

The tale of
Edith Rose Maye

Sample Chapters

By

P.A.Davies

Prologue

Present Day

The mahogany-cased grandmother clock, sitting in one corner of a very orderly living room, cut into the silence with seven chimes of its bell. At that precise moment, Edith Rose Maye entered the room carrying a tray that held a pot of freshly brewed tea (leaves, not bags) a small jug of milk and a willow patterned, China cup and saucer. She placed the tray onto the table in front of the window and sat herself down, wincing ever-so slightly as her grumbling muscles and bones sought to remind her that she was getting on ... as if she needed reminding. She let out a dismissive sigh and then glanced towards an old black and white photograph that sat on the table just next to her.

“Morning love.” She said with a smile; a smile clearly reserved only for the man in that photograph.

Stanley Maye – looking very smart in his RAF Officer’s uniform - smiled enigmatically from his position inside a sterling silver frame, but remained silent.

Edith poured a little milk into the cup, took the cosy off the tea pot and filled the cup with a very weak looking tea.

That looks like gnat’s piss.

“Be thankful you’re not drinking it then.” Edith replied, with a slight shrug. She gave the tea

a quick stir and took a sip. “Ah, that’s better. Nothing starts the day better than a cup of tea.”

She gazed out of the window, taken by her thoughts, lulled by the sound of the ticking clock sitting across the room.

Why do I never get a cup of tea?

Edith broke her tranquil stare and turned her head towards the man now sitting in the chair beside her. “It may have escaped your attention Stanley,” she began. “But you’ve been dead for years. What good’s a cup of tea to you?”

You could at least bring me a cup and saucer. It’s the thought that counts you know?

“Oh really? And what if our Anna drops by and sees the extra cup laid out? Or God forbid, our David. He would have me shipped off to the funny farm faster than you could say for sale. You know he’s itching to get his sticky hands on this house and having me locked away is just the excuse he needs”

Don’t be daft Edi. The kids and the grandkids think the world of you, you know that.

“Oh, do they?” Edith asked rhetorically. “And what about David’s lad, Robert? He’s a wrong ‘un that one is. I only ever see him when he needs money. And I know he took that five pound note off the side.”

Well, you can’t prove that love so ...

“Can’t prove it my arse.” Edith hit back. “It was on top of that cabinet ready for the milkman, as always.” She nodded towards a glass fronted cabinet in the corner of the room, its shelves awash with various pot ornaments collected over the years. “Then Robert turns up looking for another handout and the next day – when it came to pay the milk bill

- the five-pound note had miraculously disappeared, vanished without trace.”

Maybe you only thought that you left it there.

“Don’t you dare.” Edith growled.

What?

“You know what.”

I’m just saying that ...

“You’re just saying that perhaps I’m losing my marbles? Perhaps my memory isn’t what it was? Well, let me tell you this Stanley Maye. Ninety-seven I might be, but I’m sharper than the tongue in my mouth and you of all people should know that.” Edith turned away and mimicked Stanley with a definite tone of bitterness. “Maybe you thought you left it there, he says ... stupid man!” She picked up her cup, took another sip of tea and stared silently out of the window again.

I’m sorry Edi. I didn’t mean to upset you.

“Hmm.”

You know I say things without thinking sometimes.

“You can say that again.”

You know I say things without thinking sometimes.

A slight smile formed across Edith’s mouth.
“Stupid man.”

Chapter 1

It was the Spring of 1939 when a sixteen-year-old Edith Rose Leatherbarrow first noticed the butcher's son, Stanley Maye; undoubtedly because he was wearing an RAF uniform that made him look quite dashing.

She had known Stanley all her life but, given that he was a couple of years older, they had never really mingled in the same social circles. Even at the school that they'd both attended, she had no reason to associate with Stanley and, frankly, he was too ordinary for a girl to notice anyway. Not now though. Not as he walked through the door of his father's shop where Edith was collecting some tripe and sausages, looking like she had just been dragged backwards through a hedge.

Ron Maye looked up from the counter as the overhead door-bell rang and beamed. "Well, will you look at that." He said with palpable pride. "He went away a boy and came back a man." He wiped his hands on his blood-stained apron and strode quickly over to his son, embracing him in a way that left no doubt of the love that this man had for his son.

"Hi Dad." Stanley said. As he hugged his father, he caught a glimpse of Edith staring at them open-mouthed and shot her a wink. Edith smiled awkwardly and felt her cheeks begin to redden.

