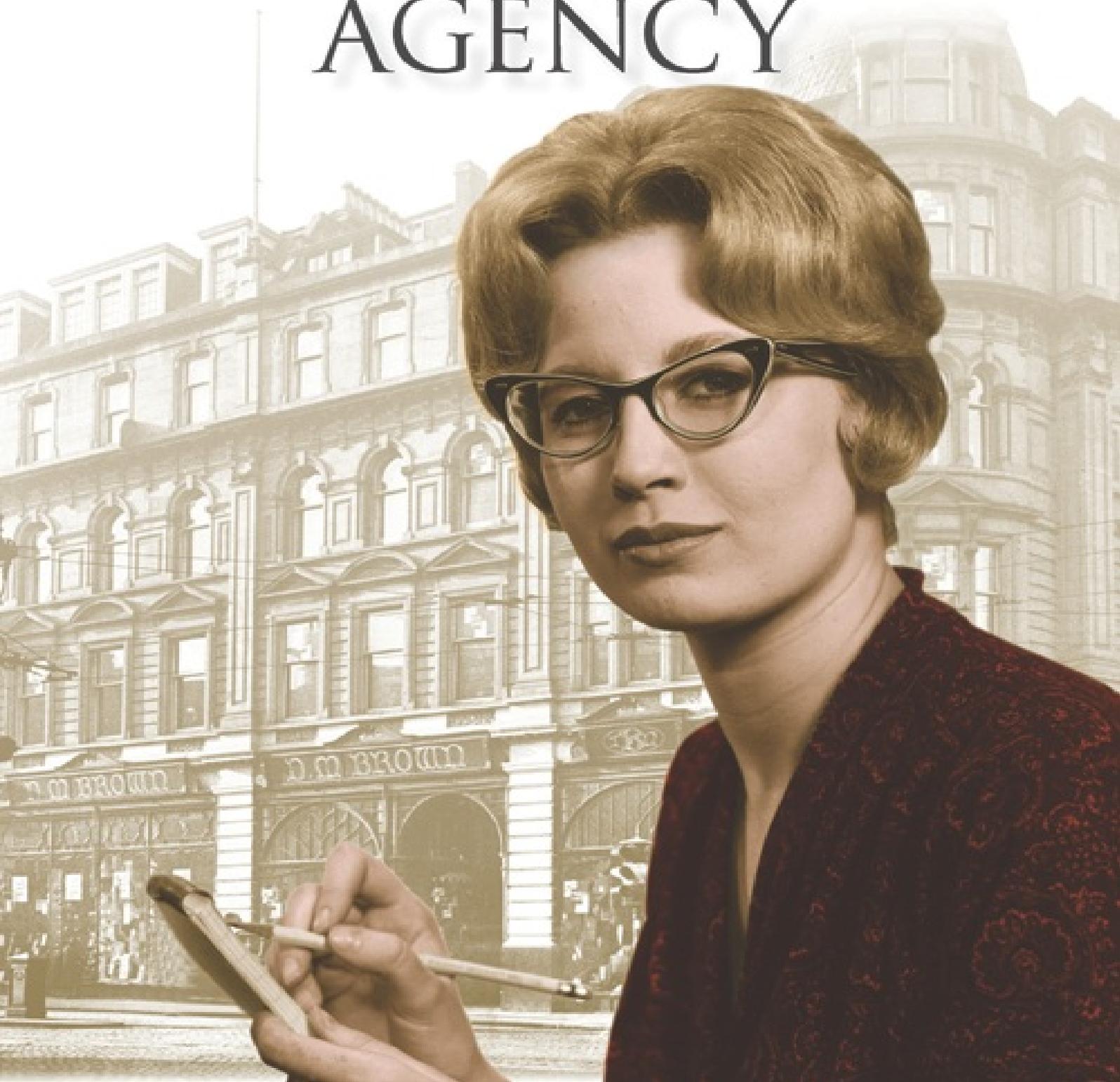


From the bestselling author of *Voices in the Street*

MAUREEN REYNOLDS

MCQUEEN'S AGENCY



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McQUEEN'S
AGENCY

BLACK & WHITE PUBLISHING

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Voices in the Street

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Teatime Tales from Dundee

For Molly:
a Mum who loved her mystery stories

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PROLOGUE

The gunfire was getting closer. A few minutes earlier, Colin had awoken to the sharp sound of a shell exploding and could hear the sporadic chatter of machine guns. He had no idea of the time. His watch said ten o'clock but whether it was morning or night he didn't know. The window was boarded up with planks of wood and the room was dim with just a single light bulb hanging from the high ceiling.

