

RANDOM HOUSE *e*BOOKS



Paradise Lane

Ruth Hamilton

About the Book

There were only four houses in Paradise Lane, and young Sally Crumpsall lived in No.1. If it hadn't been for the kindly inhabitants of the Lane she would have been even more neglected than she was, for with a father too ill to care for her, and a mother who was to abandon her, she led a ragged and lonely existence. When - finally - both mother and father had gone, then the Lane moved in and, with the help of Ivy, Sally's old and stubbornly aggressive grandmother, they decided to raise Sally as best they could.

But Paradise Lane was built in the shadow of Paradise Mill - and Andrew Worthington, owner of the mill, loomed menacingly over the lives of everyone about him. A corrupt, evil and greedy man, he had totally destroyed his own family, and soon his venom was directed towards Ivy, her friends in Paradise Lane, and finally threatened the very existence of young Sally.

As events moved towards a violent and terrible climax, only the combined efforts of all who loved the young girl were able to save her.

A powerful, vigorous and richly dramatic story of the people of the north.

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About the Author

Also by Ruth Hamilton

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CORGI BOOKS

This one is for Mrs Florence Allen of Southsea, who has been my stalwart supporter from the start.

God bless you, Florence.

A very big thank-you to my editor, Diane Pearson, who
copes with me so well!

ONE

There were only four houses in Paradise Lane, and they were all on one side of the street. The front 'parlour' windows of numbers 1 to 4 inclusive enjoyed an uninterrupted view of Paradise Mill, while the backs of these dwellings overlooked the Paradise Recreation Ground. Those lucky enough to have a cottage in the tiny lane had rear gardens too, long and narrow strips of land whose main feature seemed to be a total antipathy towards anything approaching cultivation, though weeds from what the locals called the 'Parry Rec' grew in abundance all the year round.

Ollie Blunt and his wife Rosie lived at number 2. This childless couple had moved into the cottage a few years before Ollie's retirement from the mines, and Ollie Blunt's battle with barren soil had continued for two decades. Even now, at the age of eighty, the robust ex-miner, who had left Blackburn to finish his working days on the surface of a Westhoughton pit, was wont to express his disillusionment with the town of Bolton. 'It were nowt like this i' Blackburn,' he was heard to say with a frequency that was monotonous. 'We'd good soil over yon. I were known all over for my leeks and cabbages in my day.'

His wife, who also hailed from Blackburn, owned several answers to Ollie's moanings. 'Yer've never grew a leek in yer life - it were your dad had the green fingers,' was one, though her favourite was longer and usually louder. 'Get thissen back 'ome, then,' she would yell with all the vigour of an exceptionally lively seventy-plus-year-old. 'Nigh on twenty year we've been i' Bowton. If tha wants t' pack up an' go 'ome, get gone afore I clock thee wi' me posser.' Her

posser, a circle of wood attached to a long pole, was always on guard just outside the scullery door. Only when clothes were battered in a dolly tub was the posser used for its original purpose.

Rosie Blunt was a tiny, apple-cheeked woman whose previously dark locks had bleached themselves silver with the passage of time. What she lacked in height, she made up for in what her husband called 'nowtiness', and this tendency to quick temper had resulted in a collection of armoury stored in the kitchen, under the stairs with the coal and in the back yard. Armed with shovel, clothes prop, posser or yardbrush, she had clouted Ollie, chased dogs, seen off gypsies, children and tramps. But she never went too far. Those who had suffered a 'passing' or a 'shovelling' had come out intact, more or less.

Sally Crumpsall, the youngest resident of Paradise Lane, would sit on the back doorstep of number 1, partly to escape the unhappy situation in her own neglected home, and partly because she enjoyed listening to the Blunts' many arguments. This was one of her few escapes, though her favourite times were spent in the company of a man and some pigeons whose address was 4, Paradise Lane. There wasn't much in Sally's life. School was all right, she supposed, but no-one wanted to be her friend. Although the area was far from rich, few children chose to play with a child as ragged as she was. So her pleasures were few and mostly solitary.

'Sal?' wheezed her father.

Sally picked herself up, turned reluctantly towards the scullery of her home. Dad was dying. He'd been dying ever since a year after the end of the Second World War, since round about Sally's sixth birthday.

'Sal?'

'Coming, Dad.'

She hurried through the scullery, almost fell over the cat. What would happen to Gus when Dad died? she wondered.

She seldom thought about her own future, because it seemed too terrible to contemplate. Gus shot outside, bounded over the fence, across the Blunts' garden, into Maureen Mason's. Sally could hear Maureen shouting, 'Come on, Gus, I've a bit of fish for you.' But Gus wouldn't stop in Maureen Mason's garden, oh no. Because Gus would be on his way to see Mr Goodfellow's pigeons . . .

Dad looked awful. At the age of thirty-three, Derek Crumpsall was a doomed man. Doctors and hospitals had done all they could for him, and Derek had come home to die in the company of his family. He gulped painfully, realized, not for the first time, that apart from his ageing mother, this little ragged child was his whole family. He could not lie there and allow her to watch his steady deterioration. Any hope of rekindling the ashes of his marriage was long shattered, so he must now take steps to protect his beloved baby from what was to come. 'Get your gran, love.'