"Here, let's have a look at you." Ron eased out of the embrace, stepped back slightly and began

to study his son. “Finally got some meat on those skinny bones of yours I see.”

Hasn't he just, Edith thought.

“That would be all the training they put us through, dad.” Stanley replied. “And the food they fed us.”

“Well, you look grand, son, truly grand.” Ron looked towards Edith. “Doesn't he look grand Edith?”

Oh God. Why you asking me? He looks better than grand Mr. Maye. “I ... well, I ... yes, I suppose he does.” She shrugged awkwardly; her cheeks on the verge of explosion.

“There's no suppose about it girl.” Ron chuckled. “Just wait till his mother sees him.”

“Where is mum?” Stanley asked.

“She's upstairs,” Ron replied. “I'll call her down but you go and hide by the freezer. Let's give her a big surprise.”

“Ha-ha. Okay dad.”

“BETTY. BETTY!” Ron's sudden shout out made Edith jump a little. She did consider leaving but she was still without her tripe and her dad wouldn't be pleased if she returned home without it. Oh well. No rush.

“What is it?” Came the reply from somewhere upstairs.

“Come see what the cat's dragged in.” Ron grinned and winked at Edith. It wasn't the same kind of wink that her son gave her though.

“Oh, what is it now?” Betty asked as she began to descend the stairs. “It better not be one of those bloody pigeons again Ronald Maye. The last thing we need is flying vermin guts all over the shop

floor. It's unhygienic and ..." She stopped talking when she entered the shop and saw Edith standing by the counter. "Oh, hello Edith dear. How's your mum?"

Edith wanted to point out that, despite her appearance, she wasn't what the cat had dragged in. "Hello Mrs Maye. She's fine, thank you."

"Good. Well give her my best and tell her I'll be over to see her on Tuesday." Edith nodded. "And what are you grinning like a Cheshire Cat for?" She asked, turning towards her husband.

"What's the one thing that would make you happy right now?" Ron quizzed.

Betty frowned. "I haven't got time for your silly games Ron," she protested. "I'm busy making your steak and kidney pie and then there's the ..."

Stan cut her off mid-sentence by popping his head from around the freezer door. "I hope there's enough for me?"

Betty gasped when she saw the beaming face of her only child. "Oh Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Stanley? Oh Stanley, is that really you?" She raced over to her son, tears of joy already falling from her eyes. She hugged him, she put a hand on his face, she smiled and then she punched him on the arm.

"Ow!" Stanley yelped. "What was that for?"

"That's for not telling me you were coming home. And this ..." She punched him again, which evoked another complaint from Stanley. "... is for not writing to me every day like you promised you would." Mother and son both began to laugh and embraced each other once again; Stan's muscular arms enveloping the whole of Betty's frame effortlessly.

From the corner of the shop, a slightly envious Edith looked on. *I wouldn't say no to a hug from you, Stanley Maye.* She thought.

Sample Chapters

Chapter 2

1936

Without doubt, Edith's older sister, Helen, was a very attractive and very stylish nineteen-year-old. The trouble was, nobody thought it more so than Helen who, it seemed, spent more time brushing her hair than she did sleeping. And if she wasn't busy adjusting her appearance, she was busy fussing over the appearance of her fourteen-year-old sister, Edith.

"You really need to do something with this hair of yours." Helen had once remarked, whilst fidgeting with her sister's mousey brown curls. "And perhaps put a little rouge on those pale cheeks of yours?"

"You will do no such thing, thank you very much." Her mother objected. "I'm not having my fourteen-year-old daughter looking like some fairground Aunt Sally." She took a hold of Edith's head in her hands and smiled. "She's beautiful just the way she is. Aren't you Edi love?" She leant forward and kissed her daughter on the forehead.

"Then why has she never had a boyfriend?" Helen scoffed whilst filing her nails.

Helen stopped filing her nails, leant in towards Edith and shook her head. "There's not," she whispered. "Believe me."

Edith shrugged. "I don't really like boys," she said. "Not ... you know ... in that way."

“Oh my God!” Helen exclaimed dramatically, throwing herself back into the chair. “My sister’s a lesbian!”

“Helen!” Mrs Leatherbarrow warned. “I won’t have that sort of talk in this house thank you.”

“I’m not a lesbian.” Edith protested.

