gallant hats. Edgar and Max had served with Diablo in the Second World War when they had been part of a shadowy group called the Magic Men. Their job had been to use the techniques of stage magic – camouflage, sleight-of-hand, misdirection – to aid the war effort. They had created dummy tanks and dummy soldiers. They had built a fake battleship out of an old cruiser and some barrels. And now, Edgar realised suddenly, they were the last members of the gang left alive. Bob had only known Diablo through Edgar but his wife Betty was an ex-chorus girl who understood the show-business world with its ever-shifting cast of characters but curiously enduring loyalties. Ruby, Max's daughter, had known Diablo well. She'd called him Uncle Stan – which, in Edgar's mind, justified her front-row seat. Did she know that her father was in the church? She gave no sign, if so. She had her arm round Queenie and they were crying together. Joe Passolini, in a sharp single-breasted suit, looked appropriately sombre but, as the vicar extolled 'Stanley's' virtues, he turned round and winked at Edgar. As far as Edgar could tell, Joe took nothing entirely seriously. Except money, that is.

The vicar had embarked on a long story about 'treading the boards'. He could have done with some of Diablo's material. What was the one about the six-foot Lascar from

Madagascar? In the days when pros used to buy jokes from each other and lease them for the season, Diablo had once confided that this particular gag had cost him three and sixpence. 'You were robbed,' said Max. 'Not at all,' Diablo had retorted. 'It raised quite a titter at the Alexandra in Scarborough.'

But now the Alexandra and the Royal and the Palace Theatres would know Diablo no more. The organist launched into 'Abide with Me' and the pros sang along lustily. Emma sang too, in her clear soprano. On Edgar's other side, Bob muttered the words in a kind of embarrassed drone.

'Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day.'

'Goodbye, Diablo,' whispered Edgar as the coffin went past him. He felt that they should be applauding, surely that was the sound that Diablo would want to accompany his last appearance? Queenie and Ruby followed, as befitted the chief mourners. Ruby was wearing a black dress with a short white jacket. She'd cut her hair and it swung about her ears. Joe was carrying her handbag.

'In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.'

Edgar and Emma filed out with the rest of the congregation. Max was standing by the door.

'His final curtain call,' he said. 'Not a bad crowd either.' This was so much what Edgar was thinking that he almost laughed.

'Hallo, Max. When did you arrive?'

'Flew in from Los Angeles last night,' said Max. He

kissed Emma on both cheeks. 'Mrs Stephens. You get more beautiful every time I see you.'

'Maybe it's just as well that you don't see me very often,' said Emma.

'Ruby telephoned and told me that Diablo had died,' said Max. 'I couldn't miss the old boy's final performance.'

Max had been in America for eleven years, during which time he'd become a film star and married a leading Hollywood actress. Edgar had seen Max once in all that time, when he'd visited England five years ago on the death of his father. Max was now Lord Massingham although Edgar was pretty sure that he'd never use the title.

'Joyce!' Max turned away to greet Joyce Markham, a theatrical landlady otherwise known as Mrs M, who had once been his lover.

'Hallo, Max,' she said. 'Long time, no see.'

Edgar remembered how the landlady had the ability to make the most harmless cliché sound like a double entendre.

'You're looking as lovely as ever, Joyce,' said Max. But, in the daylight, Edgar thought that Mrs M looked her age, whatever that was. She had a certain dignity though as she kissed Max on the cheek. 'Congratulations on your marriage,' she said. 'I'm a diehard Lydia Lamont fan. I never miss one of her films.'

Max had starred with Lydia in his first Hollywood film, *The Conjurator*. They had married shortly afterwards and now had two children. Edgar had only ever seen Lydia

Lamont in film magazines, but she was clearly the possessor of what the caption writers called 'a luminous beauty'. She was also at least twenty years younger than Max.

'Well, if it's not my favourite policeman,' Mrs M greeted Edgar affectionately. 'And your lovely wife. I miss those happy days in Brighton.'

The happy days had included several nasty murders but Mrs M seemed determined to remember them fondly. She told Edgar that she'd sold the boarding house in Brighton and had moved to Hastings.

'It's where we all end up,' she said dolefully, as they joined the slow procession behind Diablo's coffin. Hastings had certainly been the end of the line for the old magician but he'd had over a decade of happy years before he'd been called to the Great Box Office in the Sky. Edgar asked if Mrs M still took in theatrical lodgers.