He thought the room had been a child's bedroom in a previous life because of the crayon marks on the walls, but now it was a dingy square box with a few items of furniture and a single iron-framed bed with a grubby pink candlewick cover. Everything had a dusty and neglected look about it, as if the former occupant had moved out years before.

He moved over to the window and tried again to cut away at the wood with a small penknife but the wood was too thick and the knife barely scratched the surface. Another shell whizzed by and his heart suddenly filled with hope. He had no idea why he was being held prisoner but surely he would be released from this locked room soon.

He moved over to the tiny bathroom with its rust-stained toilet and small washbasin and splashed water on his face. He hadn't shaved in days.

Still, he had one secret his captors knew nothing about and he smiled to himself at the thought of it. Something he had found.

He lay down on the bed and wondered if it was time for a meal. His stomach certainly thought so. He was thankful that his captors hadn't starved him and although the food was stodgy and the bread dry it was filling and the enamel mug of tea was hot and sugary, just the way he liked it.

Another shell exploded and the walls shook with the blast, Colin reckoned they must be within a mile of the house. Maybe the next shell would blow the window in and he could escape.

He heard the step on the stairs and the old door creaked open. He was going to ask about the gunfire but his captor didn't carry a tray. Instead the figure was holding a pistol.

The dim light shone on the cold grey steel and Colin, taken aback, gazed open mouthed before realising his fate.

1

The entire city was in a festive mood. Banners and flags flew from every building and there was an air of joyful anticipation.

Molly McQueen was no exception. It was June 1953, and the coronation of the young Queen Elizabeth was tomorrow.

It was a new start for the country; a time of renewed hope after the restrictions of war and Molly was experiencing her own new beginnings. She gazed at the shop with pride. It wasn't the largest business in the busy Wellgate ... but it was hers.

The small shop was situated on the corner of the Wellgate and Baltic Street, smartened up with a coat of glossy brown paint, the sign painted in gold lettering. McQueens Agency.

The sign was the reason she was standing impatiently on the pavement. She was scanning the busy street for the young sign writer who had promised to call back first thing this morning.

Although the war had been over for eight years there were still signs of wartime ration restrictions in the clothes of people who hurried past in their thick serviceable woollen coats although a few young girls sauntered past in summer dresses that were unsuitable for the cool unseasonable weather with its threat of rain.

Molly sighed and wished the young painter would hurry up. She had two women to interview this morning and she was keen to have her agency up and running.

She gazed at the sign, still uncertain about the name. She had toyed with dozens of names, spending hours trying to compose a catchy name, until she realised her own surname was ideal. After all the new monarch was a queen and Molly was a McQueen.

Suddenly she spotted Ronnie making his way through the crowds of pedestrians, weaving his way towards her in his paint-streaked overalls that hung from his thin body like discarded skin. A victim of severe acne, his face was a mass of red spots but he was a cheerful lad with a lovely smile.

'Morning, Miss McQueen,' he said. 'The boss said you wanted to see me.'

'Yes I did, Ronnie.' Molly gazed up at the sign. 'You left out the apostrophe in McQueen's.'

Ronnie also gazed at his handiwork. 'An apostrophe?'

'Yes,' Molly was trying hard to be patient and polite. 'It should read McQueen's with an apostrophe between the n and the s. It's only a small matter, but it is a secretarial agency and it wouldn't look good if I couldn't spell my shop title correctly, would it?'

Ronnie shook his head. 'Right then, Miss McQueen. I'll just go and get my ladder and paint pot and be back in a jiffy.'

Molly sighed. Why hadn't he brought his paint pot and ladder with him?

However, this small nuisance disappeared when she saw the woman and girl approach the shop. This must be Mary Watt, and the older woman was obviously her

mother. She had answered the advert in the *Courier* for an office receptionist.

Molly ushered them into the shop, which still had the smell of fresh paint. The reception area, painted in a pale blue was furnished with a desk with a black Imperial typewriter, a telephone, a large diary and three comfortable chairs for the clients. A small table held a collection of magazines.

Molly still got a small thrill of pride at her new venture. She hoped it wasn't too noticeable as she sat behind the desk while the woman and girl sat on the chairs.

