

THE SEARCH FOR EDWARD LEWIS



Glenn Martin

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Extract from the book

At this point in the story, William and Rachel (of the Archer and Martin Family History Detective Agency) are stumped. They seem to have no further leads to follow. Edward Lewis, the ex-convict, policeman, detective, legal clerk and husband and father, has not turned up in any of the searches they have made after 1877 – nothing in birth, death or marriage certificates, newspaper articles or other indexes. In addition, the visitor calling himself Edward Lewis, has continued to turn up and seems to be taunting them. But they realise they have some handwritten notes from this visitor, and one of their great finds from the historical documents has been a document from 1858 with Edward Lewis's signature on it. William and Rachel realise they can compare the two sets of handwriting.

Chapter 110: Scrutinising the handwriting

"Sometimes," I said, "the way forward lies through defiance, the utmost defiance."

Rachel and I were once again walking down the road, walking towards that pleasant respite, the café. Although, I think I do not do it enough justice. It is not simply respite, it is the knowledge that we do not make answers, we do not make the future, we are simply, occasionally, wise enough to know that we do not, and in doing so we recognise the way forward, and it is the only way. So we might as well enjoy the coffee, resting ourselves within that knowledge. But it is likewise to rest in the awful feeling that we may be falling towards doom.

"What are we doing today, William?" asked Rachel, but there was no dread in it. It was a sparkling morning, and she was cheerful and mischievous, playing with the words we had exchanged yesterday.

"We are going to address a flaw," I said, "by looking at the notes that the visitor has given to us. We can compare them to the signature we got from the court documents Edward signed. We overlooked this before."

"We didn't overlook it," retorted Rachel. "If there had been something of interest there, we would have noticed."

"No, that's not true," I argued. "We didn't have a reason to consider the handwriting. In retrospect, I think he was aiming to be neutral."

"And that's the problem," she replied. "Don't we need to remind ourselves that we are dealing with a ludicrous proposition? Why should the visitor's handwriting bear any resemblance to Edward Lloyd Lewis's?"

"We only hope," I replied without thinking. For answer I got a scornful stare.

"Right now," said Rachel, "I imagine the visitor is congratulating himself on our ineptitude. We race off on ridiculous side tracks, full of enthusiasm, all to prevent ourselves from looking at the void before us."

"We still need to know," I argued. I hadn't expected us to end up in combative positions.

"Okay," I said. "There haven't been many notes anyway. How many?"

She was ready. "Three."

"What did they say?"

"The first one just said 'Samuel Lewis', in block letters. This is not the kind of writing that reveals personality."

"Okay, the others?"

"'Sarah and the family are kept safe.' We remarked that the writing was large and neat, but not ornate. We said it was written with a 'serviceable hand'."

"And the third?"

"It said, 'They don't like to give up. They are used to winning.' Nothing about the handwriting stood out. We simply focused on the message."

"We could look at the notes again. We have the benefit of hindsight."

"Are you being ironic?"

"Not my forte," I retorted. "You go first. What do you think?"

"I am thinking, why should there be any relationship between the visitor's handwriting and Edward Lewis's signature? We are stretching the lines between entities. It's like bad geometry."

"But what if there was a similarity?" I replied. "We should definitely look for that."

"I am caught between worlds," Rachel sighed. "I don't want to give this possibility air to breathe. As you said earlier, it breaks the rules, it opens up the ground beneath us, and we all fall down, endlessly."

"Yes, the abyss looms," I said, "but I think we must face it, and even defy it. Could the notes be written by the same person as signed the court depositions in 1859?"

"No, no," cried Rachel. "No. I find myself agreeing with the visitor – there is nothing here."

"Even though the visitor is aiming to put us off the scent?" I persevered.

"Or we recognise that that is no more than another assumption, and it may well be unjustified. Which is to say, only we can decide what is the case, and we cannot be certain."

"Rachel," I said, "what is your best judgement about this? I am asking you to base it on all your experience, and I am willing to assume you have learned something through all of your experiences, consciously and deliberately. I know you will not claim certainty, but you have more experience than many. What do you think?"

Of course, I have asked all the same questions of myself.

"I would not reject the idea that the person who wrote these notes is Edward Lewis," she eventually said, "without giving you any declaration of certainty." After a pause, she added, "I am also willing to own the extent of my experience. I am not certain, but my opinion is grounded on more experience than that of many other people, and I have continually questioned my experiences, and gone back to all the sources I can, as much as I can."

"One can never be glib," I said. "I know it is demanding, but all we have is experience, deeply questioned. The people who promise us certainty are mostly schooled in the making of promises."

"Yes, it is demanding," said Rachel, "particularly when you know you are not trading in certainty, only inferences from experience. And even when you have more experience than anyone else, that barb is still cast at you – you don't know for sure, do you? You are still only guessing."

"I would trust your guesses more than I would many other people's confident assertions," I replied.

"Where has this got us?" asked Rachel.

"The game," I replied, "is still afoot."

"Or at hand," Rachel grinned, but a trifle wearily.

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