Sally hesitated, one hand straying to her mouth. Mam couldn't stand Ivy Crumpsall. Granny Ivy was a big, tall woman with a stoop which had caused her to lose a couple of inches in height, though her vocal power showed little sign of diminishing with the passage of years. The child swayed from side to side, the movement betraying inner turmoil.

'Go on, Sal.'

She continued to shift her weight from foot to foot. 'What about Mam?'

He stared at her, the over-large eyes burning in their sockets. Every bit of him was sore. Soon, too soon, there would be a daily visit from the doctor. A cocktail of drugs would be administered, its components varying and intensifying in strength until the patient's senses had been removed. Derek was a moderately well-read man, and his depleted brain scuttered about now among a mountain of

half-remembered phrases. 'One may have good eyes and see nothing.' Was that from some Italian writings?

'Dad?'

He no longer had good eyes. They were huge in his face, because his flesh was disappearing, but nothing functioned adequately any more. Who had looked after this child between '40 and '45? he wondered. 'Who looked after you while I was away fighting?' he asked.

'Mr and Mrs Blunt and Maureen Mason.' The old couple from next door and the Irish lady from number 3 had cared for Sally. They had looked after Gus, too. Sometimes, child and cat had slept in Maureen Mason's spare room at number 3 while Mam had been out with her friends. Often, Sally, Gus, Maureen Mason and the Blunts had spent the night trying to rest in an air raid shelter. It had been cosy then, Sally thought. Cosier in the shelter than it was in number 1, especially after Tom Goodfellow's arrival at the end house. The war had been almost finished, and there had been no more bombs. But Mr Goodfellow had limped to and from the shelter, his legs infirm as a result of an accident in an aeroplane. Sally was dreaming, remembering, because she didn't want to fetch Granny Ivy, didn't want her mother to come back angry and shouting . . . But poor Dad needed somebody.

Derek closed his eyes, felt as if he were literally sinking lower and lower into the mattress of uncomfortable flock. Lottie. Aye, she'd be back shortly, would Charlotte Crumpsall. He seldom spoke to her these days, preferring to wait for help until a neighbour came in. Tom Goodfellow had turned up trumps, took bedpans and soiled linen in his stride. But Derek needed nursing during the nights now. He couldn't ask Tom to do even more, didn't want to place a burden on the Blunts or on Maureen Mason. And as for Lottie - well - she was often the worse for drink at night, and she couldn't bear to touch her dying husband. 'I need you to run down to Worthington Street for Gran,' wheezed

Derek. 'Tell her . . .' Tell her what? That his time had come? 'Tell her your mam's out and I need some shopping. Then come back with her.'

Sal backed out of the kitchen and into the small scullery. Mam would be back in a minute. She'd only gone to the post office to send a letter to New York. What would happen if Mam and Granny Ivy came face to face again? Another big row, another lot of yelling and bawling? Mam hated Granny Ivy Crumpsall with a ferocity that was overwhelming for a child of seven.

She always wrote back to America straight away, did Mam, always scuttered off to post her reply before the ink had dried properly. She'd been at the mirror today for half an hour before setting off for the shops. While Derek Crumpsall waited for his end, Lottie had preened and pouted, had spat on her fingers to wet the kiss-curls and make them more firm.

Little Sally Crumpsall leaned against the slopstone. Had she been able to see herself, the child would have noticed much of Granny Ivy in her own stance. Ivy Crumpsall, a great thinker, often stood staring into her own slopstone when cogitating. 'I don't know what to do,' mouthed the child. 'They'll only fight.'

She lifted her head, looked through the window at a sky dulled by filthy glass. Mam didn't love her, didn't love Dad. Mam loved a man in America, a big, loud person with red cheeks and greased-down hair and a laugh that didn't sound real. There was a letter every two weeks from America. Mam always giggled when she read those letters.

Sally scraped the toe of a clog against the floor, swallowed a bubble of pain, grimaced against the echo of a stomach whose sole occupant was guilt. 'She'd like me if I were good,' she whispered to herself. Lottie Crumpsall had been Sally's mam for seven years, but she showed no love for and no patience with her daughter.

The little girl drew a hand across her face, then skimmed an unclean flannel over tear-stained cheeks. Mam had chosen an awful boyfriend. He was too old to be a boyfriend, really, because he was a great big grown-up lump of a man. But all of Paradise knew about Lottie Crumpsall's American bloke. Folk who didn't like Lottie – and there were many of those – would sometimes call after her, 'Oy, how's yon Yankee boyfriend, Lottie?' and 'Got any gum, chum?' There shouldn't have been a boyfriend at all. Married people were supposed to look after one another, were supposed to have no girlfriends and boyfriends. It was all a mess and it made Sally ashamed, especially when the letters came and Mam read them and laughed in front of poor Dad.

Mr Goodfellow got letters too, mused Sally, her thoughts expanding to encompass the lovely man from number 4. Every four weeks, a big white package was delivered to number 4, with GOODFELLOW printed above the address, and a fancy blue drawing on the back of the envelope. Nobody else ever got much mail, but numbers 1 and 4 were visited regularly by Henry Chaucer, who had a red bike and a funny moustache. Henry Chaucer said Mr Goodfellow's letters had all been redirected from a London address and that the blue drawing on Mr Goodfellow's letters was a crest, but it had never looked like a bird's topknot to Sally.