She glanced keenly at Mary Watt. The girl was fifteen years old and soon to leave school. Dressed in a navy gabardine coat, white ankle socks and black sensible school shoes, with her fair hair in two plaits tied with white ribbons, she didn't look any older than twelve.

'You know I'm looking for a young receptionist, Miss Watt. Someone to be behind this desk and deal with the telephone and take bookings. I need someone who can take messages correctly and has a pleasant manner, both here in the shop and on the telephone.'

Mary Watt nodded eagerly. 'I've done a commercial course at Rockwell School and my marks were very good in shorthand, typing and bookkeeping.'

Mrs Watt leaned forward and said. 'Mary will get her School Leaving Certificate in three weeks' time and she's also got the prize for commercial subjects.'

Molly smiled at the girl but addressed Mrs Watt. 'At the moment the job will be in the office, but when Miss Watt is a bit older she can join the agency staff if she wants to. The wage is twenty-five shillings a week but if the agency becomes successful then there will be a wage increase.' Molly turned to Mary. 'Can you sit here and pick up the telephone?'

Molly handed her a business card. 'When you answer the telephone this is what you say. "McQueen's Agency, 3435." If the caller wants to make a booking you must write all the details in the diary and make sure the name, telephone number and address are written clearly, plus the dates the agent is required to work.'

Mary sat at the desk. Molly was surprised at her manner. She may have looked like a twelve-year-old child but her voice was strong and clear.

There was just one final thing. 'Should you have two bookings for the same date and time, you must consult the diary and see if we have any spare agents. If in doubt just ask me. Now that is all I think except to say that the job is yours if you want it, but maybe you want to talk it over with your parents and let me know soon.'

Mary and her mother exchanged a look then Mary nodded. 'I'd love to work here but I can't start till the end of the month.'

'Yes, I know and that will be fine. I can stay in the office myself or get a friend to stand in till then.'

What Molly didn't say was that the diary was as pristine as the day she had bought it and no bookings had come in yet. It was early days.

Half an hour later the second applicant arrived.

She was tiny. Molly guessed she was an inch less than five feet but her height was raised by her high-heeled shoes. Edna McGill was dressed smartly in a navy blue suit and her dark hair was neatly cut. She wore little make-up apart from pale pink lipstick. So far so good.

The woman introduced herself. 'I have a ten thirty appointment.'

Molly shook hands with the woman.

‘Mrs McGill, what I’m looking for is someone in the office to supplement a small list of names I already have. I’m hoping to supply secretarial staff to businesses that find themselves short of staff. This means you would have to go anywhere when needed and there may be times when I won’t have any work for you.’ She hurried on when she saw a flicker of worry cross the woman’s face. ‘Still, I have high hopes that when the agency gets off the ground that there will be loads of work.’

Edna McGill was candid and down to earth. ‘I do need the work. As I explained in my letter, I have a five-year-old son and agency work will suit me fine.’

Molly knew all this. ‘Who will look after your son if we have to call you out with short notice?’

‘I live with my mother and she will care for Billy when I’m working.’ She made no mention of a husband, but that didn’t bother Molly. People’s private lives were just that, private. As long as the work was done to a high standard that was all that mattered.

Edna handed over her references, which were excellent. ‘I worked in Smith & Horner’s office from leaving school in 1940 until Billy was born and although I was asked back, I can’t work full-time. That’s why I answered your advert. I thought agency work would maybe be a bit more flexible.’

Molly glanced at the references once more. She knew that Edna was twenty-seven years old, two years younger than herself. Her address was Paradise Road which was close to the Wellgate. Another plus in Edna’s favour.

‘The problem is this, Mrs McGill. If you are keen to start work right away then I can’t guarantee this as I have just opened for business. I’ve placed adverts in the *Courier* and *Evening Telegraph*, plus I’ve mailed out business cards to quite a few large companies, but until I hear from them, my diary is empty. I can employ you on a month’s trial with pay and see how it goes, but if you would rather look elsewhere for a job then I understand.’

Edna smiled and Molly suddenly realised she wanted this tiny woman to work in her agency. She held her breath.

‘You’ve been very honest with me, Miss McQueen and I would love to be on your books if you think I’m suitable.’

Molly nodded and stood up. ‘If you come in every morning at eight thirty I’ll let you know what work is available and, as I said, it will be full pay for a month. Now let me show you around.’

At the back of the reception office was a tiny back shop with a staircase leading up to a small apartment with two rooms, a tiny kitchen and toilet and washbasin. ‘I’m hoping to live here later but at the moment this will be a staff room,’ Molly explained.