'Just one or two in pantomime season,' she said. 'I can't imagine a Christmas without a Buttons or a Dame in the house. But variety's dead. There are no weekly shows any more.'

Variety was dead and so was Diablo. Edgar had a sudden squeamish shrinking from the thought of seeing Diablo's coffin being lowered into the ground. It was ridiculous. He was a policeman, he'd seen enough death over the years. He'd lost his brother in the war and Jonathan had only been nineteen, not Diablo's three score years and about thirty. But he followed Mrs M's black feathered hat under the lychgate to the graveside. Emma

took his hand as if she understood. Max had turned aside to light a cigarette.

‘I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord.’

This was the moment for the reveal, for the magician to stand up in the box and wave to the stalls and the Royal Circle. But, instead, Queenie and Ruby scattered earth on the coffin lid and the gravediggers picked up their shovels. A seagull flew overhead calling loudly and Edgar had a moment’s fantasy that Diablo’s soul had been reborn in this appropriately nomadic and disorderly bird.

‘Edgar!’ Queenie gave him a fierce hug. ‘Thank you for coming. Diablo was so fond of you. I hope you’ll come back to the house for some tea.’

‘That’s very kind,’ said Edgar. He didn’t want to go back to the boarding house on the seafront but he did want the chance to talk to Max. He introduced Emma who said all the right things. She’d been fond of Diablo too, even though he had tried to give their daughter Marianne a bottle of whisky for her seventh birthday.

Emma had never visited Queenie’s boarding house but she’d seen plenty of others like it. It was a tall, Regency house overlooking the sea. She knew that inside it would have elegant lines, elaborate cornices and probably a sweeping staircase. It would also have serviceable carpets, wipe-clean walls and a long table for those endless late breakfasts. The rooms upstairs would be divided, each making two or three smaller rooms, the ceilings too high for their width.

Queenie had laid on a magnificent spread, though, and the theatricals got stuck in with relish. Emma saw one moustachioed lounge lizard in a white suit taking two plates of sandwiches into a secluded corner.

‘Can I get you anything?’ asked Edgar.

‘Maybe just a cup of tea.’ She looked at her watch. One o’clock. This was lunch rather than tea; no wonder people were so hungry. Perhaps she should eat something. She had to get back at three to collect the girls from school. Most of the other children walked home alone but Emma thought that Sophie, at six, was still too young. Mavis was looking after the baby but she always made it clear that the ten-minute walk to the school was too much for her varicose veins.

Looking round the room she saw Ruby sitting on the window seat, lighting a cigarette. Joe was hovering with a cup and an ashtray. There was the usual buzz of ‘That’s her’, ‘That’s Ruby Magic’, but Ruby seemed unconcerned. Perhaps she was used to it by now. There had been photographers waiting outside the house too, avid to catch Max or Ruby, both of whom had ignored them. Ruby looked pensive, thought Emma. Maybe she was sad about Diablo or maybe the visit to Hastings had stirred up bad memories. Emma rather despised herself for being more interested in where Ruby got her dress and jacket from. The dress was the fashionable shorter length and it made Emma feel dowdy and middle-aged in her full skirt. Emma and Ruby were almost the same age but Ruby had

never been married and had no children. That was the difference.

‘Tea?’ It was Max, not Edgar, proffering a cup and saucer.

‘Thank you.’

They sat on a small ottoman, rather closer together than was comfortable.

‘So, Mrs Stephens,’ said Max, ‘how’s married life?’

‘We’ve been married for ten years now,’ said Emma, rather tartly. She wasn’t sure that she liked Max’s new habit of calling her Mrs Stephens. As a child she’d hated her maiden name, Holmes (the source of much teasing when she entered the police force), but now she rather missed it.

‘I should ask you how you’re enjoying being a husband,’ she said. ‘But it’s not something men get asked, is it?’ Max had been married for almost ten years too, soon after meeting Lydia Lamont on the set of *The Conjuror*. But Emma had only seen him once, briefly, in all that time. Tea in a London hotel, five years ago, made uncomfortable by the squirming presence of Sophie, then just over a year old.

‘I’m enjoying it very much,’ said Max. And considering that he was married to one of the most beautiful women in the world, maybe this wasn’t surprising. He grinned at Emma, teeth very white in his sun-tanned face. Max was fifty-four, Emma knew, but he seemed, if anything, younger than when he left England. Then she realised that Max was showing her a photograph.

