

Doctor JOHN

EDWARD
EVANS



Introduction

*It isn't often a reporter gets involved in the story he or she is writing about; involvement is normally after the event but there are always one or two exceptions. You may remember in my article about **The PIANO**, I interviewed and reported on Terry Mudson, the spy who was sentenced to many years in prison for his sins and then on his release, became involved in the preservation of Noël Coward's piano at St Thomas' Hospital in London.*

*Or my other story, under the title of **THE FOUNDRYMAN'S APPRENTICE**, where I, with the help of the Daily Mail, assisted Irvine Gough to obtain justice for a friend of his family who was cruelly murdered on the battlefield during WW1.*

I better explain myself before I go any further: I'm Clive White; I work for the Daily Mail as an investigative journalist and have done so for many years, but when this happened I was a new boy on the block and naturally wanted to make a good impression.

The story you are about to read is another where I become deeply involved, as my good friend and general practitioner accidentally becomes mixed up in a murder.

The whole incident however took place in the nineteen seventies and whilst it involved the Mail, the matter was reported after the event, and it is only now that I can tell the inside story. So here goes!

My editor at the time was a Joe Spade and although I had stumbled on my first big story, he wanted to keep an eye on me and keep a lid on my enthusiasm. In fact, it was because I was so deeply involved that he decided to run the story himself, which he said would serve as a training session on how he would like things to be done.

In fairness, he did put my name on the byline. Anyway, how could I argue with my boss, the Editor of the Daily Mail!

Things became difficult from the start, as within hours of the incident taking place, a lid was put on us to prevent the story breaking in order to protect the identity of the chief witnesses and I was left to see how it ran for the next four months or so, following which Joe decided to write up the story himself. He would call me into his office and I would have to relate point by point, action by action whilst he put together the sequence of events.

I remember walking into his office for the first time:

'Now Clive, when you are writing a story for the papers you have to get the story over so that it is understood by your reader. So first you tell them what you are going to tell them; then you tell them the story; then you tell them what you have told them. You keep things moving so their interest is always maintained. So now, start from the beginning and remember what I have said. Right?'

'Right,' I replied, somewhat nervously.

'Right, you begin and don't waste time. Time costs money.'

Chapter 1

A Crime is Committed

Well, I suppose it began by accident. Yes, I had an accident and had suffered severe pain in my leg for many months. I was a new reporter with the Mail and had not bothered to see a doctor about the pain. It was a new job and I wanted to make an impression by not taking time off, but I had now caught the flu and had to go to see one of the local doctors, just for some antibiotics. There were four doctors in the practice at that time and I was down to see a Dr John Brenton.

I walked into his surgery feeling absolutely dreadful and walked out feeling as though there was nothing wrong with me. This was his strength as a doctor. He would talk to you, get to the bottom of things, then diagnose and prescribe. It wasn't often you needed anything after he found out what was wrong.

He is a tall, wiry sort of bloke, as strong as an ox with a beard, which makes him look like some Arctic explorer. I soon found out why he had become the most popular doctor in the practice and why, after only nine months in the job, he was being offered a full-time appointment as they were anxious to keep him.

During the examination we talked about this and that and found that we both supported Wolves Football Club, and had many other things in common as well as being of similar age. For those uninitiated, the Wolves is short for the Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club.

I suppose we had chatted for at least half an hour, when I felt I was taking too much of his time and should leave, but as I was leaving, he noticed me limping slightly when I walked to the door. He asked if I had a problem and when I explained the circumstances, he

suggested that he take a look. I sat back in the chair as he began to examine the leg.

‘I think this leg may be broken,’ he began, ‘and I think we should have it x-rayed quickly.’ With that, he made all the arrangements there and then and within a few days, I was back in the surgery for the prognosis on the leg, the flu having disappeared.

‘I was right. It was broken,’ he said, as he invited me to sit down, ‘but it’s healing on its own. Not exactly as it should be, but it looks near enough for me. The specialist recommends it be broken and repositioned. I wouldn’t, but it’s up to you.’

That did it for me; I took his advice and never looked back. A few weeks later, the pain had disappeared and Doctor John became my drinking partner and good friend and has remained so. I call him Doctor John now, as everyone does, but I’ll explain the reason later.