The child drew breath as if steeling herself against her mission. Granny Ivy must be fetched, then the consequences must be endured. There was no time to be standing here thinking about the man of mystery who lived at the end house.

She slipped through the back gate and along a narrow dirt track that separated the Paradise houses from the Rec. A few children played on the field, but none called to Sally. At top speed, she flung herself towards Worthington Street and Granny Ivy Crumpsall.

Ivy was holding court in the midst of three spellbound neighbours. She was famous for her opinions, was Ivy. '. . .

and that there Jimmy Foster's got extra tinned fruit and tea and toffees, I saw it all being delivered to the shop Tuesday last. Fancy rationing and shortages still going on in 1947. Who'd have thought it would last, eh? Aye, he'll be stashing all the good stuff for the Worthingtons. Pigs, the lot of them.' The last five words were stained with bitterness towards the man whose family had built Paradise Mill and most of the cottages that flanked the massive structure.

'Easy for him, eh?' Ivy waved a hand towards her small audience. 'Gets his dad's money, throws these houses up and sticks a bloody great mill on top of us. Oh aye,' she nodded vigorously. 'But for Joseph Heilberg, yon Worthington would have used the Rec for another mill. Good job we've got folk like Joe looking after us.'

A thin-faced woman at the table spoke up. 'Worthington tried to get his hands on Heilberg's land during the war, while that lovely man were interned.'

Ivy exploded with rage. 'Aye, and there's another injustice for you.' Her eyes, which were so like her only son's, blazed in triumphant praise of her own oratory. 'Interning a Jew - I ask you. What were the point in locking up a bloke who came over here years ago to get away from bloody Hitler? He's a good man, is Joseph Heilberg. Not a penny rent did he ask when he came back. All them in Paradise Lane lived rent-free for the duration.' She sniffed deeply, eyed her granddaughter. 'And that's just as well, because my poor son's rotten wife would have had to increase her turnover if she'd needed rent on top of perfume.' It was no good being ashamed, she had decided wisely. Everybody knew what Lottie was, no-one better than the mother of the man she had married. 'Hello, our Sal,' she muttered belatedly.

Sally bit her lip, which wasn't an easy task, as most of her infant incisors had vacated their place of residence. 'Dad says you've to come, Granny Ivy.'

The thinnest of the trio of visitors blessed herself hurriedly.

‘Eeh, whatever next?’ The rhetoric was ignored while Ivy Crumpsall reached for her shawl. Summer, winter, boil or freeze, the good woman never set foot outside her house without her pinny and her shawl. The black skirt swept the floor as she approached Sally. ‘Right, our Sal. Let’s go forward into the fray.’ She had looked at one or two of her son’s books in the past, liked to think she had picked up a smart turn of phrase. She was very proud of her lad. Her lad had been born when she was over forty and ‘on the turn’. Everybody knew about ‘on the turn’ babies being special.

When her neighbours had left, Ivy looked around the sparse home to see if she could find something for her dying boy. With the fringe of her dark shawl, she dashed a tear from a cheek and picked up a couple of old newspapers. ‘That should keep him happy for an hour,’ she mumbled to herself.

‘Me dad can’t read,’ said Sally.

‘Course he can . . .’ The dim light of anger that always glowed in Ivy Crumpsall’s eyes was suddenly fully rekindled. ‘Blind?’ she asked.

‘Nearly. And he can’t get out of bed no more, Granny Ivy. Mr Goodfellow’s been seeing to him.’

The old woman hung on to her composure as best she could. No use falling apart in front of the little lass. ‘Aye, he’s Goodfellow by name and a saint by nature, is yon.’ She moved towards the door. ‘Where’s your mam?’

‘Post office, I think.’

‘Huh.’ She grabbed the child’s hand and marched across the street into Paradise Lane, stopping for just a moment outside the open door of number 4. ‘Mr Goodfellow?’

‘Yes?’ enquired an unusually cultured voice from somewhere within the house.

‘It’s Ivy. Ta for looking after our Derek. I’ll see you later.’

They passed Maureen Mason’s and the Blunts’ house, walked through the front door of number 1. Ivy stopped

short when she saw the empty shelves near the parlour fireplace. 'Where's his books and papers?' she asked.

Sally shivered. 'I don't know where the books are, Gran. We don't get papers no more.'

'Does he know his encyclopaedias is all gone? Does your dad know?'

Sally shook her head, blushed on her mother's behalf. 'He stops in the kitchen all the while now, Granny. Me mam said he couldn't read no more, so—'

'He could still hold them. He could still touch the pages and remember how much he loved reading.' Ivy squared her shoulders. 'Don't say owt to your dad about the books.'

'I won't.'

Ivy Crumpsall squatted down and stroked the child's thin cheek. 'I wish I had a few bob, love. If I had a bit of money, I could feed you up and get you a decent frock. I don't get much for cleaning the pub, you know. Still.' She stood up and made her face fierce again. 'We must make best use of what's to hand, as my old mother used to say.'