Along with Mary and Edna, she had another six names on her register; six friends who were willing to do a few hours work when necessary.

Molly watched as Edna walked away towards Dudhope Street, marvelling how well she walked in her high heels.

Ronnie reappeared at twelve o’clock with his ladder and paint pot. It took a few minutes to paint in the apostrophe in gold paint.

Molly gazed with pride at the sign. McQueen’s Agency was ready for business but was business ready for McQueen’s Agency?

2

Molly walked through the streets bright with flags, bunting and banners, which made a bright splash of colour against the grey sky. Lots of activities were planned for the next day but Molly didn't think she would see any of them. A fine drizzle soaked her hair and face and seeped through the fabric of her coat, making her blouse and skirt cold and damp. It was going to be an uncomfortable journey home.

Fortunately, when she reached Craig Pier, the ferry was just docking and she ran to catch it. The 'Fifie', as it was better known, was quiet at this time of the evening, with only three cars and one lorry making their way slowly up the ramp.

She lived with her parents in Newport and the ferry journey each day was a bit of a bind, but there was nothing she could do until she saved enough money to renovate the rooms above the shop. As she huddled on a seat on the lower deck, she thought of the Coronation the following day. According to the newspapers, London was full to bursting with people pouring in to witness the occasion, from foreign royalty and dignitaries to journalists and cameramen from the television; the new invention that had captured the interest of the nation. People were camping out overnight on the streets and, judging by the weather, they were in for a cold, wet night.

She was glad when the ferry docked and she hurried up the road to the warmth of the house. In spite of it being June, her mother had put the lights on.

The agency was worrying her. It had been open for a week but so far no work had materialised. Then there was her parents' 'holiday'. This was to be Archie and Nancy McQueen's last night at home for the next six months.

Her mother's voice called out from the kitchen as she hung her wet coat up on the back door hook. 'The tea is almost ready. It's macaroni cheese.'

Her father rose from his chair by the fire, putting his paper down and taking his off his glasses. 'Well, how did your day go, Molly?' he asked.

Molly didn't answer right away. She didn't want to worry her parents on the eve of their longed for holiday. 'I'm putting another advert in the papers and I've got another list of businesses. I'm planning to post off my cards tomorrow.'

'I wish you were coming with us to Australia to see your sister,' said her mother, spooning large portions of hot food onto plates. 'After all, this is her first baby and surely you want to be there when it's born.'

'I'm not long come back from Australia, Mum. I've only been back nine months and I was at Nell's wedding. Nell has a new husband and will be a new mother in a couple of months so she has her own life now, which doesn't include me.'

This seemed to satisfy them both because the conversation turned to the imminent Coronation.

'Isn't it lovely to have a young queen on the throne? Queen Elizabeth the second.'

'Actually she's Queen Elizabeth the first in Scotland,' said Archie.

Nancy gave him an exasperated look. 'Oh stop being political, Archie. You sound like some of those Republicans who are going on and on about her title. She's a brand

new Queen and hopefully the country will forget all about the war and the rationing and let us all have a good life again.’

Molly smiled. Her mother had a good life. Archie had been a clerk in the offices at Craig Pier, from which passengers and motor vehicles bought their tickets for the paddle steamers that crossed the River Tay every day. His retirement two months ago had been a bittersweet moment for him. He loved his job and after they moved house a year ago, from Strathmartine Road to Newport, he missed the daily crossing of the river.

This long trip to the other side of the world was to celebrate his retirement. They would have a long cruise out, arrive in time for the birth of their grandchild, and spend time with Nell and Terry in sunny Queensland before sailing back again to a Scottish winter.

Later, in her bedroom, Molly took out the photographs from an old handbag and spread them on the bedcover. It was as if the hot sunshine shone out from them and Molly recalled the two years she had spent with Nell in Australia.

How exciting it had been in the beginning, going out as emigrants on the Government’s £10 scheme, the luxury of the outward boat journey with food that they hadn’t seen since childhood and all the fun on board ship.

In Sydney they had both worked as secretaries and shared a flat together. They had made loads of new friends, spent long hours on the beach and generally revelled in the warmth of this new country.

She had met Tom on the boat. He was another emigrant leaving Dundee, hoping for a new and better life. He was a bit older than Molly and Nell and his parents had died.