However, I suppose this story began when I received a phone call from him one evening. I don’t remember exactly when, just that it was dark outside and about nine o’clock at night. I picked up the phone and before I had time to answer, I heard John almost shouting down it.

‘Clive, I need your help. I’ve just seen a young woman dragged from a car and hauled up to a flat in the corner of my road by some heavy-handed bouncer type. I saw him leave and so I went up to the flat to have a look and found her. She’s been badly beaten up and tells me she’s seen a murder. I’ve brought her up to mine, but I need your help to get her away. Can you help me?’

‘I’ll be there in ten.’

‘Thanks.’

Sure enough, within minutes I was climbing up the stairs to his three-bedroomed apartment above Boots the Chemist, with its entrance at the rear. Not the most salubrious route to a front door but it was large and well-appointed once inside.

I rang the bell, the door being opened almost immediately.

‘Thanks for coming, Clive. I do appreciate this.’

'Don't be silly. What are friends for? So what's all this about?' I asked as John shut the door, but not before taking a furtive look around.

'Go in and sit down. I'll bring you a beer. You'll need it.' I sat down, wondering what was going to happen next when the beers arrived.

'She's in there. I put her in the bed and gave her a sedative. She'll be out till morning. Come on, I'll show you.'

I followed him into the room and stood looking at her. She had certainly been given a hiding. Her face was absolutely battered. You couldn't tell who she was at this stage.

'She won't go to the police and wouldn't allow me to take her to the hospital, so she's there until morning.'

'I thought you were going away?'

'I am,' John replied. 'Later this week if I can sort this out. I've booked the boat for Saturday afternoon, so it gives me four days.'

'What on earth has happened then?' I asked.

'Look Clive, I'll have to get the car off the jack. You get a couple more beers. I'll be two minutes.'

He left me to my own devices wondering what I should do. It really was a police matter and I knew I would have to report it. Somehow I had to get him either to agree with me, or suggest it himself. I poured two more beers and waited, thinking how on earth this sort of thing can happen and how an ordinary small town doctor could have become involved in what was obviously serious criminal activity.

He returned to the lounge some few minutes later after taking another furtive look around and then peering out of the window.

'It's got me nervous this has, Clive,' he said as he sat down to drink his beer.

'I'm also worried about her condition and her vulnerability. I don't mean she is in any danger. There's nothing broken and the facial wounds will be okay, but

what I mean is I've put myself in an unfortunate position having her here, but she was so distressed and got herself in a terrible state I thought it was for the best. Anyway, I'm glad you're here.

'I didn't have a chance to talk to her very much when I was examining her, but I can tell you what I learned is a shocking state of affairs.

'It was very difficult for her to talk, but I think she took that short cut to avoid the traffic on her way home. You know the one all the motor bikers use to avoid the lights?'

'Danvers Passage?' I asked with my new reporter's hat now firmly on. Although John was a friend, I could feel there was a story in the offing.

'Yes, it may be, but I couldn't make it out. Anyway, it was a short cut. She was travelling along when it would appear the wind blew a door open as she was slowly passing, and she tells me she saw a man being murdered.'

'Murdered!' I exclaimed.

'Yes, murdered in the open doorway. Apparently, she screamed as she saw the man fall to the floor having been shot in the head. She stopped and his attackers turned and stared at her. She saw them. Three faces she says she would never be able to forget.

'She panicked and started screaming, accelerating out of the alley. She thought she heard a bullet whizz past her, zinging against the walls of the alley, but wasn't sure. Once on the main road, she didn't stop; she simply rode and rode until she was out in the countryside and safety.'

'If this is true, I don't think they're going to let this witness get away that easily. Do you?' I interjected.

'No, I think you're right. Apparently, she stopped at the road side, crying and unable to take in that she had actually seen a man being killed. She couldn't think what to do as she tried to make sense of what had happened. She was in total shock; nothing was functioning as she sat staring into

space wondering what to do next. Then the sedative I gave her kicked in, so I decided to leave things until the morning.'

'Who is she?' I asked.

'I don't know, I haven't had chance to find out,' John replied.

