

## Why?

**A DI Crosier Mystery  
by Edwin Tipple  
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**6th October 1952**

**Bridge of Weir, Scotland.**

Her thin reflection was no barrier. Beyond it and the swirling, early-morning mist, she sensed all the actors would be waiting. She hoped and prayed this performance would, at last, allow them to catch the train, safely. Now she could see them, beckoning, ready to start and ... *once more she was amongst them ... on the railway station, at Harrow.*

*Mary — and her brat-of-a-daughter Phyllis — were there to wave them all off, but Lorna knew they were probably wasting their time: their train had never arrived before, so why should it this time?*

*She sat with Mary, their brother Robert and his daughter Emily. Daddy had stopped to buy some newspapers — he'd be along soon.*

*Fog, not thick, more ... secretive: one moment lurking by the signal box, the next gone, only to return. Lorna hated it.*

*Scene One always opened with the enamelled London Underground map vibrating against the wooden wall as the freight train passed through, clanking its noisy passage north. It shook the platform violently — was a wagon about to come off the track and crash into them? Smoke cloaked its grey form, as if embarrassed for its presence, until it shrank and vanished ... spirited away by the mist. The red light on the guard's van grew dim, till it too was gone.*

*Lorna stared at the swirling mist, mesmerised until the clanking sound faded away, leaving the station bereft of trains. She shivered and tightened the scarf around her neck. Despite lots of people nearby, she felt alone, and checked the patch of fog once more. Their turn to disappear into it would soon come.*

*An almost unintelligible announcement, as if spoken by machine, echoed around the station to herald the arrival of a commuter train bound for London. Across the tracks, an army of office workers, soldiers, railway people and shop assistants mustered along the platform's edge ready for their daily scramble. Just as they'd rehearsed, they stood well away from the stone-faced bowler-hatted bankers and managers, each it seemed, armed with an umbrella to keep the riff-raff at bay.*

*She felt a bit better, watching this scene of ... normality?: the same script, played out by the same actors, performed at the same time, on the same stage every weekday. She was determined never to live like that — good-heavens no!*

*Smoke from the locomotive wafted over them as it slowly came across the points. Even before stopping on the fast line, boarding had already begun. Faces of anonymous performers appeared framed in tall, narrow windows, as their bodies began to fill vacant seats. Some immediately hid behind newspapers, as if steeping themselves in Queen Elizabeth's Coronation plans*

*for the coming year would extend them royal protection — it would be interesting to see if they survived. Most stared at her as if seeking her confirmation that the next scene could begin. She saw they were ready, and wondered if they knew today would mark their last performance?*

*Emily asked Robert if her granddad would arrive in time.*

*Robert pointed to him on the footbridge.*

*As one, the faces in the windows followed the direction of his finger.*

*Emily waved, relieved.*

*Phyllis turned away in a huff, the peeling paint on the seat-back far more interesting.*

*Lorna hoped daddy had spotted them but she couldn't be sure; something obscured his face. It was vital he remembered to stay put.*

*Carriage doors banged shut, guards blew whistles and the engine tooted a friendly response.*

*Angrily, bells dinged in the signal box, unnerving Lorna. They seemed to go on forever, announcing for some players their final call.*

*On cue, the mist, dense and sinister, slithered back into position.*

*Lorna, trapped in the nightmare once more, began to shake. Robert grabbed her hand, squeezing it tight. She knew, something terrible was about to happen right in front of them. But what? She'd been here before but now her brain must be blanking-out a hideous memory.*

*Emily must have remembered, though. She was stamping her feet up and down on the platform, and trying to shout the warning ... but her message ... it wouldn't come.*

*Stupid faces, framed in the carriage windows, seemed amused by her.*

*She began moaning, the words still jammed in her throat. She waved her arm furiously towards the fog.*

*Now the carriage-faces followed Emily's finger. Everyone on the platform turned to see the fog rapidly changing shape, clouds of smoke and steam thrusting above it. Deep inside, an ominous form was growing.*

*Lorna looked back at the performers. One youth leaned over to his mate. They hadn't attended the rehearsal and would pay the price. Now they were laughing at Emily ... until they heard those dreadful sounds.*

*First, the detonators placed on the track by the signalman, to warn drivers of danger, exploded with ear-piercing cracks.*

*Next the continuous whistle of the Perth sleeping-car express, screaming loud its belated warning for people to get clear.*

*A few of those about to board the London train stopped to look towards the sound. Selfish ones pushed past, eager to get a seat in which to die. Others knew they must escape and turned to make a frantic dash for safety. Some just stood watching the express, shot from the fog at fifty miles-an-hour, coming straight for them.*

*Framed-faces were looking worried, some showed signs of panic. Several seemed to be questioning Lorna: this isn't normal, what's happening? But what might she tell them? Did they still not know what to do? Why hadn't they learned their parts properly? Help was pointless now; they were out of time.*