They had spent lots of time together on the journey. Then in Sydney, where he quickly found a job as an electrician with a large company, their friendship had blossomed into something more serious.

Then it had all gone wrong.

Nell had answered an advert for an office worker on a remote sheep farm in Queensland, met Terry and got married.

Molly had travelled up to the farm for the wedding. She smiled when she recalled the wedding clothes. Nell was dressed in faded jeans and a white halter-neck top, while she had worn a thin seersucker dress with pastel-coloured stripes, both of them wearing flat strappy sandals. She remembered how hot the sun had been and how vast the fields were. Under the wide, blue sky they seemed to stretch to the very ends of the earth.

How happy she had been that day. She vowed then that she would spend her entire life in that country and that had been her intention until arriving back in the city. A letter was waiting for her; a simple white envelope that held no warning of its contents.

Tom was dead.

He had been a passenger in a van involved in a road traffic accident. The driver, a work colleague, had escaped unharmed. Tom had often told her what a reckless driver his colleague was. Always driving too fast and taking unnecessary chances. He had been told off by the boss of the firm but he never heeded any warnings and now this accident had happened and Tom had paid the price with his life while the driver had

escaped unharmed and had even been acquitted of the charge. She couldn't stop thinking if only Tom had been with someone else in another vehicle or if the boss of the firm had been more strict with this reckless driver then Tom would still be alive. Her days were filled with angry thoughts of 'If only'.

She felt ashamed now but at the time she had wished it had been the driver who died, a thought that sent her almost crazy, raging at the four walls in the flat and crying non-stop. Nell had come to see her but the joy and pleasure had all disappeared to be replaced by a deep sadness and rage.

She had carried on working for a few more months, going out and coming in but never ever leaving the flat except for work. Then she booked her passage home, bringing with her the money she had saved; the money she now hoped would finance the agency.

The trip home had been a terrible time for her. It was a complete contrast to the journey out. She stayed in the cabin for most of the day, only venturing out at night for an evening meal. Then she would walk the decks for hours until tiredness drove her to bed.

To start with some of the cabin crew had asked her if everything was all right but after the first week they stopped, apart from one kind steward who brought her meals to the cabin and checked on her periodically. No doubt they thought she was some kind of crazy woman.

She quickly gathered all the photographs and stuffed them back in the handbag. It was a pity that memories couldn't be stuffed away like that, pushed into some dark handbag and put away in the wardrobe.

It was going to be a busy day tomorrow. She would drive the family Anglia to Wormit station where her parents would catch a train on the first step of their journey to Southampton, and the ship *The Golden Empress*. Then over to the agency where hopefully there would be clients all eager for her services.

In spite of her sad memories, she slept quite well and Coronation day dawned grey, misty and drizzly.

Her mother was ready to leave. She gazed out the window at the weather.

'What a shame the sun's not shining for the Queen.' She turned to Molly. 'Now you will be all right on your own, Molly?' Her voice sounded concerned. 'This new venture is a worry to us but if it doesn't work you will go back to Woolworths, won't you?'

Molly had worked in the department store ever since arriving home. She had loved the work and the company of the other girls but had set her heart on being her own boss. Molly, who didn't want to contemplate failure, nodded.

'Of course I will, Mum. Don't worry about me.'

'If you need any help just ask Marigold next door. She said she would keep an eye on you.' Her mother stopped to load the suitcases into the car. 'And you'll look after Sabby?'

Sabby was the large tabby cat. Her father, with his wicked sense of humour had named her after one of his favourite films, *Sabu, The Elephant Boy* but because the cat was a she, the name had been changed to Sabby.

Later, she stood on the station platform and waved her parents away until the train was half way across the Tay Bridge before driving the Anglia back to the garage.

Later, in the office, she was despondent that no enquiries had come in. Edna appeared and they sat down with a cup of tea but no clients.

Edna kept looking at the door every time someone passed by. If she could have drawn people in by the intensity of her stare then the office would have been mobbed. However no one even gave a passing glance to the shop, let alone crossed the threshold.

Later Edna's mother and son appeared and she introduced them. Billy looked like his mother. He had the same dark hair and brown eyes.

'I'm taking Billy into the town to see the celebrations,' said Edna's mum, Irene.

Molly said. 'There doesn't seem to be anyone wanting our services today Edna so go off and spend the day with your family. Maybe some work will come in tomorrow.'

3

Molly was tidying up the reception area when the bell above the door made a small musical sound. At first she thought Edna had come back for something which made the woman's appearance quite startling.