Sally followed Granny Ivy into the kitchen. It was sparsely furnished, with flag floors, a black grate and a tattered rug in front of the hearth. The mantelpiece was not bare, though. Across its length lay pots of rouge and powder, two dark blue bottles of Evening in Paris and a stick of eau de Cologne, then a confusion of combs, brushes, curlers. Lottie Crumpsall's mirror was propped behind a broken clock, and the rest of the shelf was taken up by hairnets and pins. 'She wants whipping,' breathed Mrs Crumpsall Senior.

'Hello, Mam.'

The bed was under the window, its sheets crumpled and torn, the top quilt stained and ragged. His hands clawed at the fringe, while large, uncertain eyes blinked in the direction of his mother's voice. 'We'll get you sorted,' said Ivy with a cheerfulness that was tailored to hide her distress. 'I'll borrow bedding, lad. I've good neighbours down Worthington Street. If yon fancy piece had let me in here

more often, we'd have had you sparkling - wouldn't we Sally?'

Sally made no reply, as her gaze was fixed on the fancy piece who had featured so recently in Ivy's words.

'Get out,' said Lottie Crumpsall.

'No.' Ivy planted her feet wide, knew that she looked quite terrifying in the long black clothes. 'I'm stopping. This time, lady, you'll not see me off, because my lad needs me.' She unfolded her arms, waved a hand in Sally's direction. 'And our little lass could do with a bit of looking after and all. Look at her. She's all rags and bones, not a pick on her and the clothes in bits.'

Lottie made a noise that sounded like 'pshaw', picked up a lipstick, pushed it into her bag. 'I've somebody to see,' she said. 'When I get back, you'd best be out of here. If you've not gone, I'll pack my bags and leave.'

'Oh aye? Are you making that a promise?' Ivy leaned her head over to one side, put Sally in mind of a rather tall bird looking for worms. 'It's nice when you've bags to pack, Lottie Kerrigan. It's nice when you've summat to shove in the bags. How many pairs of silk stockings did you collect, eh? And underwear and fancy scarves and bottles of scent? You could happen fill a trunk out of your earnings, 'cos you're nothing but a cheap whore. Your mam were the same, only she kept her business away from the Yanks. I suppose there were no Yanks then.' She nodded. 'Now as I think back, Nancy Kerrigan would have entertained a battalion for some stockings.' She looked her daughter-in-law up and down, was glad of the distraction. Because while she was attacking Lottie, she wasn't looking at the haggard face of her son.

'Shut up, you old bag.' There was no energy in the words, because Lottie didn't care any more. In a matter of days, she would be gone. Morton was waiting for her in New York. He'd found an apartment and a job, knew somebody who knew somebody who wanted English hostesses in a club.

‘Do what you want,’ she said while studying a chipped nail. ‘It’s all the same to me.’

Sally had had enough. She crept out of the room, through the scullery and into the garden. The noise still reached her, though. Granny Ivy was going on about Mam being a bastard, about nobody knowing who Mam’s dad was. ‘There were that many candidates, they were thinking of calling a general bloody election,’ screamed Ivy Crumpsall.

All that shouting would do Dad no good at all, thought Sally. But Mam and Granny Ivy were only carrying on like they always did, so happen Dad would fail to hear the racket. There was nothing wrong with his ears, but Derek Crumpsall had stopped listening years ago.

The little girl walked through the gate and down Back Paradise Lane until she came to number 4. Without hesitation, she pushed her way into Mr Goodfellow’s garden and walked to the pigeon cages. Gus was curled up between Scarlet and Beau, a breeding pair who were not in the slightest way perturbed by the grey cat’s presence in their loft.

‘He’s in the birdhouse again,’ said a male voice.

‘They’re supposed to kill birds,’ replied Sally. ‘I never knew a cat who guarded birds.’

‘Always a first time, me dear.’ Tom Goodfellow turned away and shook his head. She was as thin as a rake. Her clothes were probably held together by the filth they had collected over several days. ‘Come inside for a sandwich, Sally,’ he said.

Sally loved Mr Goodfellow’s house. It was filled with shining silver cups and pictures of pigeons. There was always a fire in the grate, even in summer, and Mr Goodfellow made lovely cakes and scones. ‘Thank you,’ she said when her plate was loaded. She was careful to eat slowly, did not want to look greedy. Her stomach moaned with pleasure as the food occupied its cavernous emptiness.

He sat on a chair, sat on his anger, worked hard to keep a smile on his face. 'How is your father today?'

'Very ill.' Her dad was ill and her mother was going to America and here she sat eating butties. No, they were sandwiches, she told herself. Sandwiches were thinner than butties and sometimes, the crusts were cut off. 'Thank you,' she said when the plate was empty.

'And your mother?' he asked casually.

She could have told Mr Goodfellow anything, as the man was completely trustworthy. When Sally had been left alone during the death throes of a world war, this man had come for her, had fed her and installed her at Maureen Mason's house. During evenings in the shelter, he had sung nice songs to lull her to sleep. But she didn't want to find the words, made no effort to frame a proper answer. Dad was going to die and Mam was setting her sights on a future at the other side of the world. 'I'll talk him round,' Lottie said whenever she remembered the small hiccup who was her daughter. 'Morton doesn't want children, but you'll be sent for, don't worry.'