“Edith!”

“But I’m not. I just don’t like boys. Unless we’re playing football that is. Then they’re okay I suppose.”

Mrs Leatherbarrow looked at Helen and Helen looked back.

“What’s so funny about that?” Edith asked, as her mum and sister had suddenly broken out into laughter.

1939 Sample ^{*} Chapters

Three years on and Edith still hadn’t had an official boyfriend. Oh, she had once let William Battersby touch her boobs when she was fifteen, but that didn’t count, not really. They might have been an item, she thought, but she remembered on one particular day how William suddenly went bright red, made a very strange grunting noise and then ran off, leaving her to button up her top in bewilderment. He didn’t talk to her for weeks after that, which Edith found very peculiar.

The absence of suitors didn’t bother Edith in the slightest but it certainly appeared to bother her sister, Helen, who was always harping on about the benefits of the opposite sex.

“I don’t see the appeal.” Edith said. In truth, it was a little white-lie because she found Stanley Maye very appealing; a fact she wouldn’t share with Helen because she knew that Helen found him attractive too and was probably waiting for the day he asked her for a date.

“That’s because you’re still a virgin, I suppose.” Helen said, matter-of-factly.

Edith’s eyes widened with surprise. “Are you saying, you’re not?” She gasped.

“Oh, Edith.” Helen replied. “I’m nineteen for God’s sake. What do you think?”

Edith expression was a picture. “Does mum know?”

“Don’t be a moron Edi. There’re some things you just don’t tell mum, regardless of how liberal she seems.”

“Well, I don’t care what you say.” Edith sighed. “I don’t intend to lose my virginity until I’m married and only then, when I’m good and ready.”

Helen snorted a laugh. “Okay Saint Edith. We’ll see.”

*

When Edith turned seventeen, she was overjoyed that she could enjoy the summer without the thought of having to return to school in September.

More importantly, her dad had taken her on her first driving lesson which was both exhilarating and nerve racking at the same time. She only hoped that the slight mishap with Mr. Taylor’s gate post hadn’t put her dad off too much.

Two days after her seventeenth birthday, there was a rapturous knock on the front door.

“Good Lord. Where’s the fire?” Mrs Leatherbarrow gasped. “I hope that didn’t wake your father up.”

“I’ll go.” Helen said, jumping up out of her chair.

“And remind whoever it is that your dad’s on nights. You know he doesn’t like being woken up too early.”

Helen swung open the front door and immediately regretted not applying a little lipstick beforehand. “Oh, hello Stanley.” She said, sweeping a whisp of hair behind her ear. “Have you come to ask me out?”

Stanley reddened at the unexpected but direct question. “Erm, no, sorry.” He managed.

“Oh,” Helen said, sounding a little deflated. “Then why *are* you here?”

“I was, er, hoping to have a word with your sister.”

Helen frowned. “Who, Edith?” She asked with genuine surprise.

“Well, seeing as you only have one sister, yes, Edith. If she’s free that is?”

Helen looked Stan up and down with a sudden bout of contempt. “I will go and see.” She replied and shut the door on Stan with a thud.

She went back into the kitchen, slumped into a chair and began studying her nails without speaking.

“Who was at the door dear?” Mrs Leatherbarrow asked, without looking up from her

“Oh, nobody.” She replied, picking at a cuticle.

This time, Mrs Leatherbarrow did look up and frowned. “It can’t have been nobody dear,” she pointed out. “Not with all that racket.”

“Well, not *nobody* obviously, but nobody important.”

“I didn’t ask for their general status in life Helen, I just want to know who was at the door?”

“It was just the butcher’s boy, Stanley Maye.”

This time, Edith looked up at her sister. “What did he want?” she asked.

Helen let out a very strange snorting sound and shrugged her shoulders. “You, apparently.”

“Me?” Edith quizzed. “What did he want me for?”

“What am I, your maid? Go ask him yourself.”

Edith looked at her mum and then back to Helen. “What? He’s still here? At the door?”

“Well. Unless he decided to go home and chop up a pig, I’m guessing so.”

Edith shot up out of her chair and walked quickly out of the room.

“That wasn’t very nice Helen.” Mrs Leatherbarrow said.

“What wasn’t?”

“You know *what*. Not every young man that comes to our door is going to be looking for you, you know.”

“I never said they were.”

