

The Riding Officer

Recently commissioned as the new riding officer, Edgar Rice Paper arrives back in his home town to discover that he is now persona non grata.

More ironic in his appointment is the fact that he is no longer the unsuccessful son of a legendary smuggler; he is now the hated son of a legendary smuggler, set for a life of struggling to perform his new job in a town of hate.

Cast

EDGAR RICE PAPER – ridiculously named son of the legendary smuggler Mulberry Rice Paper. Slightly pompous, intelligent but totally innocent and trusting of almost all, having been mollycoddled by his mother.

ERIC THA'KNOWS - his best, and only, friend. More aware of what is going on in the village.

MRS DRY – fishwife, neighbour, regular supplier of tea and butties (also unknown to Edgar, co-ordinator of many smuggling operations)

LORD CARSHALTON – local duke, landowner, magistrate and very often the receiver of smuggled goods, despite being in charge of also sentencing smugglers and acting as Edgar's local CO.

Introduction

History rarely tells the truth. The romanticism of Mr Charlotte Bronte and his tales of love and deceit in the North Yorkshire moors during the late 18th century reveal little of the truth of the time.

Rather than being a distant backwater surrounded by poverty, coastal areas of Gods Own County were more affluent than London. This was due to an economy built on smuggling – cigarettes, alcohol, clothing and drugs were shipped from the continent and sold.

Robin Hood's Bay was a hive of smugglers – modern estimates suggest every citizen was involved.

All but one: The Riding Officer, a man with the thankless and futile task of preventing smuggling.

In a town full of smugglers, The Riding Officer is a lone voice in a sea of corruption. A hero, charged with claiming or destroying contraband or demanding duty is paid in the name of the glorious King...

Setting

Action takes place within EDGAR RICE PAPER's abode – a wood-panelled old, unkempt house. With stairs to the back and a main entrance beside the stairs, a kitchen also exists to the back. Main action takes place around the fire and the driftwood desk, where there are seats. A safe or cabinet exists behind the desk.

SCENE 1

INT. OFFICE

18th century, ramshackle, gloomy wood and brick office, lit by oil lamps and featuring a drab desk with quills, ink, stamps, wax and a pipe. Candles will suffice.

EDGAR dances/prances around the room, apparently serenading a small box in his hand.

FX: We hear the sound of hooves echoes from outside, pre-empting the door opening)

EDGAR

Oh Edwina, Edwina, Edwina! I'll sweep you off
your feet you enchanting woman!

He gets on one knee and offers the box to thin air

EDGAR

Happy birthday, Edwina!

Eric enters on cue

ERIC

No, sir. It's me, Eric. Frankly I'm baffled you
thought otherwise.

I'm not even a blonde, Edgar!

Like a flash, EDGAR is sat back in his chair, feet up on the desk; he holds a document, pretending to read it

EDGAR

Hmm? Oh, it's you. You're back then? Did you find
him?

ERIC

I certainly did.

EDGAR

Yes, I thought I could hear the clop-clop of hooves;
although I did wonder if it was Mrs Dry next door
exercising her right to wear clogs.

ERIC

She never does that on a Friday. And only when they're freshly smuggl – imported, I mean.

No, I found your horse – however unfortunately I was unable to reach him before he bolted.

EDGAR

What?

ERIC

As a result, I was forced – as your deputy – to seize an alternative in the name of the crown, and set off in pursuit.

EDGAR

(Sitting up in chair)

Really? I'm impressed, you've genuinely surprised me. So he's outside?

ERIC

...while in pursuit, I subsequently discovered that when trying to calm and retrieve a thoroughbred stallion given to your senior officer as a birthday present, you probably shouldn't try and catch him on the back of a mule.

EDGAR

On his feet, pacing, anxious

WHAT?! You chased after my horse – the one YOU lost – on a donkey?

Why exactly do you think he's called "Lightning"?

ERIC

I assumed he liked the rain.

EDGAR

Damn it Eric! My second day on the job, you've lost my horse and the village hates us! Not only that but you've confused the fact that I got this

job on my birthday – the horse comes with the job!

ERIC

I did think that it was rather strange that Lord Carshalton should give the son of a smuggler a horse. Then again I thought it strange that the son of a smuggler as notorious as your dad should be given a job as a riding officer at all.

Some people have suggested something...
underhand taking place.

EDGAR

Have they? Have they indeed? Well I'll show them.

I'm sick and tired of being laughed at and discarded by this bloody village. Just because I wasn't considered good enough to sit on a boat all night when I was 14 doesn't mean I couldn't be a smuggler.

ERIC

Well, you were sea-sick, as I recall...

EDGAR

The fact that I was a bit poorly is hardly the point is it?

I was 14!

ERIC

More than a bit, to be fair...

EDGAR

Now listen! I'll show them. I'll have this town cleaned up, and then the whole country will know and fear the name Edgar Rice Paper!

He thumps the desk; it collapses.