'Sally?'

She shook herself out of the gloomy reverie. 'She's been to the post office.'

'Another letter?'

Sally nodded. 'Same day as yours, Mr Goodfellow.' Everyone in Paradise Lane, Worthington Street and Spencer Street gossiped about Tom Goodfellow. He got queer letters, envelopes with a piece of paper hiding another address, packages bearing more than one set of stamps. Where had he come from, why did he talk so posh? How had a grown man learned cooking and washing, where did his money come from? But Sally accepted him gratefully for who he was now, occasionally wondered who he used to be. 'And she wrote back last night.'

Tom cleared the small tea table, picked up a blue-rimmed jug and opened the tap on the copper. 'I'll let you wash up,'

he said.

In the scullery, Sally caressed bone china cups and silver knives, made up a story in her head about living in a beautiful house with roses in the garden and roses on the plates. She had never broken a single piece of Mr Goodfellow's dinner and tea set. To smash even the smallest item would have been a crime, because everything matched, right down to salt, pepper and a sugar bowl from whose handle a tiny spoon was suspended.

He watched her, knew her thoughts. What could he do for her? When was that dreadful woman going to leave the country? After Derek's death, little Sally would probably live with Ivy Crumpsall. Ivy was a good woman, rather firm in her views, but sound enough. So the child was going to move from one poverty to the next, from one empty larder to another. Though she would doubtless get love from her grandmother, and love was worth a lot.

'I've finished, Mr Goodfellow.'

He sank to his haunches, fought back a groan when his game leg creaked. 'Why don't you call me Uncle Tom?'

She blushed, put a finger to her lips. 'I've got no uncles.'

He nodded grimly. She had been visited by several 'uncles' during the latter years of the war. In addition to some with ordinary names, there had been Uncle Buzz, Uncle Dwight, Uncle Morton. Tom had explained, when asked, that uncles were brothers to a child's parents, and Sally had stopped saying 'Uncle' when addressing her mother's consorts. For that sin, she had been beaten and sent to bed for two days.

'Let me be your uncle,' he said again. There was a basket and a rope under the child's bed these days. Whenever she was locked upstairs, she would raise the sash window and lower this container to the ground. The Blunts, Maureen Mason and Tom Goodfellow had been feeding her for some time by placing what they could spare in the empty basket as soon as Lottie Crumpsall had disappeared up the street.

Lottie seldom used the back garden, never attempted to clear the waist-high weeds, hung out precious little washing beyond the odd pair of stockings and some French knickers in pink and blue satin. Only when the lavatory was needed did Lottie Crumpsall venture out along the whole length of the rear garden.

‘You can be my uncle, then.’

She was thinning towards transparency, he mused. Fine blond hair hung in greasy rats’ tails about the narrow face, while enormous blue eyes expressed all the feelings she refused to verbalize. In the depths of Sally Crumpsall’s pupils, Tom read poverty, pain, bewilderment. Above all, he saw an aching need to be loved. Ivy was getting on. Some days, she was as straight as a die, bold to the point of belligerence. But in the twilight of her own life, Ivy’s heart was about to be broken by the death of her only son. Would the pale waif be enough to keep Ivy Crumpsall on this side of the frail curtain that divided the living from the dead? Only time would bring the answer to that question.

‘Shall I get Gus out of the loft, Mr . . . Uncle Tom?’

Her smile cut right into him, because it was clear that she would have had dimples had her face been fully fleshed. ‘If he’s happy, leave him where he is. Mrs Mason has some fish for him, I believe.’

‘She likes you, does Mrs Mason.’

‘And I like her.’

Sally thought for a moment. ‘Yes, but she likes you the same way as she liked Mr Mason till he got blew up in France.’

He laughed. ‘I’m too old for all that nonsense, child.’

Enlivened by the food, she decided to ask a question. ‘How old are you?’

‘Somewhere between forty and fifty,’ he said with mock gravity.

Her jaw dropped. Nobody except Granny Ivy was as old as fifty. Yet Mr Goodfellow – Uncle Tom – had dark brown hair,

light brown eyes and skin that looked young. 'But you don't look old,' she exclaimed.

He threw back his head and chortled. 'And the reason for that, Sally, is that I have avoided the female predators of this world. No woman has managed to ensnare me.'

She sniffed, pondered. 'Scarlet's a woman bird, isn't she?'
'Yes.'

'And she lays eggs for you to have more pigeons and she's Beau's missus. So you have got some fee . . . some females, 'cos they're out there in cages.'

He laughed again. 'Where they belong, isn't that the case?' If he could just shut Maureen Mason in a cage, then his life might become a little easier. No, no, he was surely being uncharitable. And Maureen was extremely gentle and pretty . . . But the good Irish lady had taken to wearing powder and paint, had started simpering whenever she found a reason to visit him. The reasons had deteriorated, had become mere excuses. And now, the excuses were so feeble that most showed signs of rigor mortis as soon as they dropped from Maureen's reddened lips. 'Could you lend me a couple of spoons of sugar, Tom?' This after he had seen her coming out of the Co-op with the tell-tale blue package perched on top of her shopping. He had 'mended' bedsprings, doors and window catches. He had almost choked on air redolent with California Poppy, had been plied with enough tea to refloat the *Titanic*.

