

*Miss Ruddock is an ordinary middle-aged woman. The room in which we see her is simply furnished and there is a bay window. It is afternoon.*

I can't say the service was up to scratch. It smacked of the conveyor-belt. In fact I wrote to the crematorium. I said I thought the hallmark of a ceremony of that nature was reverence, whereas the word that kept coming into my mind was brisk. Moreover, I added, grief-stricken people do not expect to emerge from the Chapel of Rest to find grown men skulking in the rhododendrons with tab-ends in their mouths. If the hears drivers must smoke then facilities should be provided. I'd heard good reports of this crematorium, but I hoped that they would agree with me that on this occasion it had let itself down.

Of course if I'd happened to be heartbroken I'd have felt much worse. I didn't let on to the crematorium because I thought it might get them off the hook but I actually didn't know her all that well. I used to see her getting on the 37 and we'd pass the time of day. She lost her mother round about the time I lost mine, she had a niece in Australia and I have the one cousin in Canada, then she went in for gas-fired central heating just a few weeks before I did, so one way and another we covered a lot of the same ground. I'd spent years thinking she was called Hammersley, which was a way off the mark because her name turns out to be Pringle. There was a picture of her in the *Evening Post* (she'd been a big voluntary worker) with details of the funeral on the Wednesday afternoon, which is the one time I'm dangling my feet a bit, so I thought I'd get out my little maroon coat and put in an appearance. At least it's an outing. And I was glad I'd gone but, as I say, the ceremony was a bit lack-lustre and topped off by these young fellers smoking, so I thought the least I could do was write.

Anyway I had a charming letter back from the director of operations, a Mr Widdop. He said he was most grateful I'd drawn this matter to his attention and, while he was aware the practice sometimes went on, if he personally caught anybody smoking he would jump on the culprits with both feet. He knew I would appreciate that discipline within the chapel precincts presented special problems as it wasn't always convenient to tear a strip off somebody when there were grief-stricken people knocking about. What he personally preferred to do was to keep a low profile, then come down on the offenders like a ton of bricks once the coast was clear. With regard to my remarks about facilities, they had no plans to provide a smoking area in the Chapel of Rest in the foreseeable future as I must

understand that space was at a premium and top of their list of priorities at the present moment was the provision of a temporary temple for the use of racial minorities. However, he would bear my remarks in mind, and if I were to come across any similar infringements in the future I was not to hesitate to get in touch.

I wrote him a little letter back thanking him for his prompt and courteous reply and saying that though I hoped not to be making any further visits to the crematorium in the near future (joke) I took his point. I also dropped a line to the relatives, care of the undertakers, saying that I was an acquaintance of Miss Pringle, had been present at the ceremony and had taken the liberty of entering into correspondence with the crematorium over the unfortunate lapse. I enclosed a copy of Mr Widdop's reply but they didn't write back, which I can understand because the one thing death always entails is a mass of correspondence. When Mother died I had fifty-three letters. Besides, they may not have even seen them smoking, they were probably blinded with grief. I see we've got a new couple moved in opposite. Don't look very promising. The kiddy looks filthy.

*Go to black.*

*Come up on Miss Ruddock in the same setting. Morning.*

A card from the opticians this morning saying that their records indicate that it's two years since they supplied me with spectacles and that by now they would almost certainly be in need of verification and suggesting I call at my earliest convenience. I thought that was nice so I took my trusty Platinum and dashed off an answer forthwith. I said I thought it was very considerate of them to have kept me in mind and while I was quite satisfied with my spectacles at the present moment I was grateful to them for drawing the matter to my attention and in the event of my noticing any deterioration I would in due course get in touch with them. (*She picks up her pen.*) It's stood me in good stead has this pen. Mother bought it me the last time she was able to get over to Harrogate. It's been a real friend. (*She glances in the direction of the window.*)

Angie her name is. I heard him shout of her as I went by en route for the Post Office. He was laid out underneath his car wanting a spanner and she came out, transistor in one hand, kiddy in the other. Thin little thing, bruise on its arm. I thought, 'Well, you've got a car, you've got a