*A man had remembered his part, though, lowered a window then leaned out to look back along the track. Had he seen his cue to leave the carriage? — catherine-wheels of red sparks flying from every squealing brake of the express. He was supposed warn others, get them out. But he just stayed, leaning from the compartment. He'd be chopped in two if he didn't wake-up and move, now.*

*In the cab, the engine driver was fighting to bring his train to a halt in time; the vacuum brake he'd applied hard; the reversing gear he wound too late to be effective — the young fireman hung on to the whistle as urine ran down his legs.*

*Lorna knew his struggle was in vain, that he and his mate had but few seconds to live.*

*'It's not going to stop,' shouted Robert. 'Get back.' He began moving people away from the tracks. They stood for a second, horrified, before dashing*

*towards the underground line; all except Emily.*

*Lorna yelled at her to run, but the engine screamed louder. The child sat transfixed, not daring to take her eyes off the unfolding disaster.*

*Across the track, pairs of eyes trapped within rows of glass coffins, the lids pressing their faces flat, appealed once more to Lorna ... what should they do? As Lorna wasn't helping, they vowed to haunt her in the coming nights, and stared at her through decaying eyes.*

*Lorna ran to Emily as the Perth express ploughed into the back of the standing Euston train. The thunderous sound of the crash hurt her stomach and ears. The engine splintered the rear wooden coaches of the local into matchsticks. Performers lost protection. They, and lethal shards of glass debris, flew wide.*

*New performers were rapidly slid into view, cannoning into one another, inside the slowing express carriages. Their luggage tumbled from racks onto heads. An elderly couple shot forwards the full length of a corridor, hands flailing uselessly, trying to grab hold of each other or something solid. They were hurled into the vestibule wall then sank to the floor.*

*A door burst open. A stunt-man, still clutching his briefcase, fell from it. He somersaulted along the track. His performance was excellent but, as his case burst open, he misjudged his roll and swerved under the carriage wheels. His pin-striped legs, still wearing their black shoes, lay motionless. Papers flew about as if searching for him, his body nowhere to be seen — another image to be dredged up in Lorna's nightmares.*

*The express engine hauled several coaches over what remained of the local train. They collapsed onto the actors trapped inside. The locomotive completed its part by thundering onto one side to straddle the northbound fast-line ... the track Lorna's train would be on.*

*At last, the remaining carriages of the express stopped. Splintered wood and glass came to rest, and for a moment, everything fell silent.*

*Emily was shaking.*

*Lorna ran to sit with her.*

*The child started coughing, as she breathed the dust hanging in the air. All colour had drained from Emily's face. But she wasn't hurt. Not yet.*

*Screams and cries for help followed from those not killed but unjustly injured, their bodies partly crushed or suffering the loss of a limb or two, savagely ripped away.*

*'Stay here,' Robert shouted. 'I'm going to dad, see he's all right.' He dashed back towards the steps that led up to the footbridge. He saw him through the dirty windows and stopped short of the staircase to frantically wave, trying to show him they were all right. But daddy didn't seem to notice: his face was still obscured by something.*

*Mary went to Robert's side and started to wave. Robert left her at the steps while he dashed up.*

*Lorna too, was relieved they had survived the terrible first act and were still alive.*

*The last scene, they all thought, should open with the hunt for survivors. But there was to be no interval, no chance to catch their breath: within seconds another, even more frightening act had begun; opening with a duet of rising screams of a very recent, terrifying kind. This time from a northbound express, rushing with suicidal haste to visit a greater horror upon them.*

*A Liverpool and Manchester train, pulled by two engines, smashed into the Perth locomotive which lay in its path. The first engine jumped the pile of wreckage and punched a gaping hole in the footbridge, cutting it in two, and killing Robert before he reached his father.*

*Mary stood screaming, seeing her brother's body tumble with the flying debris. She realised too late, she had to outrun the locomotives descending towards her.*

*They crashed with an almighty explosion onto the platform. Instantly transformed into colossal bulldozers, they slid to easily demolish everything in*

*their path; petrified passengers were flattened; jets of high-pressure steam shot from broken safety valves, to scald anyone who didn't move away. The roar of twisting, shearing metal, the only sound.*

*Lorna stood ready to run but Emily remained frozen to the bench. She'd forgotten her part. Lorna screamed again, prompting her to get up, tugging at her coat until she eventually ran with her. Phyllis had almost reached the platform's ramp and could watch the act play-out from a safe distance. But now Lorna and her niece had to bolt for their lives.*

*Lorna looked back over her shoulder, amazed to see her sister running towards the tube lines, intending to take cover by jumping over the platform edge — but these tracks are electrified! Mary stopped for an instant; a fatal mistake. Perhaps next time, the dream would allow her to live, but this time the second engine had her once more.*

*The first was coming for Lorna and Emily. Desperately they ran, trying to reach the end of the platform. Emily slowed — would she never learn? — and, as Lorna lost her grip on her hand, she turned to look back hoping Emily hadn't seen her mother die.*

