

Submitted to The Scotsman Short Story Competition, winner of a writing masterclass with Iain Rankin.

Evidence and Innocence

Emma has asked me to write down everything I know about the missing book.

The National Library of Scotland is my favourite place in the world, that is why I wanted to do my placement there.

I have always liked libraries. I liked libraries before I liked books because in a library everyone has to be quiet, they write it on signs and put the signs on the wall so that everyone will know. I made my own signs and put them up in our house, but my mum made me take them down. They didn't work anyway.

Emma told me that because I enjoy writing, I should think about journalism or crime writing because people like me, who like facts and numbers and codes and sorting things into their proper order, should be good at this sort of writing. Emma says this writing is 'formulaic'. I liked this word and so I wrote it down in my own dictionary of Favourite Words. It is in-between Forbearance and Fornicate. I keep a record of the words that I like the sound of best, and I write down who said them and when. Sometimes it is only later that I find out what the word means. I kept a record of my time at the library too, I kept notes so that I would remember perfectly.

Now, as well as going to college, I come to the library two days a week and I 'shadow' Neil, this means that I watch what he does and remember it. Neil says that I don't have to remember everything that he does, but I sometimes remember things other people don't and I think this is a good thing. It will help when I am a Real Writer.

Neil works in Cataloguing, this is my favourite part of the whole library. In a library there are Collections, Catalogues and Codes; those are three of my favourite things beginning with the letter C.

When I had been coming for the library for eleven days, I noticed that there was an old lady who came to the library twice a week and would take the same seat at the same desk in the reading room. I noticed her because her behaviour is always the same, she has 'rituals', like me.

The old lady is a witch. Neil says that it is bad to say that because there are no such things as witches, and they are made up by children because they are scared. Neil says that if I told the old lady I thought she was a witch that it would hurt her feelings. Emma says some of the things I say can hurt her feelings, but that I am getting better.

I know she is a witch because I have put together Evidence. It all started six weeks ago when I asked Neil why she comes to the library but doesn't ever ask to look at any of the books.

Neil told me that the old lady is sad and that we should just be 'respectful', that she deserved her privacy. I kept asking him more things after that and I think eventually

he changed his mind because he realised that the more he told me, the less I would have to ask him.

He told me that she had come here to trace her family history, and that maybe she didn't like what she had found, because she stopped suddenly and since then, has not asked to look at any more books.

Neil showed me two books about her right here in the library! One is called 'A Modern-Day Witch-Hunt: The Trial of Lilith Stewart' and the other one is called, 'Never Seen Again – A Story of False Persecution'. On the front cover of the first one is a fabric doll with no eyes that Neil told me is called a 'poppet'. I put Poppet and Persecution into my dictionary.

The first book tells all about the legal proceedings and what was wrong with them. I made notes about one part in particular. Before her trial, a Psychical and Paranormal Researcher was shown around her house by police, although they didn't want to admit it at the time. The same man then went to visit her in jail, he wrote a report pleading with the authorities to "Never, ever let her out".

Just before close on the day I found the books, I went over to the seat where the old woman sits. I could smell cloves. I didn't know they were cloves until I went home and smelled every herb and cooking ingredient in my mum's cupboard. I went through them in alphabetical order, right after Cardamom - Cloves.

I looked up cloves on the internet and it said that they are "said to protect babies in their cribs if hung over them strung together". Emma said that you shouldn't believe everything that you read on the internet because people make things up. I don't make things up, but if I did, I wouldn't make up things about cloves.

I decided to go to her seat at the end of every night to see if there are any other clues to collect. I don't think that I will tell Neil what I'm doing though; he says that she is a library member, and that people come to libraries to study, not to be studied. I asked Neil what he thought she was studying just sitting there all day, but he did something that people do when they don't want to talk to you anymore, he 'changed the subject'.

I sat down at her table one day, in the same spot that she sits, facing the bay and with my hands under the table. Under the desk, some of the wood has been carved away. It is two circles side by side, with a jagged line going through them.