'She's got to go to the police. There's no alternative,' I said, my manner insisting on it.

'Yes, I realise that. I was going to tell her first thing in the morning,' John added.

We returned to the lounge and sat consuming two or three more beers, trying to rationalise the situation, but all the time coming back to the fact that John would now also be in danger, especially if they found out that he had rescued the girl.

I remember it was now about two o'clock in the morning and we were still talking when we were disturbed by a great deal of activity outside. I went to the door, closely followed by John. You could see the blaze through the glass panel even before we opened the door. The flat in the corner where the young woman had originally been was ablaze, not just the front door; the whole floor was burning with the flames now showing through the roof.

Someone had called the Fire Brigade who were there in force and had already evacuated the nearby buildings and flats. We were that far away to be in no danger.

It was sheer inquisitiveness that we remained gawping out of the front door at the consternation when our attention was momentarily attracted by one of the fireman who shouted: 'Is this your car?'

'Which one?' John asked.

'The blue one here.'

'Yes, it is,' John replied, looking down and feeling somewhat stupid as there was only one car directly outside his flat.

'It may be sensible if you took it to the car park round the corner,' the fireman added as he made his way up the stairs to talk to us, followed by a police officer. There were a number of police officers milling about.

'I'll do it straight away,' John replied. Turning to me he remarked, 'You take them inside. They will probably want to see us. I'll go and shift the car.'

He collected the keys and ran down the stairs, whilst I invited the two men into the apartment.

'I'm Constable Smith, Trevor Smith, sir,' the policeman said, introducing himself.

I waited for the fire officer to say something but he appeared dumbstruck, leaving the Constable to do the talking.

'I'm Clive White,' I replied, breaking the silence 'I'm a reporter for the *Mail*.'

'What brings you here so quickly then?' the policeman asked.

'I'm a friend of John Brenton. It's his flat. We were just having a drink.'

'This late?' the copper asked.

'Careful. A question or comment like that is not really called for, is it? I'll let John explain when he comes back. He's the local GP. Anyway, why are there so many police about? Anything suspicious?'

'Nothing that concerns the press for the moment,' the Constable replied cockily.

We stood like a bunch of idiots, waiting in the hall for John to return, not even wanting to discuss the weather. It reminded me of Peter Sellers, the actor, when in one of his films, as Inspector Clouseau, he was trapped in a lift with three or four gangsters. No one uttered a sound until he farted. It was at that moment I wanted someone to fart just to break the silence. Then at last it was broken as John hurried back into the flat.

'There's a black Hillman Hunter over the road with a man inside and he seems to be watching the activity. I think he may be involved.'

'You were watching the activity?' the policeman asked somewhat sarcastically. 'Were you involved?'

'I thought it may assist you,' John added.

'So you're now a criminal expert as well as a doctor,' Constable Smith retorted.

'Look Officer, this will make a lovely story in the *Mail* tomorrow. Can you imagine the headline: Police Officer Belittles Doctor's Offer to Help and the Villains Escape!

'Now Constable, will you get hold of Mr Beddows, the Chief Constable and tell him what you have said and done, or alternatively ask Inspector Donald Monroe to contact me quickly. It is now urgent.'

'It's Chief Inspector and he's down there, sir,' he replied sheepishly.

'Well, go and get him and look forward to your first rollicking, which will be one of many no doubt, PC 4173 Trevor Smith.'

A few minutes later, PC 4173 was at the door again, introducing Chief Inspector Monroe.

'Hello Clive, What are you doing here?' he asked in a friendly manner.

'I've already asked him that, sir,' PC 4173 interrupted.

'Constable Smith, this man is a friend of mine. Now go down, join the others and make yourself useful,' Monroe replied, becoming impatient.

Out of interest, Monroe had been an immediate neighbour of our family for some ten years or so and we were all on good terms.

John was hopping mad at the attitude of the young PC, but was also very worried about his own status and what the villains would do with him should they find out he was involved.

'Look Inspector,' John began impatiently. 'I tried to

explain to your officer that there was a man parked outside in a black Hillman Hunter, but unfortunately he didn't want to discuss the matter further, so he will probably have gone by now. It may have been important because less than a couple of hours ago, I rescued a woman from the flat that's now burning. She had been badly beaten up and was saying she had seen a murder.'

