

***EDGAR  
WALLACE***



***THE ULTIMATE  
TRUE CRIME  
COLLECTION***

**Edgar Wallace**

# **The Ultimate True Crime Collection**

**Tales of Real Murders & Mysteries**

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# The Secret of the Moat Farm (1924)

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The plausible and sinister adventurer who, for the love of gain and of an easy life, preys upon women, is a familiar figure in the history of crime. Camille Holland was fifty-six when Dougal captured her affections, and the unhappy romance of a rich old maid led to her murder at this infamous scoundrel's hands. The crime might have gone unpunished but for one damning clue. It was a pair of shoes which brought Dougal to the scaffold after the lapse of years.

Herbert Samuel Dougal.

At the age of fifty-six a spinster may well be resigned to an old maid's life. Into the life of Camille Cecille Holland romance had not come, though it was inevitable that she should possess her dreams. For she was a woman of imagination. She scribbled sentimental little stories, and painted in watercolours sentimental little landscapes — mills and ponds and green woodlands — pleasant, pretty scenes.

Camille Holland did not look her years: most people thought she was forty. A certain refinement of face and trimness of figure, an exquisite smallness of foot (her chief pride) lent to her an attractiveness which is unusual in women who have passed through many loveless years, "living in boxes," having no home but the boardinghouse and cheap hotels which she frequented, and no human recreation but the vicarious acquaintanceships she formed in her uneventful journeyings.

She could afford an occasional trip to the Continent; she could afford, too, other occasional luxuries, for her aunt, with whom she had lived many years at Highbury, had left her the substantial fortune of £7,000, invested in stocks and shares, which brought her from £300 to £400 a year. Amongst her investments was £400 invested in George Newnes, Limited, which shares were to play an important

part in the detection of one of the cruellest crimes of the century.

Living as she did, it was natural that she had few friends. There was a nephew in Dulwich, who saw his aunt occasionally; there was a broker to whom she was known, and a banker on whom she sometimes called. Very few tradesmen knew her, because she ran no accounts, buying in whatever town she happened to be, and paying cash.

## § 1

It was in the early days of the Boer War, when military men had acquired the importance which war invariably gives to them, that a smart-looking, bearded man called at the boardinghouse in Elgin Crescent, Bayswater, where Miss Holland was in residence. He had evidently met Miss Holland, for he sent up a card inscribed "Captain Dougal," and was immediately received by the lady in her hostess's drawingroom. He appeared a great friend; he came again and again, took the lady out for long strolls in Hyde Park, and once they went to dinner and to a theatre together.

The devotion of Captain Dougal must have brought to realisation one of the romantic dreams of this spinster whom love had passed by, and she warmed to his subtle flattery, his courtesy and his obvious admiration. When, in his manly way, he confessed to her that he was unhappily married and there could be no legal culmination to their love, she was shocked, but did not dismiss him. Life was passing swiftly for her, and she was confronted with the alternatives of going down to oblivion starved of love, or accepting from him the ugly substitute for marriage.

There was undoubtedly a great struggle, sleepless nights of heart-searching, before she surrendered the principles to which she had held, and let go her most cherished faiths. But in the end the surrender was complete. One afternoon

she met him at Victoria Station, and together they went to a little house at Hassocks, near Brighton, the house having been rented for two months by her imperious lover.

Dougal's earlier marriage, he said, had been a very unhappy one.

"I need not have told you I was married at all," he said. "You would never have discovered the fact. But I cannot and will not deceive you, or treat you so badly as to marry you bigamously."

His scruples, his fairness, his very misfortune, were sufficient to endear him further to this infatuated woman of fifty-six, who for the first time in her life was experiencing the passion about which she had read and heard, and about which, in her mild and ineffective way, she had written. And those first months at Hassocks brought her a joy that fully compensated her for the illegality of the union.

The adventure was at least no novelty to Samuel Herbert Dougal, sometime quartermaster-sergeant of the Royal Engineers. Nor was it the first time that he had described, in his soft Irish tongue and in the most glowing colours, the happiness in store for his victim. His very brogue, so attractive to the ears of women, was an acquisition, for he had been born in the East End of London, a neighbourhood which had grown a little too hot for him at a very early age, and had made him accept the Army as an alternative to prison.