I thought I'd go and have a word with the doctor, drop a hint there somehow. There used to be just one doctor. Now they've all amalgamated so it's a bit of a lucky dip. Young fellow. I said I was getting upset, like I did before. 'Before what?' he said. I said, 'It's in my notes.' So he read them and then said, 'You've been getting a bit upset, like you did before. I'll give you something to take.' So I told him about the kiddy, and he said, 'Well, these tablets will help you to take a more balanced view.' I gave them three or four days and they didn't seem to me to make much difference so I went along again. Different doctor this time. Same rigmorole. I said I didn't want any more tablets, I just wanted the name of the firm manufacturing the ones I'd already had, because I think they ought to be told if their product isn't doing the trick. The doctor said it would be easier if he gave me some new tablets and anyway I couldn't write, the firm was Swiss. I said, 'What difference does that make, everybody speaks English now.' He said, 'We don't want to get into that, do we?' and writes me another prescription. I shan't bother with it. In fact I put it down the toilet. I don't know who you write to about doctors.

After I'd had my tea I sat in the front room in the dark watching the house. He's messing about with the car, one of those little vests on they have now without sleeves. Radio going hammer and tongs. No kiddy still. I don't even know their name.

*Go to black.*

*Come up on Miss Ruddock in her hat and coat against a bare background.*

Thinking about it afterwards, I realised it must have been the doctor that alerted the vicar. Came round anyway. Not the old vicar. I'd have known him. This was a young fellow in a collar and tie, could have been anybody. I didn't take the chain off. I said, 'How do I know you're the vicar, have you any identification?' He shoves a little cross round the door. I said, 'What's this?' He said, 'A cross.' I said, 'A cross doesn't mean anything. Youths wear crosses nowadays. Hooligans. They wear crosses in their ears.' He said, 'Not like this. This is a real cross. A working cross. It's the tool of my trade.' I was still a bit dubious, then I saw he had cycle clips on so I let him in.

He chats for a bit, this and that, no mention of God for long enough. They keep him up their sleeve for as long as they can, vicars, they know it puts people off. Went through a long rigmorole about love. How love

comes in different forms . . . loving friends, loving the countryside, loving music. People would be surprised to learn, he said (and I thought, 'Here we go'), people would be surprised to learn that they loved God all the time and just didn't know it. I cut him short. I said, 'If you've come round here to talk about God you're barking up the wrong tree. I'm an atheist.' He was a bit stumped, I could see. They don't expect you to be an atheist when you're a miss. Vicars, they think if you're a single person they're on a good wicket. He said, 'Well, Miss Ruddock, I shall call again. I shall look on you as a challenge.'

He hadn't been gone long when there's another knock, only this time it's a policeman, with a woman policeman in tow. Ask if they can come in and have a word. I said, 'What for?' He said, 'You know what for.' I said, 'I don't,' but I let them in. Takes his helmet off, only young and says he'll come straight to the point: was it me who'd been writing these letters? I said, 'What letters? I don't write letters.' He said, 'Letters.' I said, 'Everyone writes letters. I bet you write letters.' He said, 'Not like you, love.' I said, 'Don't love me. You'd better give me your name and number. I intend to write to your superintendent.'

It turns out it's to do with the couple opposite. I said, 'Well, why are you asking me?' He said, 'We're asking you because who was it wrote to the chemist saying his wife was a prostitute? We're asking you because who was it gave the lollipop man a nervous breakdown?' I said, 'Well, he was interfering with those children.' He said, 'The court bound you over to keep the peace. This is a serious matter.' I said, 'It is a serious matter. I can't keep the peace when there's cruelty and neglect going on under my nose. I shouldn't keep the peace when there's a child suffering. It's not my duty to keep the peace then, is it?' So then madam takes over, the understanding approach. She said didn't I appreciate this was a caring young couple? I said if they were a caring young couple why did you never see the kiddy? If they were a caring young couple why did they go gadding off every night, leaving the kiddy alone in the house? She said because the kiddy wasn't alone in the house. The kiddy wasn't in the house. The kiddy was in hospital in Bradford, that's where they were going every night. And that's where the kiddy died, last Friday. I said, 'What of? Neglect?' She said, 'No. Leukaemia.'

*Pause.*

He said, 'You'd better get your hat and coat on.'