‘Rocco, aged six,’ he said. ‘Elena, four.’

The colour picture showed two beautiful dark-haired children standing on either side of a large dog. In the background a vast white house, vaguely Spanish in style, glimmered against a blue sky.

'They're gorgeous,' said Emma.

'How old are yours now?'

'Marianne is eight, Sophie is six and Jonathan's just ten months.'

'Great names.'

'So are yours.'

'Elena's after my mother. Lydia says that Rocco's a more suitable name for an Alsatian.'

This was interesting. It was the first personal thing that Emma had ever heard about Lydia Lamont. She noted that, whatever Lydia's objections, Max had got his way about the name.

'What's the Alsatian called?'

'Bob.'

Emma laughed and, hearing his name, Bob walked over, carrying a plate piled high with sandwiches.

'Hallo, Bob,' said Max. 'Still fighting crime?'

'Someone has to,' said Bob. Emma hadn't seen Bob for a few months but he was always the same, still boyish despite increased girth and slightly receding hair. Betty, who was talking to Ruby, looked the epitome of respectability in a black-and-white check suit. It was hard to believe that she had once posed on stage as the Lady of Shalott, naked apart from a few well-placed flowers.

'Oh, you've got tea.' Edgar emerged with two cups. He was always the last person to get served in a bar or café. Emma used to find it lovable but now she found herself contrasting Edgar unfavourably with Max, and even Joe, both of whom had fought their way to the tea urn.

'I'll drink both,' said Emma, smiling at her husband. 'We ought to go in about half an hour.'

'So soon?' said Max, getting out his cigarette case and lighting up. Emma could just read the inscription on the silver: 'For MM with love, LL'.

'I have to collect the girls from school.'

'Don't you have a nanny?'

'We have a woman who helps but she refuses to walk anywhere,' said Edgar.

'Well let's meet up for dinner in Brighton,' said Max. 'I'm staying at the Grand.'

Of course he was.

'We'd love that,' said Emma. She drained her second cup of tea and was aware of a maid hovering at the edge of the group. She didn't think anyone had maids any more. This poor woman even wore a uniform.

'Please, m'm. I've got a telephone message for the detective inspector.'

'Yes?' she heard Bob say. 'I'm Detective Inspector Willis.'

Emma still couldn't get used to the fact that Bob was the DI now.

## CHAPTER 2

After Bob had taken the message, he and Edgar conferred in low voices for a while. To avoid looking as if she was listening, Emma wandered over to Ruby, who was still sitting on the window seat.

‘I keep thinking how much Uncle Stan would have loved this,’ said Ruby. ‘He adored reunions. Telling all those Magic Men stories.’

‘About the time they were adrift at sea for days and days,’ said Emma. ‘And Diablo kept them alive by singing “Burlington Bertie”.’

‘Those were the days,’ said Ruby. She stubbed her cigarette out in her saucer.

Emma was trying to think of a neutral topic of conversation when Ruby said, ‘Was Max showing you pictures of his adorable children?’ There was definitely an edge to this and ‘adorable’ was said with what was clearly meant to be an American accent.

‘He did show me a photograph,’ said Emma carefully.

'Very much the proud father,' said Ruby, getting another cigarette out of her case. She seemed a bit lost without Joe to light it for her.

'He's proud of you too,' said Emma.

'You wouldn't know it,' said Ruby. 'I've barely seen him since he went to America. He's only here today because of Uncle Stan. Oh, and because of the film.'

'He said that you telephoned him to tell him about Diab-  
lo,' said Emma. 'I think he's here for you too.'

They both looked over at Max who was talking to two women who were obviously once chorus girls. All three of them were laughing and Max did not look like a man with fatherhood on his mind.

'I went to visit them in Hollywood,' said Ruby. 'They've got this massive house with a swimming pool. Lydia spends all day drifting about in a negligee getting photographed by gossip magazines. The children are quite sweet though. Although they've got American accents.'

'Well, they are American, I suppose.'

'I suppose,' said Ruby. 'I just never thought that Max would have American children.' She had succeeded in lighting her cigarette and inhaled deeply. Ruby might be a glamorous TV star who called her father by his first name, thought Emma, but she still sometimes sounded like a disgruntled child.

