

The Mission

By Eileen Everitt

It was late afternoon and the shadows were already creeping across the grass as the elderly lady approached the bench by the lake. A glance around satisfied her that only a very few stragglers were still in the park and they were slowly making their way towards the exit. "Soon be time for action girl. You know what you have to do, so just get on with it!" she muttered, settling herself on the familiar old wooden seat. Mary often spoke to herself in this way, living quite alone as she did. There were times when she found it helped to give herself a good talking to and this was certainly one of those times! Just thinking about what she was about to do caused her hands to start shaking. She had never thought in her wildest dreams she would commit murder, but that was exactly what she was about to do. Groping about in her bulging shopping bag Mary took out some slices of bread followed by a brown paper parcel which she placed on the bench beside her. The parcel was heavy and it was difficult to get a firm grip round it. This was only to be expected, since it contained a house brick found earlier on some waste ground close to her home.

As a regular visitor to the park, Mary was well known by old Fred, the park keeper, who would always greet her by name or with a wave. "What would Fred think if he knew what I am going to do now?" she thought, "I'd better be quick about it!" She loved to feed the ducks and one duck in the group was a particular favorite. A rather scruffy brown duck she called Daffy. Daffy was always first to come and last to leave. "Well, he certainly will be this afternoon", Mary's mouth set in a firm line, all determination, for here sat a lady with a mission – and to achieve it Daffy had to die. He had to die because she was sure that nestling inside his fat little tummy was something very precious. It was badly scratched and worn thin by constant wear, but it was still her most treasured possession. It was the wedding ring Charlie had placed on her finger long years ago. The next day he had left with his regiment for the battle fields of the Falklands, never to return. Her finger was thinner now and as she sprinkled bread for the ducks

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that morning the ring must have slipped off. Too late she realized it was missing. Frantically she had searched amongst the grass with the enthusiastic help of Fred, but there was no sign of the precious ring. The only conclusion was that Daffy had swallowed it as he gobbled down the bread, so just before closing time here she was, back in the park.

Excited by this late offering of food, the ducks came quickly. "Just like this morning" Mary thought, shifting her weight slightly to the front of the bench and sprinkling pieces of bread around her feet. The ducks were all very tame. She glanced around to check he was coming closer. He was, but was still not close enough. Then he became braver. He waddled up, fully focused on the food. "Come on Daffy, come and see what I've got for you". He came. She launched herself off the front of the bench like a rocket. "Yes!" Mary was triumphant, spreading her hands firmly around his fat little body. She had him securely anchored to the grass and a quick glance around confirmed they were still quite alone. "I've got you now, my boy, I want my ring back."

She groped along the bench until she felt the parcel. "Careful now girl, get a good grip". It was difficult to hold the duck securely with one hand and the brick with the other. To finish the job, she had to bring duck and brick together..... Muttering to herself "Don't look at his face, just don't look" and shifting her weight slightly, Mary took a deep breath, closed her eyes and raised the brick high enough to deliver the fatal blow, missing of course - by quite a large margin. The duck squawked and wriggled. Her attempts to hold him down caused him to expel an impressive amount of green porridge onto her skirt and over her knees. Shocked by the horrible mess, the poor lady naturally let go of her grip on the duck and, using the bench to steady herself, stood up to shake off as much slime as she could. Some of it stayed stuck on her skirt, despite her shaking. "What a state I am in now!" she groaned "and I have to walk home like this!" Then it didn't matter, it really didn't. She laughed out loud because there, stuck firmly on her skirt amongst the detritus from the lake, was the missing wedding ring. "Mission accomplished" she said and with a beaming smile made her way to the park gate.

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The End

Eileen Everitt bio: I am 75. I am a Londoner by birth, but lived all my married life (38 years) in a small village on the Essex coast. Later I moved to Wiltshire but as a leaving present to the village I produced a booklet outlining how the village came to be. This was only sold locally and made over £2000 for the village. I was quite proud of it, as you can imagine. Since retiring I have more time to write and got through to the national final of a W.I competition. As my interest grew I joined Fareham Writers, who have given me lots of encouragement. Last winter I won a short story competition in Prima magazine which was included in their March edition this year and in April I had a poem included in the WI Hampshire magazine.