EDGAR

Do you think our meagre budget would stretch to a desk not built from driftwood?

ERIC

Not really, sir, no.

EDGAR

We'll find me something, at least. I'm going to have a bit of paperwork to get through tomorrow, Eric.

ERIC

Really, sir?

EDGAR

Waves an official-looking sheet of paper

Absolutely! I've received notice here of an impending delivery of a selection of highly sort after, illicit French lithographs, featuring the nude forms of a string of notorious Parisienne harlots, from Suzanne du Suc to Analise Anale.

ERIC

Bloody hell!

EDGAR

Indeed - it's filthy stuff, and according to these instructions direct from London, we're to intercept this evening!

Ext FX:

MRS DRY

Coo-eeee!

EDGAR

Ah. The clogless Mrs Dry is outside, Eric. Let her in, there's a good chap.

Eric lets the visitor in

MRS DRY

Oh hello there young Mr Rice Paper. How are things today? Caught any smugglers?

ERIC smirks. EDGAR notices this.

EDGAR

Sadly, Mrs Dry, we've barely managed to catch a horse, isn't that right Eric?

ERIC

Yes, sir.

I'll stick some tea on, sir.

EDGAR

So Mrs Dry, to what do I owe this most rare of pleasures?

MRS DRY

Well, I heard a rumour that there's bit of an operation on tonight...

EDGAR

A rumour? Really? I find that hard to believe. I took receipt of the orders directly at the post office.

MRS DRY

Something to do with France, was it?

EDGAR

Well, that's a turn up! Is nothing private around here?

MRS DRY

So it's true then! Well you'll have your work cut out won't you, stopping that lot and attending Lord Carshalton's daughter's birthday party.

EDGAR

Penny drops

You're absolutely right... yes, we'll manage it though, Mrs Dry, don't you worry.

MRS DRY

Anyway, my cousin Henry has been making sausages, and I had a few left over so I thought you might like to try them?

EDGAR

Really? That's smashing!

ERIC returns from preparing the teas

MRS DRY

Yes, they're fresh off the grill – a little spicy, I'm told, but certainly not the worst sausages you'll taste this side of Berlin – I mean Birmingham!

MRS DRY offers the sausages. EDGAR and ERIC take one each.

ERIC

Delicious!

EDGAR

Do you know, I've never tasted a sausage like this? What did you say it was called?

MRS DRY

Bratw- um Bradford Best. Our Heiny, lives in Bradford, you see.

EDGAR

"Heiny"?

Bit of a strange name, isn't it? Sounds almost... German?

MRS DRY

Um...It's short for hindquarters. He's a butcher, see, forever playing with pigs trotters as a boy, you know. We all knew he'd end up as a butcher, what with his dad and his brothers.

EDGAR

Oh, so a family of butchers?

MRS DRY

You might say that, yes.

EDGAR

Well, pass on our compliments, Mrs Dry, your cousin makes possibly the finest sausages I've ever tasted!

Eric steps up with the teas.

Well I hope you'll join us for a cup of tea. It's from the batch that you dropped off earlier this week. Very relaxing, I think you'll agree.

MRS DRY

Oh yes, that's one of my favourites!

(Takes cup.)

So, young Edwina Carshalton, eh, Mr Rice Paper! Have you got her a birthday gift?

EDGAR

Ah, just a small something I made myself.

ERIC

With my help!

EDGAR

...ably assisted by my good friend here. I'm not certain she'll be entirely happy to see me after the last time we met, but certainly since I got this job she's seemed more interested.

MRS DRY

That's cause you've got prospects now, in't'it? No longer a smuggler like the rest of 'em... not that you were actually a smuggler as we all know on account of your trouble, but ours is not to reason why.

Funny though that Lord Carshalton should be happy to hire a riding officer with such an aversion to water, though, don't you think?

EDGAR

Never crossed my mind. He evidently wanted the best man for the job. Well, second best, after what happened to old Fruity.

ERIC

Oh dear.

EDGAR

What's that?

ERIC

Oh, I always get sad when I hear about what happened to old fruity. Always brings a tear to my eyes.

EDGAR

Given that Fruity was hurled off a cliff by a bucking mule after stopping for a piss, I suspect he had a few more tears in his eyes.

Notices something on his desk.

Ah.

Anyway, Mrs Dry – I'm afraid I do have some work to be pressing on with before tonight's operation, so if you wouldn't mind, you will have to excuse me.

EDGAR sits. MRS DRY remains.

EDGAR

So if you wouldn't mind...?

MRS DRY

Don't mind me, love

EDGAR

This is of course top secret work Eric and I are undertaking, both in respect to my position as Riding Officer and as a guest of Miss Edwina Carshalton this evening.

MRS DRY

Oh you know me, Edgar, I'll be the soul of discretion.

EDGAR

Even so, I would prefer if it you made your way.

MRS DRY

Well I'm still drinking my tea, dear.