“Then try to have a little thought for your sister will you. She’s a long time starting this

journey and she might well need your help, not your hindrance.”

Helen sighed. “Okay, fine.”

There was a long moment of silence between mother and daughter before Mrs Leatherbarrow spoke again.

“Anyway,” she added. “This might just prove one thing.”

“Really?” Helen asked. “And what would that be exactly?”

“Well, that your sister’s not a lesbian, I suppose.”

Helen’s jaw dropped open. “Mother!” She gasped. “I seem to remember that you didn’t want that sort of language in this house?”

Mrs Leatherbarrow shrugged. “Slip of the tongue love.” She replied with a slight tone of mischief and then burst out laughing. “No pun intended.” She eventually managed in between breaths.

“What’s so funny?” Edith asked, walking back in to the room.

“Oh, nothing much dear,” her mum replied, still chuckling. “Anyway,” she went on, eager to compose herself. “Why do you look like the cat’s got the cream?”

Edith’s faced was positively beaming. “Stanley’s just asked me if I wanted to go to the summer fair with him.” She replied, excitedly.

“And? What did you say?”

Edith looked to her sister and then back to her mum, both of whom were literally on the edge of their seats.

“Well, I said yes. But only if dad says it’s okay that is.”

“Oh, don’t you worry about that dear.” Mrs Leatherbarrow said. “You’re going to the fair with Stanley and that’s that. You can leave your father to me.”

Edith’s smiled widened.

“Ooo, in that case.” Helen suddenly piped up. “We have work to do.” She stood up and pulled out a chair. “Right Edi. Sit down here and let’s take a look at that hair. We can’t have you turning up on a date looking like Tom Sawyer now can we.”

“But the fair isn’t even on for another week.” Edith pointed out.

Helen stepped back and looked at Edith. “Yes, I know that.” She replied. “But Rome wasn’t built in a day, sis. And this ...” She pointed at directly at Edith’s face and began to make circles in the air with her finger. “... this needs a fair amount of work if you intend to knock Stanley Maye off his feet.”

From her knitting chair in the corner of the room, Mrs Leatherbarrow watched her two daughters laughing. And, as they chatted about make-up, hair styles and boys, she wondered where on Earth the time had gone. *It seems like only yesterday that they were toddlers*, she thought with a little sadness.

Just then, the final piece of her own idyllic family jigsaw entered the room and smiled warmly at her. *He’s still a handsome devil*, she thought. “Cup of tea love?” She asked her husband, Eric.

“That would be grand, thanks mother.” Eric replied, then kissed both his daughters on the top of

their heads. "And then," he went on, sitting himself down. "Somebody can tell me what all this bloody racket is about?"

There was an immediate hush in the room, followed by a sudden outburst of giggling.

Eric frowned. "Huh? What have I said now?"

"Don't worry love," Mrs Leatherbarrow said, placing a mug of tea in front of her husband. "Your youngest daughter is growing up. That's all."

*

5th August 1939

Each and every year - as decreed in a charter issued by Edward I in 1283 - the small Lancashire village of Croston, held its summer fair. Although it was supposed to be medieval based and fun, the event that was held on Saturday 5th August 1939 was a little more sombre than recent years. This was due to the activities of a little fascist man in Germany who seemed intent on taking over the world, and the residents of Croston knew that it was only a matter of time before Britain intervened and went to war.

Just prior to the annual fair being opened, it was customary for the village Reverend - flanked by the mayor and his minions - to address his flock, welcome them, thank them, praise God and finally get the mayor to declare the event officially open. Standing on his podium today, looking down onto the gathering of ordinarily dressed residents and visitors, he felt a little saddened that the spirit of the

day had been dampened by the loom of conflict with Germany. He also felt a tad stupid that he had turned up to the annual fair dressed as Richard the Lionheart. Clearly somebody hadn't shared that particular memo with him. Ordinarily, he would have vehemently discussed the oversight with his wife, Doris - who also acted as his secretary - and demanded an explanation as to why he was the only one in costume thus, looking and feeling like a total prat. However, given that she was currently dressed as a buxom, 12th century wench, he didn't really have any grounds to blame her.

He turned to address the gathering of people but could have sworn he saw the mayor chuckling to himself.

"Nice costume Reverend!" Somebody shouted out from the crowd, bringing a ripple of laughter from the audience and a ridiculously loud belly-laugh from the mayor.