*The monstrous locomotive was gaining on Emily.*

*The seat on which they'd been sitting less than a minute before had disappeared.*

*Luggage piled high, tumbled from a sack-truck into Emily's path. She jumped, caught her foot on a suitcase and fell.*

*Lorna screamed at her to get up and run, but the engine flipped a cast iron lamppost out of the platform and hurled it, like a huge truncheon, across Emily's head as she tried to stand.*

*Lorna's legs were jelly once more. She could go no further and hoped her life would be crushed from her. Through some unfair miracle, the engine veered onto the electrified lines and ... she saw her solid reflection in the glass, lips moving slowly, whispering it's over now, it's history, let them go. Her legs buckled, she sat heavily on the bed and closed her eyes, wishing they'd never*

attended Vincent's funeral.

Sylt — the name, rarely spoken — always sounded evil to her. Since her sister's marriage to Vincent, even addressing a letter or a greetings-card to Mary had been difficult enough, but not anymore. Now, no letters or cards were sent to Mary — what would be the point? Come Thursday she, her brother and niece, would be seven long-years dead.

Surviving relatives, contrary to Lorna's opinion, refused to accept their family's destruction began when her sister married into the mob. Nor did they anticipate then three would be killed together. A few years hence, there would be no argument.

Vincent and Lance Sylt, villains from the East End of London four-hundred miles south, had destroyed Lorna's family. Vincent died just a month before Mary, and his death led to her relatives' too. Technically, Vincent wasn't to blame, though Lorna doggedly refused to see it any other way. If Vincent had lived, she argued, they would all be alive today. But die he did — such is the way of Fate.

Just as Vincent caused their deaths, his dim-witted brother Lance caused those of his two *associates* in the same disaster. Not that Lorna knew, or would have cared less if she had, which just left Lance to gore his way through the rest of his repulsive life. A life that, by rights, should die in prison — or better still, Lorna wished, end soon like his brother's.

Lorna, loyal to her sister, went to Vincent's funeral; for Mary's sake of course — not his. As the coffin was lowered to consign Sylt a little closer to the devil, a dry-eyed Mary turned to Lorna and announced in a stage-whisper how she felt about her dead husband and his cronies.

'A loving father they thought. I couldn't believe it, a complete stranger actually said so in his, so-called, eulogy! But I know the real truth: the truth that Vincent was vicious, verbally ... and physically. Oh yes, had been for years, but not when or where it would show.'



Lorna put her arm around her sister, gave her a hug, Mary winced: a cracked rib, Vincent's final souvenir.

'If only I'd had the nerve, I'd have walked straight up to that bloody-pulpit and turned to face the ignorant scum. While the liar was speaking in glowing tones about Vincent, I'd have taken off my scarf, coat and cardigan. I'd drop my slip off my shoulders, remove my bra and reveal to the mob my bandaged chest and bruised breast.

'Admittedly,' said Mary, with a mischievous look in her eye, 'it isn't quite as colourful as the church windows, but nevertheless, it sports several tints of blue, black and yellow, in a range of shades stained-glass will never match.'

Lorna often recalled that moment; Mary sounding— though she hardly touched a drop — a little tipsy; and understood too the release, so long overdue. And sometimes she remembered, it was the last time they'd laughed together.

'I'd shout at the top of my voice,' Mary continued, 'tell the ignorant congregation what a brutal coward he'd been. But what would be the point? Like father like son. Yes, that was Vincent all right ... his sodding-brother still is!'

The sodding-brother, and the scum within earshot, looked as if they were ready to throw Mary into the grave. Unusual, Lorna thought, for them to recognise unseemly behaviour. So what; their contact with the Sylt mob, she felt sure, would cease as soon as they left the churchyard.

Later, Mary had tried to recall the good times ... easy enough: once married, there were none. Mary, My Queen of Scots he called her before they wed, fascinated by her accent. Of late the words were used to insult, undermine, or worse, signal his demand for sex.

Lorna's family spent a few days with Mary before they departed for Scotland. But for Lorna and her daddy, Vincent's funeral wasn't to be their last. Many more would have to be arranged ... over one hundred in fact. And three, would be for Lorna's relatives.

This morning, while tidying daddy's bedroom, Lorna found several newspaper cuttings he'd saved about the tragedy. Over the years she'd read her own collection countless times, each time, searching the words and pictures for the smallest detail in the hope they might give up their terrible secret: the reason why. Why had it happened?

Time to clear away the useless papers, she thought, and stuff them back into their makeshift-folder. It was then she found something new, something to give her hope. An article she didn't recognise repeated many facts already imprinted on her brain, but habit made her search its every word.

In addition to the main crash investigation in London, it revealed there was also one at Crewe. The railway detective in charge at the time, it told her, was one Inspector Crosier.

And Crewe, it occurred to her, was just over half way back to London.