'You can get married if you want,' advised Sally. 'Then you won't have to do the cooking and polish your cups.' She pointed to the rows of trophies. 'What's that one for?'

He shrugged. 'Tennis.'

'Oh.' Her eye followed the line of trophies. 'That big one?'
'Yachting.'

She looked hard at him. 'Boats?'

'Yes, boats.'

He was a lot more interesting than she had thought, then. 'What's the round plate for?'

‘Golf.’

Sally wasn’t one for questions. Because few of her peers spoke to her and, since her mother seldom noticed her, Sally had failed to master the basic arts of conversation. Also, she worked hard at being inconspicuous. When near invisibility proved impossible, she tended to opt for silence or total acquiescence. But curiosity overcame her on this occasion. ‘Was them all won before you lived here, like?’

He nodded.

‘Where did you live, Uncle Tom?’

‘Hampshire, then Surrey. A year or two in Plymouth.’

‘Oh.’ She mulled over this information. ‘Is them places down London way?’

‘Most of them are in the south, yes.’

She smoothed the tattered dress and made for the door. Everything had been explained now. Folk from London were different from folk round here. They had loads of money, cigarette holders, nice frocks, motor cars and a lot of time for games like tennis. After thanking her host for the meal, she made for the door, stopped, turned round, this movement fuelled by sudden impulse. ‘Why are you here?’

‘I arrived and I stayed,’ he said softly.

‘Can you not go home no more?’

He put a hand to his clean-shaven chin. ‘I could, I suppose.’

Sally’s eyes were like saucers. ‘Do you stop here because you want to, then?’

‘In a way, yes.’

She allowed her gaze to wander round Mr Goodfellow’s house. It was nice, she supposed. Clean, better furnished than most. But it still had the mill blocking out the light at the front, then an outside lav shed at the back. He talked like . . . like the man whose voice came out of Maureen Mason’s wireless set. When she’d been only five or six, Sally had peered for hours through the tight mesh of the set’s speaker, had never seen the tiny people inside. Of course,

at the grand age of seven, Sally knew that those men and women were full-sized and from London, though she hadn't managed to work out how they shouted loudly enough to be heard from so far away . . .

'Sally?' He loved to watch her face, enjoyed its mobility. Females with expressionless features were judged to be the most attractive according to something he had read recently. That might well explain the vacuous ladies portrayed in so many paintings. Ah, she was going to speak again.

'But it's dark here, Mr—' She grinned in response to his deliberately fierce expression. 'Uncle Tom. It's poor. Everybody's poor. They all work in Paradise Mill or down the pits. And you're . . . not the same.' The difference was impossible to verbalize, but she was certain of its existence.

He raised his hands, pointed to various portions of his body. 'Two arms, two legs, two eyes. I am made of flesh and blood and bone. How am I different, Sally?'

'You just are.' Why did he never go to work? she wondered. Everybody else clattered off at the crack of dawn, but Mr Goodfellow just messed about with books and pigeons all day. No, she wouldn't ask him about work, because that might be rude, like accusing him of laziness. He wasn't lazy. He helped her dad, washed him, lifted him on and off the potty chair. 'Ta-ra,' she said.

Ivy Crumpsall stood in the parlour of number 1, Paradise Lane, a bunched and white-knuckled fist clamped hard against her mouth. There was neither rhyme nor reason to any of this. He'd always been a good lad, had their Derek. Born at the start of a war that had taken his dad, Derek had remained in good health long enough to defend his country against the Third Reich, yet his reward was . . . She stifled a sob. Derek's reward was cancer.

It was the pit that had done for him, she thought. Not one man emerged from the bowels of the earth unscathed. Each

and every miner she knew was older than his years, seemed to be starved of air and sunlight, deprived of most sensory perceptions for eight or more hours of every day. Coal was killing her boy.

She sank into a chair whose stuffing had exploded through several cracks, eased herself off a protruding spring and wondered what was going to happen next. Lottie had been and gone, the doctor had been and gone for medicine, Sally had simply gone. She would be with Goodfellow, no doubt. The poor child was escaping at every opportunity, because she had no mam, no dad . . . Ivy was determined not to cry. She'd cried enough already, had wept a river during recent months.

Still, at least Derek had been lying in clean linen when the doctor had arrived. The sheets weren't Derek's own, but they were spanking clean. 'You're doing a good job, Mrs Crumpsall,' the medic had said. Well, the smart-mouthed Lottie was not going to get her own way this time. Ivy intended to stay, as it was plain that Derek was nearing his end.

She leaned back and closed her eyes, was once more in Worthington Street with the newborn Derek. Her husband, almost ten years her junior, had set off for the trenches a few weeks earlier. Sam never saw his son. Her mind rushed forward, endured the pain of the lad's first day at school, the weeks spent at his bedside during measles, mumps, the whooping cough that had nearly taken him. But she had hung on to him. She had hung on until Lottie.