Reverend Horsfield tried to smile as best he could whilst all the while, itching to punch the mayor right in the mouth. He said a little prayer whilst the crowd settled down; not, as you might think, to ask the lord's forgiveness for his violent thought, but to thank him for giving him the strength of restraint.

The Reverend cleared his throat in a manner that was loud enough to bring a hush to his flock. He waited for the crowd to settle, set his expression to warm and opened his arms wide.

"Dear friends, neighbours and guests of Croston." He began. "Welcome to the annual village fair of 1939." There was a small round of applause from the gathering below. "However," he

continued. "It is not without a heavy heart that I welcome you all to what should be a joyous occasion, knowing that conflict with Germany seems very much on our horizon." Many in the audience nodded their heads. "But, let me say this. If that war does come, I have no doubt that our brave men in the armed forces will very quickly quell this unrest and put Adolf Hitler back inside his nasty little box where he belongs." The applause was rapturous. "God save Britain and God save the King!"

God save the King, came the unanimous response.

"And so, my friends," the Reverend continued, eager to push on and get his bloody chainmail off. "We have been blessed with a beautiful August day so let's enjoy it, but above all else, let's have some fun today, yes?"

The audience cheered, the mayor stepped forward and declared the fair officially open, whilst the Reverend strode over to his wife and whispered in her ear.

"We look bloody ridiculous," he hissed. He then feigned a smile, turned partly back towards the dispersing audience and waved, not caring in the slightest if anyone saw it or waved back. He then left the podium and headed back towards the vicarage.

"I think you look quite charming."

Doris Horsfield jumped at the voice from behind and quickly turned around to see who it was.

"I apologise," the mayor offered. "I didn't mean to startle you. I was just saying that you look quite charming in your outfit."

Doris wondered if the mayor's eyes would rise above her chest anytime soon but, given her plentiful helping in the breast department, she guessed not. She shook her head with dismay "Tch, men." She said tetchily. "You're all the bloody same."

Sample Chapters

Chapter 3

Present Day

Edith began to pour herself a second cup of tea but stopped midway when something - or rather somebody - caught her eye.

“Oh, there she is, sneaking another fancy man out.” She grumbled.

Who is? Came a reply from Stan.

“That strumpet over the road. Lisa or Leeza, however she pronounces it. That’s the third fella this week she’s had staying. It’s like a bloody brothel over there.” Edith leaned forward and pulled back the net curtain a little, hoping to get a better look.

What are you doing woman? She will catch you, spying on her.

“I’m not spying Stanley,” Edith hit back. “I’m just taking an interest in the neighbourhood. One, incidentally, that she is bringing down with her activities.”

Out in the street, Lisa - or Leeza - suddenly turned and looked towards Edith’s front window.

“Ooo.” Edith gasped, quickly dropping the curtain and sitting back in her chair.

See? I told you she would catch you. Stan chuckled.

“Well, she shouldn’t have been looking this way, should she?” Edith heard Stan sigh but chose to ignore it. She was too busy looking towards Lisa - under cover of the net curtain - who was still

staring at the house with a visible frown on her face. “What you up to missy?” Edith mumbled suspiciously. After a few moments, Lisa’s gaze was broken by the sound of her *guest* starting up his car. Edith watched Lisa speaking to the man through the open window of his car door for a minute or so, before stepping back and waving him off. When the car had driven out of sight, Lisa headed back into her home but briefly looked over her shoulder towards Edith’s window again. She then shook her head, carried on into her home and closed the front door.

“I don’t know why she’s shaking her head.” Edith said. “It’s not me that should be ashamed of my behaviour.”

Maybe she isn’t ashamed? Stan suggested.

“Well, she should be. Bloody floozy. Three kids to three different fathers and not one of them a match. One brown, one white and the other one; whatever colour she is.”

I think she’s part Korean.

“Hmm.” Edith considered. “I can’t say I’ve ever seen a Korean, so I wouldn’t really know. I do feel sorry for those kids though.” She went on. “A right bag of Liquorice Allsorts if ever I saw one.” She took a further sip of her tea and immediately grimaced. “Now see. That’s gone cold.” She stood up and loaded the teapot and milk jug onto the tray. “Best make another pot I suppose.” She paused to look at Stan. “And before you start Stanley Maye, the answer is no, I won’t bring you a cup and saucer.”