Near the end of the first book, there is a photograph of her that was taken in the days before the trial. The photograph is in black and white, but the article says that her hair was red and that the marks on her face were red too. In the photograph she has two small, round scars, one each halfway down her cheeks and a long, curved line around the front of her throat. She said that they were "birthmarks".

When I asked Emma, she said that witches are Sexist. I don't think Emma wants me to tell her about the old lady anymore.

I read the first book in my lunch hour in six days and started the second book. It says that she was put in prison, but they let her out after thirteen months and three days.

This was because other people thought that witches were sexist too and that there was not enough evidence.

The second book says that they couldn't keep her in prison because the evidence was 'circumstantial', that the case was based on Superstition and Rumours.

There were lots of rumours. Some people said that one of her ancestors was hanged as a witch in North Berwick, 313 years before she was born. Other people said that she was a Nazi, because the children who disappeared had some disabilities, and some were 'slow'. Neil said that 'slow' means that they thought slowly, not walked slowly. So they could have run away, but maybe they didn't think of it in time.

She was pretty and some people say this is why she got out. I think that sexism is complicated. I asked Emma to explain but she said that it would take too long.

The children went missing after the Second World War (1939-1945), in the years 1947 to 1952, thirteen children disappeared in Edinburgh and no one ever saw them again, no bodies were ever found. The police tried very hard to find the children, and wanted very much to prove that Lilith Stewart was guilty, but they had very few solid facts to work with, I have made a list of them:

- There was no evidence to link her to the children, except that three of them said that she had "come into their dreams"
- The children didn't know each other, or go to the same school, or live in the same part of town, they could find no links.
- A neighbour had reported that she heard screaming from Miss Stewart's flat, but when she went to check, no one was home. She couldn't remember the exact date and time.
- The police found lots of 'poppets' in Lilith Stewart's house. Thirteen of them were all in a row.

There was one piece of evidence that was stronger than the others. When they searched her house, they found a mark scratched into the wall in the tiny basement, it was two circles side by side, with a jagged line through them. The mother of one of the boys who went missing, John Baxter, said that John used to draw this everywhere he went and that she knew this meant he had been in that basement. But because she couldn't produce any more Evidence of this, the case was never re-tried.

I think that this happened because the police did not collect the evidence properly, they don't understand how to be careful and look at everything in order. If I had been there, then I would have collected everything and put it in proper order and looked after it. Just like Neil does at the library.

I told Neil that Emma says everyone is on a Spectrum (between Speculate and Spectre), and that I think he is nearer to me on the spectrum than other people. This made Neil laugh, but I don't think he was laughing at me, I think he thought I made a joke.

I don't really make jokes, sometimes I laugh at them, but I don't always find them funny. Emma says this is because I have a problem understanding Irony and Metaphor.

I like the science section of the library, where there aren't any metaphors. This is where I first saw the missing book, 'Communication Skills in Mentally Deficient Children' the book was written by a Dr Albert Menzies in 1944.

I asked Neil if I could read the book, because I know that Mentally Deficient is one of the old names for some people on the Spectrum like me. Neil told me that this was an old-fashioned book and that the man who wrote it was probably very stupid.

In the book is the final clue, the missing piece of evidence. Dr Menzies did studies on children in Edinburgh between 1937 and 1943, he didn't use their real names, they were just Child A, Child B and so on in alphabetical order. But Child D was John Baxter. There is an illustration of a sign that Child D would draw again and again - two circles, side by side, with a jagged line through them.

I left the book out, where we keep them reserved for Readers Requests, so that I could read more the next day and show it to Neil. But when I came in in the morning, it was gone.

I waited and waited all that day, but the old lady didn't come in to take her seat. I knew she wouldn't.

Neil says that she has been persecuted enough and that I should know better, but all I have done is collect the evidence together.

When I walked home last night, I took the same route that I always take but when I went down the lane near Tesco, I could smell cloves.

This is all I know about the missing book.