In a very short time he had gained promotion, for he was a remarkable draughtsman, and so clever with his pen that he earned for himself amongst his comrades the name of Jim the Penman. From his earliest days he had preyed on women, for he had been one of those parasitical creatures to whom a sweetheart meant a source of income.

At twentyfour he married, taking his wife with him when his regiment was moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia. She died there, with suspicious suddenness. Pleading that her death had upset him, he was allowed a short furlough in England,

and returned with a second wife, a tall, young and goodlooking woman, who tended his children and seemed to be possessed of some means of her own, for she had a quantity of jewellery. Nine weeks after arrival, she also was seized with a sudden illness, and, like his first wife, died and was buried within twentyfour hours, the death being due, according to Dougal, to her having eaten poisonous oysters. Under military regulations it was not necessary to register the death in the town of Halifax, and beyond the fact that Dougal seemed to be very unfortunate in the matter of his wives, no notice was taken.

There was in Halifax at the time a girl who had been a friend of both the Mrs. Dougals. Though no marriage ceremony occurred, Dougal, by his very audacity, succeeded in imposing upon his comrades to the extent of their accepting her as his wife, going to the length of forging a marriage certificate, which, however, did not deceive the officer commanding, whose signature was necessary to secure her a free passage to England. This union was a short one, and the man's brutality and callousness were such that she decided to return to Canada.

"What excuse shall I offer my friends?" she asked tearfully. To which he replied, with that cynicism which was part of the man:

"Buy yourself a set of widows' weeds, and tell them that your husband is dead."

Dougal left the Army with twenty-one years' service, the possessor of that good conduct medal which is the scorn of most military men, and some three shillings a day pension — an amazing end to his military career, remembering that during his period of service he served twelve months' imprisonment with hard labour for forging a cheque in the name of Lord Wolseley, Commander-in-Chief of the Forces in Ireland.

Scarcely had the Canadian woman left than another girl was installed in his home, only to flee in the middle of the

night from his violence.

He was successively steward of a Conservative club at Stroud Green, manager of a smaller club at the seaside, and held numberless other positions for a short length of time; invariably his terms of employment ended abruptly, and as invariably the cause had to do with his treatment of the women with whom he was brought into contact.

First and foremost Dougal was a forger. He could imitate handwriting with such remarkable fidelity that even those he victimised hesitated to swear to the forgery.

When he met Miss Holland he had lost his youthful slimness; the fair, curling moustache was touched with grey, and he had added the pointed beard which lent him a certain sobriety of appearance that so ill accorded with his character. He was a man versed in the arts and wiles of wooing. The life at Hassocks was a dream of happiness to his dupe, and her own nature and predilections assisted him to the fulfilment of his plans.

There can be little doubt that Dougal was a poisoner; the circumstances attending the deaths of his first and second wife, the callous conduct he displayed in those events, almost prove his responsibility. But many years had elapsed since those tragedies; at least two great poisoning cases had been tried in the courts; and he must have learnt how dangerous it was, in so law-abiding a country as England, to repeat the crimes of Halifax.

Moreover, the death of Miss Holland could not in any way benefit him, since he had no legal claim upon her. There is some slight evidence that he tried to induce her to make a will in his favour, but Miss Holland, despite her infatuation, displayed an unusual acumen when the question of placing her signature to a document arose.



The life at Hassocks, delightful as it was, was not exactly the kind of life that the woman desired. She did not want to rent a house; she wanted to settle down, to have a permanent home of her own; and Dougal, to whom she expressed her wishes, agreed with her. When she told him that she would like to buy a farm, he instantly became an authority on farming. Nothing would please him better than to live the simple, rustic life; and accordingly they began a search for a suitable habitation, and the columns of the newspapers were carefully perused.