She looked like a film star, dressed in an expensive looking grey suit with matching black shoes, handbag and a small black hat perched on her blonde wavy hair. She was beautiful. The only thing to mar the perfection was the woman's right arm, which was in a sling. Molly saw the white bandage, just visible at her wrist.

The stranger hesitated in the doorway. Molly went over and introduced herself.

'Good morning, I'm Molly McQueen, owner of the agency. Can I help you?'

She felt quite dowdy next to this exquisite creature.

The woman seemed to make up her mind. 'My name is Mrs Lena Lamont and I'm looking for a temporary secretary for a few weeks,' she gestured towards her arm, 'until I get this plaster off. My husband, brother and I run a family antique business and I do all the paperwork, but since my accident I haven't been able to keep up with it and it's starting to pile up. It's mostly typing, filing and taking down letters. I saw your advert in the paper.'

Molly made a great show of looking at the empty diary. 'Yes, that can be arranged, Mrs Lamont. When do you want her to start?'

'Oh, as soon as possible. Perhaps next Monday.'

Molly could hardly believe her luck. This job would keep Edna employed for a while. She got all the relevant paperwork out of the desk and wrote down the details.

'We work from home most of the time and my address is Cliff Top House. It's just a few miles from Newport-on-Tay.'

Molly gave her a sharp glance, 'Can you give me the directions to the house, please?'

'Of course. It's about five miles from Newport, on the St Andrews Road.'

Molly wrote all this information down and asked, 'What time would you like our secretary to work?'

Mrs Lamont gave this a bit of thought. 'Perhaps ten o'clock in the morning till three o'clock. If we need any more I can always arrange it with her in advance. I may need help on a Saturday but not on a Sunday.'

Molly offered her client a cup of tea but she declined. 'My husband will be picking me up. We came over on the ferry. We have a shop in the Nethergate, Lamont Antiques, and I like to drop in every now and then. We also wanted to see some of the events that are planned for the Coronation celebrations but the town is so busy we might give it a miss.'

After she left, Molly kept a lookout for Edna to give her the good news and also to give her the times of the ferry and the bus that regularly ran from Newport to St Andrews.

According to Lena Lamont, the bus stop was a few hundred yards from Cliff Top

House.

By four o'clock, there was no sign of Edna so Molly decided to go to her house later with the details.

She was debating about closing up at five thirty when the phone rang. Molly, who hadn't taken a message on it since it was installed, looked quite dazed at the insistent ring before picking it up.

'McQueen's Agency 3435.'

'Good afternoon. I saw your advert in the paper and I want to hire someone who can do shorthand, typing and bookkeeping.' The man had a pleasant voice and sounded quite young.

Molly couldn't believe it. Two jobs in one afternoon.

He started to give his details and Molly had to lean over and grab the diary.

'My name is Mr Knox and my address is 27 Constitution Place. I'm writing a book and I need help with taking notes and typing the manuscript. Is it possible to have someone tomorrow? I'll need her for a week or two.'

Molly said that would be no problem.

After the call, she realised it was a problem. There would be no one to stay in the office next week and take messages. What a pity Mary couldn't start until the end of June.

It meant getting in touch with Jean, one of her friends who had offered to help out if needed and, if other work came in, then it would mean calling on other friends. Molly was suddenly struck with how small her workforce was but until she had built up a steady stream of clients, her finances couldn't stretch to hiring permanent staff.

Edna and her family lived two flights up in a two-roomed flat. The close was still well lit by the evening sunlight that had emerged after a day of grey drizzle. Molly thought she wouldn't like to climb these stairs in the dark but maybe it was well lit in the winter.

Billy was in bed, tired out after a busy day in the town, but Edna and her Mum were pleased that work had come in.

Molly explained about the job at Cliff Top House. 'I'll do that one, Edna, because I live on the same side of the river and also it doesn't start until next week. Another job has come in which starts tomorrow and I thought you could take that one on. Molly left the typed sheet with Mr Knox's details before leaving to make her way to Craig Pier and home. She felt tired and was glad the day was over.

Tomorrow, she would get in touch with Jean about coming into the office next week and she also wondered if Mary might like to come in after school and all day Saturday. She would write her letter tomorrow.

It had been an eventful day and hopefully the start of a successful agency.

4

Harry Hawkins made his way down the narrow gangplank of the cargo ship and, dodging the many obstacles that lay on the dockside like discarded rubbish, made his way towards the town.