'How's Edgar?' said Ruby. 'I hear he's a superintendent now.'

'Yes, he is,' said Emma. 'He's fine, although it's a lot of

work.’ The previous superintendent, Frank Hodges, had spent most of his time on the golf course but Edgar was made of sterner stuff.

‘Do you miss it?’ said Ruby. ‘Being a policewoman?’

Emma was surprised. In all the years since she had married Edgar and left the force (‘married women can’t be police officers,’ Hodges had decreed) no one had ever asked her this. Most people seemed to think that she must be delighted with her life: handsome husband, three healthy children, charming town house in Brighton. And, by and large, she was.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I do miss it. I was good at it.’

‘You were,’ said Ruby. ‘I remember.’ Were they both thinking about the days when Emma was a detective sergeant – one of the first women to have this title – and Ruby was engaged to Edgar?

‘You’ve been so successful though,’ said Emma. ‘Are you happy?’ It was rather a personal question but she really wanted to know.

‘Oh I’m deliriously happy.’ Ruby flashed her famous TV smile. ‘The show is more popular than ever and I’m seeing a rather delicious new man.’

Emma glanced over at Joe who was now deep in conversation with Max, who had once been one of his clients.

‘Oh, not Joe,’ said Ruby. ‘We’re just friends, whatever the papers say. And he’s my agent, of course. No, this is someone *entirely* different.’ Her voice lowered and she leaned forward.

‘Emma. There you are. I think we should be going now. It’s nearly two.’

Ruby laughed. ‘Still the same old Edgar.’

Emma didn’t like her tone.

‘What was the message for Bob?’ asked Emma as they drove back along the coast road, the bland white hotels on one side, the sea on the other. It was a beautiful spring afternoon, blue and gold, seagulls riding in on the waves.

Emma was sure that the message was confidential but Edgar usually shared work details with her. He said it was because he valued her advice but Emma noticed that he didn’t always take it.

‘A girl has gone missing,’ said Edgar after a pause. ‘She left a note saying that she was going to London but her parents are worried. She’s only sixteen and still at school. Roedean,’ he added, with a sideways glance at Emma.

‘Goodness.’ Emma had been a Roedean girl herself. She liked to say that the school, an imposing building on the cliff edge outside Brighton, had been like a prison and that her only happy years were when the pupils were evacuated to the Lake District in the war. But, as she grew older, she found herself feeling almost nostalgic for the place. It didn’t mean that she was going to send her daughters there though, whatever her parents said.

‘How long has she been missing?’ she asked.

‘Only a day,’ said Edgar. ‘The school informed the parents this morning. The girl, Rhonda, was last seen in her

bedroom last night. The father's an MP, quite important, and he's kicking up all kinds of fuss.'

Emma could imagine her own father doing the same, though he wasn't an important MP, just a businessman with enough money to send his daughter to a posh private school. 'What does Bob think?' she asked.

'He thinks – and I quote – that she's gone to see "the bright lights of London".'

Emma laughed. 'Has Bob ever been to London, do you think?'

'He went once,' said Edgar, 'but he didn't like it.' He was laughing too.

'What about the note?' said Emma. 'Was it in Rhonda's handwriting?'

'You're still a detective at heart, Sergeant Holmes.'

'I was the best sergeant you ever had,' said Emma. 'Make sure you have a look at the note.'

Edgar dropped Emma at the school gate. The girls were at Bristol Road Primary, a council school whose intake made Emma's parents shudder every time they encountered them at end-of-term plays or the disorganised free-for-all that counted as Sports Day. But Emma and Edgar had met the headmaster on a previous case and liked him. If Marianne and Sophie passed the Eleven Plus then they would go to the grammar school in Hove, which was unrelentingly middle-class. 'Why put them through that, darling,' said Emma's mother, 'when Roedean is so close?' There were many answers to that but Emma was

saving her ammunition for nearer the time. At the moment the girls loved their school, playing hopscotch in the concrete playground or running madly around Queen's Park with their friends. And at least they had local friends, which is more than Emma ever had.

'Mummy!' Sophie came hurtling out first. 'I drew you a picture.'

'It's lovely.' Emma took the sheet of paper, still wet with poster paint. 'What is it?'

'How can you say it's lovely when you don't know what it is?' Marianne had appeared. A tall girl with Emma's blonde hair, she could occasionally look alarmingly grown-up.