Eventually a suitable property was found. This was Coldham Farm, in the parish of Clavering in Essex, and negotiations were begun with Messrs. Rutter, of Norfolk Street, Strand, for the acquisition of the house and acreage. If the property had a disadvantage, it was that it was remote and lonely, the nearest village being Saffron Walden, and the equivalent to "town" the town of Newport, a quaint and ancient place which all people who motor from London to Newmarket pass through without giving it a further thought.

The price of Coldham Farm was £1,550, and Dougal, who had charge of all the arrangements, settled with Messrs. Rutter that a conveyance should be made in his name. Miss Holland selling off some of her stock in order to secure the money for the purchase. One day she called with Dougal at Norfolk Street, and the necessary documents were placed before her for her signature. Instead of being perfectly satisfied with the arrangements as he had made them, she read through the conveyance with a frown, and shook her head.

"The property is conveyed to you," she said. "I don't like that. It must be conveyed to me."

"It doesn't make any difference; it is only a matter of form," pleaded Dougal, who seemed to have made no secret of their relationship, even to Rutter's clerk.

"If we are to be known as Mr. and Mrs. Dougal, how can you have the conveyance in your maiden name? Everybody

will know our secret.”

Apparently Miss Holland was superior to the malignant tongues of gossip.

“It must be conveyed in my name,” she said stubbornly, and, despite all Dougal’s protests, despite his private interview with her, when he must have urged more intimate considerations, she had her way. The conveyance was torn up, a fresh document was prepared, and Coldham Farm was transferred to her.

The pair left Hassocks at the end of January, 1899, and took lodgings at the house of a Mrs. Wiskens in Saffron Walden, where they remained until April 22nd. Mrs. Wiskens, in addition to letting lodgings, was a dressmaker, who had a small clientele, and she added to the income she derived from “lets” by doing odd dressmaking jobs, repairs, etc., incidentally serving Miss Holland in this capacity.

Their life at Saffron Walden seems to have been a pleasant time for Miss Holland. Dougal was still the attentive and devoted “husband,” and nobody in that respectable little town dreamt that the formality of a marriage ceremony had been overlooked.

From time to time they drove over to their new home, the purchase of which had not yet been completed, and Dougal simulated a knowledge of farming which must have been very comforting to the woman, who undoubtedly had her suspicions of his ability to conduct even this small establishment.

It was a smallish house, surrounded by a moat, and, to the romantic eye of the aged spinster, possessed many attractions. It was she who decided to rename Coldham Farm, which became the “Moat House Farm,” the Post Office being notified of this change.

They moved into Moat House Farm in April, soon after the purchase was completed. The former owner of the farm left behind him a small staff of labourers, cowmen, etc., which Dougal re-engaged for the work of the farm.

Dougal purchased a horse and trap, threw himself with vigour into his new work, devised changes, including the filling in of certain parts of the moat; whilst Miss Holland, who did not disguise her pride in her new possession, set about the furnishing of the house, and brought from London a grand piano to beguile the tedium of the long evenings. She was something of a musician, just as she was something of an artist, and she may well have looked forward to a life of serene happiness with the man who had come so strangely into her life, and whose love had changed every aspect of existence. It would have been remarkable if Dougal, after his adventurous career, could be satisfied with the humdrum of farming.

He might be amused and interested for a month or two, but after that the restrictions, which the woman imposed, the necessity for keeping up the pretence of devotion, and the various petty annoyances which her shrewdness produced, must have its effect. Change was vital to him — not necessarily change of scene, but change of interest. No one woman could satisfy him, and he took an unusual interest in the choice of the girl servant that Miss Holland engaged.

This proved to be Florence Havies, who look up her situation three weeks after the Dougals had gone into their new home. On the very morning of her arrival Dougal came into the kitchen, looked at the girl, and, finding her attractive, put his arm around her waist and kissed her. The girl, to whom such attentions were only alarming, complained immediately to her mistress.

It was the first hint that Miss Holland had received of the man's character, and when, trembling with hurt vanity, she demanded an explanation, Dougal tried to laugh the matter away.

"She is only a kid," he smiled; "you surely don't think I was serious?"