He was in a jubilant mood and still couldn't believe his good luck. This was his first visit to Dundee and what a bonus it had turned out to be.

He put up the collar of his jacket. It may have been June, the month with the longest day coming up, he thought, but the weather wasn't summery.

Walking swiftly through the Victoria Arch, he saw the bar at the corner of Dock Street. The City Centre Bar. It was seven o'clock and the bar was very busy.

He managed to get a space and when the barman approached, ordered a double measure of navy rum, straight from the bottle with nothing added.

The alcohol hit his stomach and he felt the warmth spread through him, Aye, there was nothing to beat a nip of rum on the cold nights at sea.

An old man standing next to him noticed his drink.

'Are you a seaman then?' he said, nodding towards Harry's glass, which was almost empty.

Harry was in an expansive mood tonight. He turned to the man and nodded. 'Aye, I am.'

The old man had pale blue watery eyes that immediately became animated.

'I'm an old sailor myself. Served with the Merchant Navy for twenty-five years until I retired in 1940. I wanted to stay on but my eyesight wasn't that great so it was cheerio to the seven seas and back on dry land for me. Are you in the Merchant Navy?'

'Aye, I am. I've been at sea since I was sixteen,' said Harry. 'I've been knocking around the world ever since. Last year I got a job on some of the big ocean liners as a cabin steward, but now I'm back working on a freight ship. We docked a couple of days ago and leave tomorrow.'

Harry ordered another drink for both of them. He wanted to keep a clear head tonight so this was to be his last.

The old man was in a reminiscent mood.

'I miss the sea. There's nothing like the wide open ocean, except maybe when there's a twenty-foot wave coming towards you. It fair beats living in a wee dark single room in Gellatly Street. Still, I like to go round the docks most days and look at the ships.' He started to laugh and took a large gulp of his rum.

'I was just going to say, when I see the ships, I feel like becoming a stowaway. Now is that not a stupid thing for an old man like me? What good would I be on the deck of a ship going through a force ten gale? Let me buy you a drink.'

Harry didn't want another one but the man had caught the attention of the barman and Harry was dismayed to see it was another double measure. But he was a man who could always hold his drink and wasn't too bothered.

It was coming up for nine thirty and closing time and he reckoned he had loads of time to get back to the docks.

‘You wouldn’t like to come up and have some supper with me?’ The man sounded hopeful.

Any other time Harry would have jumped at the chance to have a meal that wasn’t cooked on the boat, but he had other plans this evening.

‘I’m sorry, mate, I’m meeting someone and I have to be back on board by eleven. Maybe we’ll bump into one another tomorrow if you come to the dockside. The name’s Harry Hawkins and the boat’s called *The Mary Anne*.’

They were out on the pavement by this time and although it was twilight, there was a mass of dark clouds that made for a bad forecast.

The old man looked at the sky as well. ‘Aye, it’ll be heavy rain before the morning.’ He held out his hand. ‘I’m Tam Burns and it’s been great meeting up with you. I’ll see you tomorrow.’

Harry watched as he walked up the street. He had no idea where Gellatly Street was but it couldn’t be far away if the old man had walked to this bar.

As he turned away, a small sharp stab of fear hit him. He dismissed it immediately but it still niggled him as he made his way back.

He reached the Victoria Arch when it started to rain, heavy drops that blotted out the surrounding landscape. Harry pulled up his collar and started to run towards the docks.

He muttered under his breath at this turn of events. He could well have done with it being a fine night for his business. What if the person didn’t hang around and wait in this heavy downpour?

Urgency made him run faster and he was nearly out of breath as the lights of the ships came into view.

Just a hundred or so yards to go and then he could get a good night’s sleep. He wasn’t going to be greedy. A few hundred pounds was all he was asking. Enough to let him retire from the hard slog of the freight ships, to maybe settle down somewhere in a nice little house. Maybe here in Dundee, he thought. Then again, maybe not.

He felt the rope around his leg a split second before he plunged into the oily waters. His head hit the concrete wharf and his last thought was of Tam and how he should have taken up his offer of supper.

No one from the ships heard him fall and there were no urgent calls to help a fellow shipmate from drowning.

The ships lay at anchor as the heavy rain battered down on their decks and it looked as if the crews were all below decks. No one saw Harry fall.

One person was abroad that night however. A person who slipped from the deep shadows, peered casually over the silent water then returned the same way they had come ...