'It's a lady shark,' said Sophie. 'We learnt about fish today.'

'How can you tell it's a lady?' asked Marianne, as they began the walk up the hill towards home.

'They've got bigger teeth,' said Sophie. 'Did you buy me a present from Hastings, Mummy?'

## CHAPTER 3

Edgar found Bob in his office facing a large man with a red face and an intimidating moustache, the sort RAF officers had sported during the war. But he was to learn that Sir Crispian Miles had avoided military service due to bad circulation and excellent connections.

‘At last!’ Sir Crispian managed to give the impression that he had been waiting for Edgar for hours, possibly years. Edgar recognised him as the type who always starts a meeting with a sense of grievance and, having been introduced to an official, immediately demands to see their superior. Bob’s ears were pink and he said, ‘I’m dealing with your complaint, sir.’

‘My complaint!’ Sir Crispian appeared to be swelling in his chair. ‘My daughter goes missing and you call it a complaint. It’s a crime. And when I got here, I was told that the detective inspector and the superintendent were at a funeral. It’s a disgrace. Why do I pay my taxes?’

Edgar was willing to bet that Crispian paid as little tax as his accountant was able to contrive.

‘DI Willis and I are on leave today,’ he said. ‘We were attending the funeral of a close friend but we came in as soon as we were notified.’

‘I made them telephone,’ said Sir Crispian. ‘I wasn’t about to be fobbed off with some constable.’

Edgar took the seat next to Sir Crispian, wanting to emphasise that Bob was still in charge.

‘Sir Crispian’s daughter Rhonda has gone missing from school,’ said Bob, in the wooden voice he adopted for relaying evidence. ‘She was last seen at approximately nine last night.’

‘Twelve hours,’ barked Sir Crispian. ‘Twelve hours before I was informed of this. I’m going to sue.’

‘I’m sure you’ve already been through this with DI Willis,’ said Edgar, ‘but could you tell me what happened from the time that Roedean first reported Rhonda missing?’

He thought that Sir Crispian was going to explode again but, after a couple of deep breaths, he said, in an almost reasonable voice, ‘The housemistress rang me. Bloody impertinent woman. She said that Rhonda had left a note saying that she was going to London.’

‘Have you seen the note?’ asked Edgar.

‘Of course I’ve seen the note,’ said Sir Crispian. ‘I motored straight down from Surrey.’

‘And was the note in Rhonda’s handwriting? Did it sound like her?’

‘What d’you mean, did it sound like her?’

‘Did it sound like her letters home to you, for example?’

‘I never read them. M’wife reads bits out to me sometimes. But it looked like Rhonda’s handwriting, all right. The teacher thought so too.’

Where was Lady Miles? wondered Edgar. Surely she would want to accompany her husband on his visit to the school. But, then again, he couldn’t remember the last time he’d visited his daughters’ school. Emma took them there in the morning and collected them in the afternoon. She went to all the plays and sports days too, often accompanied by her parents. Edgar could rarely get time off work. But if something like this happened, he told himself rather defensively, he would be there like a shot. The thought made him feel superstitiously anxious and less willing to judge the Miles family.

‘What else did Rhonda’s teacher say?’ he asked.

‘She said that Rhonda had last been seen when a teacher called in on her at lights out. Rho shares a bedroom with another girl but she was in sickbay. The teacher said good-night to Rhonda, said she seemed her normal self but, when Rhonda didn’t turn up for breakfast, the housemistress sent a junior to call for her. The girl found Rhonda missing and the note on her desk.’

‘Did anyone see her leave?’

‘Apparently not. What a shower.’

Edgar thought about Roedean school, which was visible from Emma’s parents’ house. In fact, it was visible for miles around, a Gothic-looking mansion high on the clifftop. The coast road was in front, the South Downs behind. There were a few houses nearby, grand 1920s villas like the one owned by his parents-in-law, but these were hidden behind gardens and gates. Further back was the golf course and the beginnings of the council estate, the grey houses making their way up towards the Race Hill. If Rhonda escaped in the night, she would have had to walk along the unlit coast road or hike over the fields. That is, unless someone was waiting for her with a car.

‘What did the note say, exactly?’

‘I’ve got it here.’ Sir Crispian opened an official-looking briefcase and pulled out a piece of notepaper in a rather lurid pink.