5th August 1939

Edith had had a lovely day. The sun had shone without a break, the fair had seemed even better than the previous year and Stanley had turned out to be a real gentleman. What had made it even more special was when they had gotten off the carousel. Stan had gallantly taken hold of her hand to help her down but then hadn't let go of it all day. Edith wasn't complaining though.

As the sun was finally beginning to descend from the slate-blue sky, Edith and Stan headed out of the concourse.

"I've had a great day Edi." Stan said as they walked slowly home. "How about you?"

Edith immediately glanced down at Stanley's hand - still entwined with her own - and smiled warmly. "It's been wonderful." She replied. "Thank you for asking me to come."

"Thank you for saying yes." Stan replied.

Why wouldn't I? Edith thought.

As they walked slowly along, Edith couldn't help but notice that Stan appeared to have become a little pre-occupied with his thoughts. He hadn't said a word for the past five minutes, which Edith found unusual as they hadn't stopped talking all day. And then something happened that made Edith's heart sink: Stan suddenly pulled his hand away from hers.

"Oh." It was an involuntary remark by Edith, ignited by the totally unexpected move. She looked at Stan, confused. "Are you okay?" She asked. "Have I done something wrong?"

“What? God no, no. Not at all.” Stanley gushed. “I ...well ... it’s just that ... well, I was ...”

“Oh, good Lord above Stanley.” Edith cut in. “Spit it out, before you choke on it.”

Stan nodded and cleared his throat. “Yes, yes of course.” He replied, looking very uncomfortable.

Edith could see how awkward Stan was feeling and it was blatantly obvious - to her - what was coming next. “It’s okay.” She said with a forced smile. “I will spare you the pain.”

“Pain? What pain? What do ...”

“I know when somebody is trying to tell me that they don’t want to see me again, so I will spare you the job of actually having to say it.” Edith’s stomach was churning. “We can still be friends though, can’t we?”

Stan looked shocked. “But I don’t want us to be friends.” He gushed. He saw the instant look of hurt on Edith’s face and immediately regretted his words; or rather, how his words came out. “Damn it. That’s not what I meant.” The situation was going from bad to worse and Stanley knew he needed to get a grip, especially as Edith had now started to walk away from him.

Just tell her you bumbling idiot. His conscience called out. Before you lose her altogether!

Stanley opened his mouth to speak but nothing would come out. *What the hell?* If he didn’t sort himself out, and do it quickly, he would blow his chance forever. He took a deep breath – and then another - and went for it. “I want you to be my girl!” He shouted. Well, the line worked for James Cagney ... or was it Humphrey Bogart?

Edith stopped in her tracks and smiled; which was good because she had just been on the verge of crying. However, she quickly masked her smile behind an expression of confusion and turned back towards Stan. "What did you say?" She asked. Oh, she had heard him perfectly the first time, but she wanted to hear it again nonetheless. After all, nobody had ever said that to her before.

"Well." Stan replied. "I was wondering ... hoping ... if maybe ... well, you know?"

"No, I don't know Stanley. What?"

"If ... if you would consider being my girlfriend?"

Edith suddenly stomped back towards Stan and stopped within inches of him. Her face had a very stern look about it which caused Stan to gulp. To be honest, he felt a little intimidated at the moment and actually braced himself for the arrival of a slap. But then, a smile appeared on Edith's face and he couldn't help but let out a small sigh of relief.

When she held out her hand, Stan instinctively took hold of it and smiled. "I don't intend to let go of you again, Edith Leatherbarrow." He said.

Edith stepped in closer to Stan and looked up at him. "That's absolutely fine by me, Stanley Maye." She replied.

Stan took his chance and leant in for the kiss. Edith responded without the slightest hesitation.

Eat your heart out Bogart.

Chapter 4

Sunday 3rd September 1939

11:15hrs

In every home and workplace across Britain, people had gathered around radio and television sets to listen to a live BBC Home Service broadcast by the Prime Minister, Neville Chamberlain. In his five-minute address to the nation from the cabinet room within 10 Downing Street, Chamberlain announced that Hitler had failed to respond to British demands to leave Poland and as a consequence, Britain was now at war with Germany.

“And where do you think you’re going to?” Eric Leatherbarrow questioned, when Edith suddenly jumped off her chair and grabbed her coat.

“I have to go and see Stanley.” She replied, anxiously.

“You will do no such thing young lady.” Eric protested, standing up. “Did you not hear what the Prime Minister just said? This country is at war.”