The following morning saw some sunshine at last. The previous night’s storm had passed and it was going to be a pleasant day.

Tam, along with his faithful Jack Russell terrier, made their way past the Earl Gray dock. He thought he would go and say hello to Harry before he sailed. The place was a hive of activity as cargoes were loaded and unloaded. He soon found *The Mary Anne* and seeing a young lad on deck, he called out,

‘Is Harry Hawkins about?’

The young lad shook his head. ‘He didn’t come back last night and the captain says he’ll sail without him if he isn’t here by dinnertime. Must have got drunk last night and be sleeping it off somewhere.’

Tam couldn’t understand this. Harry had been fine when they had parted company.

‘No lad, he was with me and he left to come back to his ship. He’d had a drink but he was fine.’

The lad shrugged. ‘Well he’s not here now.’

Tam didn’t own a watch but he reckoned it must be half past ten. He would wait here until dinnertime and hope that Harry had returned by then.

He found a vacant spot where he sat down on some discarded boxes and kept the ship in his sight.

Apart from the shouts and commands of the stevedores swarming around the freight, there didn’t seem to be any sign of Harry. Tam then saw a dock official go up the gangway of *The Mary Anne*. Good, he thought, the captain has notified the proper officials about Harry’s disappearance.

The man wasn’t long on board when he reappeared and made his way back along the wharf. A few minutes later the ship was ready to sail.

Tam got stiffly to his feet and made his way towards it. The young lad was overseeing the lifting of the gangway. Tam shouted up. ‘Is there any news?’

The lad looked annoyed at having to stop what he was doing. ‘No, he hasn’t appeared and the captain has notified officials that he’s a missing person.’ He turned his back on Tam and *The Mary Anne* slipped from her mooring on her way back to Rotterdam.

There was nothing else he could do. Tugging gently on Rover’s lead, they walked slowly back. Rover hurried over to the edge of the wharf.

‘What is it?’ said Tam, looking over the edge into the murky water. Rover was sniffing at a stain on the concrete.

Tam’s head was too full of the mystery of Harry’s disappearance to really take much notice.

‘Come away, Rover, it’s just rust from those heavy chains.’

5

Edna had difficulty finding the house. It lay back from the road, hidden by a high hedge. The garden, which had obviously been well cultivated in a previous life, was overgrown and had a neglected air. The lawn looked as if it had been cut with a pair of rusty shears.

There were some lovely rose bushes but their thorny stems had encroached onto the brick path. Edna was careful to avoid these thorns, as she didn't want to snag her good pair of nylon stockings. Nylons were very hard to find in the shops and she kept this pair strictly for work.

The house had an imposing look and a solid-looking wooden door. The windows could have done with a good wash as they were dusty and had cobwebs hanging from the frames. However, the bell was loud and clear and was answered almost at once by a youngish looking man, wearing a faded green jumper over a brown checked shirt and thick brown corduroy trousers.

Edna was surprised. She had expected him to be elderly.

He ushered her into a room whose windows overlooked the untidy garden. Edna was dismayed to see the room was every bit as neglected as the garden. There were papers everywhere; on tables, chairs, even on the lovely old grand piano which stood in front of the grimy window.

One desk was reasonably clear and held an ancient looking Imperial typewriter that amused Edna when she saw it. It looked identical to the typewriters she had used in school.

The man shook her hand. 'I'm John Knox. No relation to the guy in Edinburgh.' He smiled, 'Would you like a cup of tea?'

Edna said no, not just now but maybe later. She had brought her sandwiches with her for dinner time, but as she had no idea how long Mr Knox would want her to stay, she decided to play it by ear. This agency work was all new to her and she realised it wouldn't be like a nine to five job.

'I'm Edna MGill, from McQueen's Agency.'

'Just call me John,' said the man. 'Can I call you Edna?'

Edna said that would be fine.

He picked up some papers and put them down again. 'I'm in such a muddle. I'm writing a text book on engineering and need help with it. If you could take down notes and then type them out that would be a great help.'

Edna smiled. She thought he looked less in a muddle and more in an earthquake or volcanic eruption. She half expected the bundles of papers to topple from their perches. She sat down at the typewriter, pleasantly surprised to see it had been fitted with a new ribbon. She had visualised it all dried up and in shreds.

They soon settled into to a routine where he would dictate and she copied it in her shorthand pad. It was all double Dutch to her with all the technical terms but she was being paid to help, not understand the book.