The letter was brief.

*I’m going to London for a bit. Don’t worry about me.  
See you later, alligator  
Rhonda.*

‘See you later, alligator,’ said Sir Crispian. ‘What does it mean?’

‘It’s a line from a fifties pop song,’ said Bob. ‘Bill Haley and his Comets.’

‘A pop song!’ Sir Crispian started to swell again.

Edgar cut in. 'Did the school, the housemistress, think that this was in character for Rhonda? This note, for instance?'

'She didn't seem that surprised,' said Sir Crispian. 'Everyone at the school seemed to think that Rhonda was obsessed with some film star. Bobby something. They thought she might have gone to see him. But Rhonda's not like that. She's a good girl. A hard worker. She won a chess competition recently. It was in the paper. She's not the sort to moon over some long-haired idiot from Hollywood.'

'What do you think has happened to Rhonda?' asked Edgar.

'It's obvious,' said Sir Crispian. 'She's been abducted. I'm a rich man. Someone wants a ransom.'

'Have you had a ransom demand?'

'No.' Sir Crispian sounded almost disappointed.

'And why did the school think Rhonda might have gone to see this film star?'

'Apparently he's here, in London, making some god-awful film. It's with that magician, Max Mephisto. I used to like him before he went all American.'

Max hadn't mentioned any film to Edgar. Was that the real reason why he was in England? Edgar felt a stab of hurt on Diablo's behalf. He exchanged a look with Bob.

'We should follow this up,' he said. 'Find out where this film star is staying. I suppose you can't remember his full name, Sir Crispian?'

'I certainly can't.' He sounded affronted at the very thought.

'Don't worry. I know someone who will know.'

'Bobby Hambro,' said Emma. 'He was a child star. He's only about eighteen now but he's a fully fledged matinee idol. His last two films were "box office smashes".' Edgar could hear her putting quotation marks around the words. '*Puppy Love* was the first, *Only You* was the second.'

Reading *Film Frolics* was one of Emma's weaknesses; her photographic memory was one of her strengths.

'Have you heard anything about a third film?' asked Edgar. 'Possibly filming in London now?'

'I heard that he was in England looking at locations for a new film. I don't think they've started filming yet. Apparently it's an adaptation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.'

'I thought he was a child?'

'He's a teenager in this version. A golden-haired, lovable teenager. In fact I think it's called something like *Golden*. Ruby mentioned something about a film this afternoon. Maybe Max is going to be in it too.'

'That's what I'd heard.'

Edgar thought of Sir Crispian saying that Rhonda was 'not the sort to moon over some long-haired idiot from Hollywood'. He sympathised. He dreaded the day when Marianne and Sophie became interested in boys. But, all the same, he thought it was possible that Rhonda could

have fallen under the influence of the golden-haired Bobby Hambro. He wondered what part Max could possibly be playing in an adaptation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*.

‘Do you know anything else about Bobby?’ he said. ‘Where he’s staying in London, for example.’

‘What do you think I am?’ said Emma. ‘Directory Enquiries?’ But she didn’t really sound annoyed. He could hear the wireless playing and the girls arguing in the background. It made him want to be at home. By the time he got back from work, there was usually barely time to eat supper before the girls were preparing for bed. It sometimes felt as if he was missing out on the best part of the day. When he’d said this once to Emma she had replied, tartly, that she’d be willing to swap.

‘Film stars usually stay at the Ritz,’ Emma was saying. ‘I’ll see if there’s anything in the magazine . . . Here it is . . . Oh!’

‘What is it?’ said Edgar. It reminded him of the times when Emma was his sergeant and would sometimes go off following a hunch without telling him what it was.

‘It doesn’t say where Bobby is staying but it does say who his London agent is.’

‘Who is it?’ said Edgar but he thought he had guessed. ‘Joe Passolini.’

Joe, a Londoner of Italian heritage with a sharp line in suits and trilbies, was Ruby’s agent and had once been Max’s. Edgar had never really spoken to Joe but he had a nasty feeling that the agent – who was certainly Ruby’s

confidant, if not her lover – knew everything there was to know about him.

‘Joe will be back in London by now,’ he said.

‘I don’t think so,’ said Emma. ‘I think Ruby went back alone. I bet Joe will be having a drink with Max at the Grand, trying to get him back on the books.’

As usual, Emma was probably right.