'What!' he exclaimed. 'Why didn't you report it to the police immediately,' he asked, obviously taken aback.

'She was too ill and in shock. I had to attend to her urgently.'

John explained that he was a doctor and felt she should go to hospital, but she had become very agitated and refused to go.

'I gave her a thorough check over and felt that apart from the superficial injuries she would be okay, but I needed to give her a sedative, which I did, and she's in the bedroom asleep,' John said.

'I then immediately phoned Clive here and asked for help. He was going to call you, when we saw the fire. Come on into the lounge and I will explain. By the way the registration number of the Hillman was JW 7403.'

'Why didn't you give that to us earlier for God's sake?'

'Sorry, but your officer didn't want it. He made it quite clear I was wasting his and your time. In fact, he was somewhat rude.'

Constable Smith was on his way down the stairs when Monroe went after him. He was about halfway down when Monroe's roar must have almost knocked him off his feet as he stumbled a few steps. 'Get back up here.'

Where are the details of that Hillman Hunter the doctor told you about?'

'I didn't think it important,' the Constable replied sheepishly.

'You didn't think it important that he rescued a young

woman who had been badly beaten up?’

‘I didn’t know about that. He didn’t tell me anything about that.’

‘He wasn’t interested,’ John interjected.

‘What!’ Monroe roared. ‘Smith, is this correct?’

‘Donald, I’m afraid it is. I was here as well, but I’ll let Sherlock explain that to you,’ I added.

‘Get on to that straight away,’ he ordered through clenched teeth, almost spitting the words out and added: ‘And don’t mess this up. All points nationwide and it better be correct. Go on, I will deal with you later.’

‘Sir,’ an embarrassed Constable Smith replied, leaving hurriedly.

‘Now tell me what happened.’

John went through the same scenario as with me, detailing all the factors, leaving nothing out. He then told the inspector the young lady was in the bedroom and would be fit to be interviewed in the morning. He also said he felt it would be handy to have a policeman in attendance as he feared for the woman’s safety.

We spent several minutes speculating when suddenly, Monroe upped and left us.

‘See you later Clive... Doctor.’

It was now some ungodly hour in the morning, but we did manage a few hours’ sleep, me on the settee, John in his bed and a policeman for protection in an armchair trying to stay awake, undoubtedly aided by my soporific snoring. Monroe certainly felt the woman could be in danger, hence the half-awake policeman.

I had managed to leave the apartment on a couple of occasions during the night without the policeman knowing, simply to put flesh on the bones of what was happening.

‘At least I thought that would give you some comfort as to what I was doing,’ I said to Joe who was busily making notes.

'Quite Right, Clive. Quite right.'

There were many thoughts as to what caused the fire, the main one coming to the fore that it was started deliberately, which meant it was attempted murder, or to cover up a murder the villains thought had been carried out.

I spoke to the fire officer in charge who clearly thought it was a professional job, simply because it seemed to have been started in several places at the same time and also because of the ferocity of the fire. He assured me he would know more in a few hours when they had traced the exact medium used and therefore what caused it.

When I walked back into the apartment, the copper was still dead to the world, but soon woke up as I made myself a cup of tea.

'You won't tell the Chief Inspector about this, will you?' he asked in sheer panic.

'Oh, don't worry he's just gone. He said he will see you in the morning. You can give him your report then,' I replied, trying not to laugh.

'Oh God, no! Why didn't someone wake me?'

'When we went out you were asleep and you looked so cute we didn't want to wake you. There was a bit of a scuffle with four people arrested. It all happened so quickly, but you'll get to know about those things, of course.'

'You went out!' the Constable exclaimed, his panic becoming worse. 'I volunteered for this shift,' he added, putting his head between his hands and sighing.

'Come on, I didn't go out,' I said, beginning to laugh. 'You're all right. Don't worry, there's been no Chief Inspector or any trouble,' I continued, seeing the worry on his face.

By eight-thirty, John had checked his patient was okay, finished his breakfast, made both the sleeping policeman and me a few rounds of toast and was refreshed and ready for the fray.