Ivy's eyes flew open. Lottie Kerrigan. Lottie Kerrigan, daughter of a nasty piece of work, another nasty piece in the making. How Ivy had pleaded with her son. But Derek had begun to fear his mother's over-protectiveness, had run straight into the arms of a woman who had removed him from his mother's apron strings. For years, Ivy had seen little of her son, then the family had moved back to the Paradise streets. Paradise. She made a tutting sound, looked

through the front window and saw nothing but red bricks and mill windows. If this was Paradise, most gradely folk would opt for the other place any day of the week.

She crept through the room, peeped into the kitchen, reassured herself that he was sleeping. Back in the uncomfortable chair, she mused on the choices of names for these streets, tried to keep her mind busy. Paradise was a newish mill, just about sixty-odd years old, she thought. Worthington owned it, and a bad bugger he was, too. His dad had built the factory, had set out the capital H that formed this far from godly creation. The mill sat in the top of the H, the recreation area in the lower half. Ivy's street formed one of the uprights, then Spencer Street ran parallel. Between Worthington and Spencer, the horizontal was created by Paradise Lane. Andrew Worthington and Prudence Spencer's marriage had been made in heaven, so the cobbled way that connected the two longer streets had been christened appropriately.

In spite of herself, Ivy allowed a faint smile to caress her worn features. The Worthington-Spencer alliance had been hell for both parties, though few knew the truth about the mismatch. Ivy's information had come from a reliable source, as one of her friends had once been cook at Worthington House. And from personal experience, she had learned about Andrew Worthington . . . she'd be better not thinking of that. Yes, the old swine had failed twice, because his marriage was miserable and Joseph Heilberg had refused to sell the Paradise houses and the recreation ground. Paradise Mill Number Two was still on the drawing board, was a mere phantom created by architect and draughtsman. And so it should stay for ever, if Ivy Crumpsall had her way.

'Granny Ivy?'

The old woman came out of her reverie. 'Hello, our Sal. Have you been to Mr Goodfellow's?'

Sally nodded. 'He's from London way. That's why he talks like the wireless. All them cups and things is from golf and tennis. And a boat, too. Why is he here?'

Ivy shook her head slowly and placed a finger to her lips. 'Hush, love. Your dad needs his sleep.' Soon, too soon, he would have all the sleep he needed. 'Have you eaten, lass?'

'Yes. Sandwiches.'

'Crusts cut off?'

'Yes.'

Ivy's head dropped, because she could scarcely bear to look at the poor ragged child who depended on neighbours for sustenance. But when she saw the state of the floor, she raised her head again sharply. Dirt and Ivy were not on good terms. The child would have to move to Worthington Street. If Ivy could get a couple more hours' cleaning work, they would manage.

'My dad's going to die, Gran.'

What could she say? How was she going to comfort a child whose parents were about to make an exit from her life? 'Aye. Well, I suppose it's God's will.'

'That's what you said last time,' replied Sally, her voice devoid of emotion. 'I've stopped going to chapel, because God's let my dad be very ill. He hurts. Sometimes, he cries when he thinks I'm not looking.'

'I know, lass.' At least she was talking, was saying something. A hint of pale-rose in Sally's cheeks proved that she had eaten. 'Look, I'll see to you, Sal. There's no way you'll be on your own as long as I'm alive.'

Sally studied her grandmother. She stooped a bit, did Granny Ivy, almost had a hump on her back. Granny Ivy was probably the oldest person in the whole world. No - not quite. There was often a huddle of shawlies at some street corner or other, women who, like Gran, were always dressed in black. Some of them were smelly. The snufftakers ponged of tobacco, the pipe-smokers reeked of tobacco, and most carried the aroma of unwashed flesh. Gran wasn't like them.

Gran was always having baths and all-over washes. But a lot of shawlies had lived for years in houses without coppers and inside taps, and they had grown used to the scent of dirt. So there were other old folk like Ivy Crumpsall, people whose lives had spanned the end of one century and the start of another. 'Thank you, Gran,' she said at last. 'Because Mam won't be here, you know. I can stay with you till she sends for me.'

Ivy made a strange noise, but said nothing. That bold strumpet would never send for Sally. Even if she did find time and energy to persuade the Yank with the daft name, Lottie Kerrigan wasn't going to saddle herself with the child. 'You can come and stop with me soon,' she promised. 'And Mrs Hargreaves will happen make you a couple of decent frocks.' She nodded sadly. 'I'd have got you some clothes before now, Sal, but I thought . . . well, you know how things are.'

Sally knew how things were, all right. 'Uncle' Morton, who had been good at getting his hands on things, had bought a beautiful outfit for Sally one Christmas. She remembered it now, could see it if she closed her eyes. A red coat with white fur trim, a hat to match, then little red boots. It had been put away in a cupboard, though Sally had sneaked outside in it once or twice. After Morton Amerson's departure, the clothes had disappeared into Mr Heilberg's shop. Mam had never mentioned the outfit and neither had Sally. But she'd seen it again, oh yes. A girl at chapel had flaunted it. Sally, in worn clogs and too-small coat, had been forced to listen after the service while the congregation made comments about the red coat.

'It'll get better, love.'

'Yes.'

'Try to buck up, Sal.'

'Nobody liked it anyway. They all said it were too bright for chapel.'