“I hardly think the Germans are holed up in Croston waiting to pounce on the villagers, daddy.” Helen suggested.

“I’m not saying they are, Nelly-bloody-know-all, but I’m guessing the Government will impose restrictions on going outdoors without good reason!”

“But this *is* a good reason dad.” Edith said. “Because Stanley will probably have to leave right away and if I don’t get to see him before he goes to fight the Germans I might ... well, I might never get to see him again.” Edith couldn’t stop her eyes from welling up no more than Eric Leatherbarrow could stop his heart aching when he saw his daughter’s distress.

Eric sighed and shook his head. “You have an hour.” He reluctantly agreed

Edith ran over to her dad and kissed him on the cheek. “I love you daddy” she whispered, before heading out of the door.

“Don’t forget Edi. One hour!” Eric called out, but Edith didn’t hear him; she was already running towards Stan’s home.

Sample * Chapters

Edith read and then re-read the telegram that Stan had received only the day before.

“Why didn’t you tell me about this yesterday?” She asked, holding the telegram up.

“I wasn’t allowed to.” Stan replied. “And even if I was, I wouldn’t have told you anyway.”

“Oh?” Edith responded, a little shocked. “Why not?”

“Because I didn’t want our time together ruined by something that may not have happened.”

“But it has happened Stanley and now you’re leaving ... today ... and I ... I don’t know what ...” Edith broke down and Stanley quickly took her into his arms.

“Please don’t cry Edi,” he comforted. “It will all turn out just fine. You’ll see.”

“How will it?” Edith retorted. “You’re going to fight Germans a million miles away and you might never come back!”

“That won’t happen, I promise.” Stan moved Edith’s head away from his chest and cupped his hands around her face, gently wiping the tears from her cheeks. “And I probably won’t get to see any action anyway, if the rumours are true.”

“What rumours?” Edith managed to ask, searching for any slither of hope she could cling on to.

“Well, I heard that the government are sending thousands of troops into France within a few days, to sort this mess out.”

“But ... but what if they can’t sort it out and they make you join in the fighting?”

“Then Gerry had better watch out.” Stan quipped with a smile.

Edith couldn’t return the smile so she buried her head into Stan’s chest again. Thankfully, she didn’t see Stan’s expression change to one of dire concern. Although he wasn’t about to share his actual thoughts with Edith, he knew that his deployment into the skies to fight against the Germans was inevitable and yes, chances are he might just not come back.

“Would you like to go for a walk?” He asked.

Edith uncurled herself from his arms and stepped back. “I would love that.”

*

Outside, it was cold and it was drizzling but neither Edith nor Stanley had actually noticed the inclement weather. They had walked hand in hand

for the best part of an hour and for them, nothing else mattered. They talked, they laughed and they kissed ... and then kissed some more.

When the time came for Stanley to catch the train and begin the long journey to RAF Hornchurch, Edith had insisted on going to the station to see him off. Stan's mother however, had privately moaned about this suggestion to her husband.

"Why does she have to come?" She asked, bitterly. "She's had him all to herself for the past two hours. Is it too much to ask that we see our only son off by ourselves?"

"Haven't you noticed Betty?" Ron replied. "They're in love."

"They're kids, what do they know about love?"

"Well, it may have escaped your memory, my little buttercup, but we were their age when we first met and, if I remember correctly, you couldn't get enough of me either."

Betty suddenly swiped at her husband with the tea towel she was holding. Ron caught a hold of it and pulled Betty towards him and onto his knee. "You're a fool, Ronald Maye." Betty chuckled.

"Would you have me any other way Mrs Maye?"

Betty studied his face for a few moments and then gave him a peck on his cheek. "You're better than nowt I suppose." She teased.

Ron chuckled and then looked at his wife with a serious expression. "Our boy is going to war, love," he began. "And it's not a good time for any of us. But, if Edith being at the station makes Stan

feel a little bit better about what he is about to embark on, then I for one am not going to do anything to stop it.”

Betty sighed and shrugged. “I suppose you’re right.”

“I know I am.” Ron said. “He is, and always will be, our son and we will continue to love him unconditionally. But, at this moment in time, his love for us is secondary to his love for young Edith. Like it or hate it, that’s life I’m afraid.”

