

### the "dear boss" letter

Charlotte Willis stares at the crude sketch of a murderer on a wanted poster. He stares back.

A shiver runs up her spine — as if the ghosts of the killer's victims were breathing down her neck.

She did not think a poster such as this one would be up in her lovely neighbourhood since the murders all happened in the slums over in the East End. She had heard the rumours of the barkeepers finding the mutilated bodies in the endlessly winding streets. It is such a contrast from her locality, with all of the lofty mansions where she and the rest of high society reside.

*The Scotland Yard must be getting desperate*, Charlotte thinks. It has been quite a few weeks since the first victim appeared and there is not a semblance of a clue in sight. *The people must be antsy as well if they believe such posters as a reassurance that the murderer will get caught.*

She sighs, clutching her parasol, and peers into the bushes as if the killer might be lurking within, waiting to make her the next person to end up in a cadaver room.

Nevertheless, she knows she mustn't worry about such trivial matters. Only whores were getting murdered and a member of high society such as herself was certainly safe.

Charlotte turns on her heel and starts walking back to her home, the promenade she was about to go on forgotten. It's for the best, the weather was turning sour, and it would most likely start raining soon. She picked up her speed.

Instead of thinking about the gruesome killings happening in her city, Charlotte instead was focusing on not tripping on the uneven cobblestones beneath her feet. Still, the attacks had shook the country to its core — every newspaper, every man, and every woman are infatuated with the idea of finding out who the killer was.

*Everyone* nowadays fancies themselves a detective.

When she reaches the mahogany front door and pushes it open, all thoughts of a violent killer escape her — replaced by the even uglier sensation of betrayal.

A woman's pair of lace-up boots are scattered haphazardly in the front hall. A man's dress shirt is tossed over an armchair leading into the foyer.

Their quiet laughter drifts down the large swooping stairs and into her ears.

Charlotte feels her heart crack. She had known about her husband's affairs, of course, but never would she imagine that he would be so cruel to invite his mistress to their house just ten minutes after his wife left. Of course, it had always been on weekends when she was away, or when he was "at work".

He does not know that Charlotte knows, and so he must think himself the cleverest man in the world to be able to keep such a secret from his wife.

Charlotte leans back against the door and draws a shaky breath. Rage fills her stomach and travels upward, clouding her mind and her senses.

He would pay for it. This time, she would make sure he understood the consequences for his infidelity.

Charlotte composes herself quietly and swallows her anger. She pushes off from the front door and places her parasol next to her husband's black bowler hat on the entry table.

Putting her gloved hand into the pocket of her husband's shirt, she feels satisfaction as she finds what she is looking for. The small piece of parchment paper containing the name of the prostitute upstairs.

It feels like second nature to her. After all, she had done this several times before. Every time she caught her husband in bed with another woman, Charlotte would search for the woman's "business" card.

She kept them as souvenirs.

*Mary Ann Nichols.*

*Annie Chapman.*

*Elizabeth Stride.*

*Mary Jane Kelly*

And the newest edition — *Catherine Eddowes.*

In the back of her mind, she felt regret for what she did, and would do, to these women. They were just trying to earn enough money to keep themselves alive, morality be damned. Charlotte knows that it was her husband who seeks out the whores, with promises of payments and good treatment.

It is easier, however, to blame these faceless women she does not know, rather than the heartless man she had married. And this time, she would be sure her husband heard her warnings.

She stalks towards the library, unable to go upstairs into the study and walk past their bedroom where her husband breaks their wedding vows.

Despite the levity of the situation, as soon as she enters the library, her mind calms fractionally.

The library is her favourite room in the whole house, from the towering shelves to the hundreds of books that accompany them. The candles sit unlit, waiting for dusk to become useful. Charlotte contemplates lighting one, in the foggy London weather, she would surely need light if she did not want to strain her eyes. She decides against it, however, knowing that she will need the matches for something else.

She seats herself at the head of the wooden table, her quill and ink jet already waiting.

Charlotte pulls out a piece of parchment paper, dips the quill in the ink jet, then begins her letter. *I wonder what I should do*, she thinks, *to capture everyone's attention*.

Above her, she hears Catherine Eddowes moan.

A traitorous tear slips down her face.

*A double event, maybe. Miss Elizabeth Stride hadn't gotten what was coming to her yet. Neither has Mary Jane Kelly — but her time has not come yet.*

Charlotte knows that London holds its breath, waiting for the next attack in the series of insatiable murders.

*I should purposefully misspell some words, she thinks. I cannot have them suspect me.*

She knows that this will not happen — the Scotland Yard is too preoccupied with the idea of a terrifying man hunting through the streets of the Whitechapel district, not a demure, doting little wife who has never stepped a toe out of line.

All feelings of remorse seep out of her and onto the pages she's writing, leaving her as an empty shell of a human.

Charlotte dips her quill in the ink jet, then scrawls out the signature to the letter, and the signature that resigns Elizabeth Stride and Catherine Eddowes to their sorry fates, all while smiling a malicious smile.

*Yours truly,*

*Jack the Ripper*