Ivy had no need to ask any questions. She recalled the occasion, had sat with Sally until the tears had dried. The books would likely have gone the same road and all. She would have a word with Joe Heilberg when she got the chance, see if he'd hang on to Derek's books so that Sally could have them one day. 'It were a very common colour, that red,' she said, her voice gentled by love. 'He'd no taste, yon Yankee man. A pretty little lass with your colouring should wear blue. Now, you'd look lovely in a navy velvet frock with a bit of lace. One day, I shall take you to our chapel and you'll look like a little princess, love.'

Sally, who had asked several questions that day, suddenly found her lips framing another. 'Why do you always wear black, Gran? Is it 'cos Grandad died? And all the other shawlies - why do they never wear colours?'

Ivy Crumpsall put her head on one side. 'Well, it were this road, pet. Our mams wore black when they got to forty. It were always a black skirt, dark stockings, grey shawl.' She opened the shawl, looked down on her blouse. 'It's nice, is black, as long as you're old enough to carry it. But my blouses is always nice because I look after them proper. I starch them, see. I boil, bleach and starch every Saturday. This used to be a good blouse when it were young.'

Sally walked across the room, placed a hand on her grandmother's knee. 'Black's sad.'

'And sensible.'

'Yes, but it would be nice to have a change.'

Ivy sighed. Change was coming. Derek had done well at school, she thought suddenly. If she'd had a bit of money, a pinch of clout and a lot of cheek, she might have got him educated. If she'd got him educated, he wouldn't have gone down the pit. If he hadn't gone down—

'Gran?'

'What, Sal?'

'Don't be sad.'

Yes, change was coming. Lottie Kerrigan-as-was would no doubt make a run for it any day now, would take off into the wide blue yonder with her French knickers and her Yankee fancy man. Derek would die soon, please God. She sat as upright as her stoop would allow, realized with a jolt that she was wishing him gone, wishing him past pain. 'We must both try to cheer each other up,' she advised her granddaughter. 'See, here's a ha'penny. Go up to Florrie Dent and get yourself some cocoa and sugar.'

Ivy stared blankly into the empty room, listened as Sally's footsteps grew fainter. If he hadn't gone down the shaft, he wouldn't have got cancer. She rose, tightened her apron, waited for Lottie's return. She decided to do a bit of cleaning, use up some anger. If she got busy, then she might just keep her hands away from Lottie's throat. When the sleeves were rolled, she mopped, scrubbed and tidied, but in spite of all the work, she remained ready for the fray. Lottie was out of order, and Ivy simmered as she spoonfed her precious son.

'You only came to live round here once you were pregnant,' said Ivy softly. She was not averse to street-fighting, had even been hauled up before the magistrates for brawling with a woman who had pinched a good woven quilt off the line. But this was family business. Her lad had listened to enough for one day, so this particular altercation must take place out of doors, and as discreetly as possible.

'We'd never have come at all if I'd had my road,' replied Lottie. The wind was freshening, and she'd only just had her hair done. It felt like rain, too, and she didn't want to waste the half-pint of setting lotion she'd not long paid for. Her hair was her best feature, and she intended to look after it. 'I'm going in.'

Ivy grabbed the front of Lottie's coat, twisted the lapel into a tight ball. 'Stop where you are, lady, or I'll shove you through yon window. Aye, your hair's a picture.' She allowed

a smile of mockery to touch her lips briefly. The intricately sculpted style did little to enhance Lottie's rather ordinary features. 'You came to Paradise Lane so's I'd be handy. You thought I'd step in and rear yon kiddy, didn't you?'

'Me rolls are coming down.' Lottie patted a sweep of hair that threatened to tumble. 'I've been invited to a mill do at the Empress tonight.'

'Oh aye? And who's looking after our Sal?'

The younger woman tried to shrug, was stopped by the iron grip on her coat. 'This coat cost seven and six,' she snapped. 'And Maureen'll see to Sally.'

'And Derek?'

'Look, I can't stop in all the while. I'm only thirty-three. Me life'd be over if I sat in there all day and all night long. Any road, it's none of your business.'

Ivy's mouth stretched itself into a snarl that was made fiercer by all the gaps in her teeth. 'I'll bloody swing for you yet,' she whispered. 'And when that rope cuts into my neck, I'll still think I've done the right thing. You're scum, you are. Your mother were a cheap piece and all, still chasing men right till the day she choked on her own gin-soaked vomit.'

Lottie's patience was fully extended, not because of Ivy's taunts, but on account of the expensive hairdo. She raised both hands, raked ten red-painted nails down Ivy's face. 'I hate you,' she screamed as her mother-in-law backed away with scarlet rivulets decorating her cheeks. 'You're an ugly old bag, and you're jealous because I'm still good-looking enough to get a decent bloke.' She jerked a finger towards her own front door. 'As for him in there, he were no use when he were right. I'm not stopping in with him coughing his filth all over me and—'

Ivy's balled fist made hard contact with Lottie's nose. Both women stood motionless for a few seconds, the elder fascinated and stunned by all the blood, the younger struck dumb with shock. 'If you've broke my nose,' she managed eventually, 'I'll kill you. And when I've killed you, I'll stamp