Betty got up off Ron’s knee and dabbed her eyes with the tea towel. “I best get on and finish his packed lunch,” she said. “I won’t have him starving to death before he ...” Betty couldn’t finish the sentence because - just like the girl who loved him beyond measure - she too broke down.

*

The station platform was crammed with people, each one saying goodbye to their loved ones, each one worrying if this would be the last time they would actually be together.

Reverend Horsfield had imparted his personal words of wisdom to the crowd and read from the Book of Isaiah Chapter 41: Verses 10-11.

So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand. All who rage against you will surely be ashamed and disgraced; those who oppose you will be as nothing and perish.

When he’d finished, he closed his book, clasped his hands together and bowed his head. “Our Father,” he started, loudly. “Who art in heaven...”

The crowd dutifully bowed their heads and joined in the prayer.

In other parts of Britain - and in countries, cities, towns and villages across Europe - the same prayer was undoubtedly being recited by others seeking God's help; such was the terrifying reality of war.

“...forever and ever, amen!”

Amen.

The Salvation Army Band - whose appearance had been organised by a proud Doris Horsfield - took their cue and broke into a rendition of the National Anthem. Reverend Horsfield immediately stood to attention and saluted. Some of the crowd also stood to respectful attention whilst others - the majority - saw no justification in asking God to save the King when his help was needed much closer to home.

When the band had turned its musical prowess to *The Lord is my Shepherd*, the crowd returned to their own conversations, not wishing to waste a moment longer on officialdom.

Edith reached around her neck and undid the clasp that secured her necklace. “I want you to have this.” She said, offering it out to Stan. “It’s Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travellers and it will keep you safe.” Stan took hold of the silver pendant and studied it. “It was my grandmothers’.” Edith added. “And she lived to be seventy-three, so it must work.”

“It’s beautiful,” Stan remarked. “But I can’t take this from you, Edi.”

“Er, you can and you will Stanley Maye.” Betty cut in sharply, surprising herself with the

sudden comment. Outside, she was displaying great tolerance towards Edith's presence - much to the relief of her husband Ron - but inside, she was simmering with disapproval. And now this. Why hadn't she thought of giving her son something like that? A memento, a keepsake? All she had thought to give him were a few ham and piccalilli sandwiches and a flask of tea. *Great. Now I can add envy and regret to the turmoil going on inside me.*

Stan glanced at his mum and then back to Edith, who merely shrugged. "I guess I have no choice then," he said. "But ..." he took the pendant off the chain and gave the chain back to Edith. "This is too delicate, so..." He too reached around his neck and removed his dog-tags. He then put the pendant onto the thin strip of leather that held his tags and returned it to his neck. "There," he concluded, patting his chest. "Right next to my heart."

Edith smiled but then immediately jumped when the LMS steam locomotive - idling at the platform - suddenly sounded its high-pitched whistle, signalling that it was time to leave.

"Well, that's me I guess." Stan said, and though he sounded unperturbed by it all, his mother knew exactly how he was feeling inside: Mothers can sense these things.

Betty quickly stepped forward and embraced her son. "Promise me that you will keep safe Stanley and not try to be a bloody hero. Leave that for other people. I want you home safe and sound when all this nonsense is over, do you hear me?"

"I'll be fine mum," Stan replied, softly. "Don't go worrying yourself into an early grave, please."

“I can’t promise you that Stanley.” Betty said, wiping her eyes with a handkerchief. “You know me better than that.” She took a small step backwards, looked him over for a few seconds and nodded her approval. Ron was the next to step in.

“We’re all so very proud of you son.” He said as he hugged Stanley. “But I’m with your mother on this one. Leave the heroics to some other bugger.”

Edith was already in floods of tears when the moment came for her to say goodbye, so much so, she could hardly speak. “I ... I ... I don’t ... want, you ... to go.”

Stan held her the longest and the closest. “Don’t get upset Edi, I’ll be home before you know it.” He comforted. “And, I have your Saint Christopher to keep me safe, remember?” As Edith sobbed in his arms, he kissed the top of her head and could smell the scent of camomile in her hair. It reminded him of the summer fair and the first time they had kissed. It was wonderful.

At that precise moment, Stan instinctively knew what he needed to say. “I love you, Edith Leatherbarrow.” He whispered.

To be continued

The Tale of Edith Rose Maye
will be available via Amazon
from 25th March 2024.

Sample Chapters
All enquiries to
mjdpublishing@gmail.com

www.padavies.net