EDGAR is now quite angry, and stands

EDGAR

Just take the bloody cup and piss off!!

MRS DRY

Well there's no need to be so rude, you only had to say.

MRS DRY flounces out indignantly

EDGAR

That woman!

Taking a seat, EDGAR draws up a brief list.

Right. Eric, we've got 3 hours to formulate a plan to position ourselves both on the beach for the receipt of the aforementioned illicit French lithographs, make it to Lord Carshalton manor house, and retrieve Lightning...

ERIC

Taking the initiative, ERIC pulls up a chair, opens map

Right then. I thought if we could cover these two key observation points...

EDGAR

So off you go and retrieve him!

ERIC

Right you are sir...

ERIC leaves, sheepishly

EDGAR

EDGAR speaks to himself. He's like that.

This evening will go down as my first success against the smugglers – plus I get to spend time with the delightful Edwina Carshalton.

What could go wrong?

TO BE CONTINUED!

(overleaf)

SCENE 2: Int: Office, night.

The door swings open; Edgar stumbles in, clutching a bottle of whiskey.

EDGAR

Edwina... no, don't go... load of rubbish... bloody
smugglers I'll get 'em!

He sits at his desk, still mumbling, as ERIC enters the room from the other side.

ERIC

Good evening, sir?

EDGAR

Sausages!

ERIC

Sir? Are you alright? Should I get you a glass of

ERIC notices the bottle. Luckily he is reliably equipped with several skills.

... oh.

Cup of tea, sir?

EDGAR

Why not? I might as well. It might even help me
forget.

ERIC

Knowing Mrs Dry it probably will...

So do you want to tell me about it sir?

EDGAR

Oh Eric, it was a disaster. It started off so well!

I intercepted the landing at the beach, saw off
three masked smugglers – whose builds seemed
quite familiar, I must add – and even ventured
into the water to retrieve the lithographs.

ERIC

Sounds like a successful evening, to be honest.

EDGAR

And up to that point, it was. In fact I'd venture to claim success up to and including the point where I failed to notice that the box of lithographs was by astronomical coincidence of exactly the same design we'd been working on for Miss Carshalton.

ERIC

No!

EDGAR

Yes... and the same size.

The resulting embarrassment and fracas can only be described as "life threatening" – suffice to say any designs I might have had on Edwina have been clearly discouraged.

FX Ext: knock at the door

Who on earth could that be at this time?

ERIC

Goes to door, answers – it is LORD CARSHALTON

My lord!

CARSHALTON

Is Rice Paper here?

EDGAR hears the voice, and reacts badly

ERIC

Indeed, my lord, come on in

EDGAR

EDGAR stumbles to his feet

LORD CARSHALTON! Shhh!

Sorry, Lord Carshalton. Apologies, my lord, I'm a little drunk. Couldn't quite bring myself to accept my earlier mistake; got pissed instead.

CARSHALTON

Nevermind, nevermind. I'm sure we'll be able to sort something out.

EDGAR

Eh?

CARSHALTON

Oh don't you worry about Edwina, such a needlessly sensitive thing most the time, but then aren't all women, heh heh heh?

CARSHALTON has a smug, condescending laugh

No I was visiting merely to put your mind at rest.

EDGAR

At rest, sir?

CARSHALTON

Indeed, Rice Paper! You've performed sterling work in intercepting this shipment, and your expedience in shipping material as illicit as this direct to the local magistrate – i.e. me – will be relayed to our masters in London!

EDGAR

So... everything is alright?

CARSHALTON

Alright? Of course! I knew you were the man for the job!

Now you must both excuse me, I have another appointment to keep.

CARSHALTON leaves.

EDGAR is shocked jaw dropped

EDGAR

Did I just dream that?

ERIC

I think, Edgar, that perhaps we both did.

EDGAR

His face was etched with demonic rage just an hour ago... and then he comes and tells me everything is alright!

EDGAR returns to usual seat/desk

Well, that certainly sobered me up.

EDGAR pours another drink

Good to know the lithographs are safely put away...

ERIC

...in Lord Carshalton's study, presumably...

EDGAR

Eric, you don't seriously believe that Lord Carshalton has taken the smuggled goods as his own possessions do you? You heard him yourself; he's making a report to London!

ERIC

Just a thought - after all, he did seem very grateful just now... and in a very good mood too. I wouldn't be surprised to learn that he's off home to enjoy those lithographs, what with Lady Carshalton being less than comely...

EDGAR

Well, you have a point there. Although I think you complement her unnecessarily. Fearsome, I would say.

Still, she gave birth to a handsome girl in Edwina

ERIC

True... but of course, you know how they say you should look at a girl's mother to see how she will look when she's older...?

EDGAR

Oh.

Yes.

Ah.

EDGAR opens his drawer

Good job I kept one of those lithographs, isn't it?

ERIC and EDGAR scramble to look

ERIC

What's this one called?

EDGAR

Philipa Fellation, it says here...?