

ES Collater
**DON'T GO
DOWN
THOSE
STAIRS**

A Locke & Roome Mystery Thriller



CONTRIK-69
Read-It-In-Isolation
Lock-down Library



E S Collater is the *nom de plume* of Colin Bigge-Amos [DHRA member 2011-]. After a life as a long-distance lorry driver during which he managed to maintain three separate households each in ignornace of the existence of the others, he turned to writing in 2010. Discovering he had a talent for “*putting one word after another in a reasonably coherent sequence*”, as well as an appetite for correcting fluid, he wrote his first novel - *Don't Go Into the Garden Mohammed*” - and became a professional writer shortly thereafter. He is now settled with one of his families in Chetnole and is the author of several mystery thrillers, all of which feature hardened private dick Locke D Roome.

Mr Collater has enjoyed a complex relationship with the reading public, dividing opinion on whether he is better at writing thrilling mysteries or mysterious thrillers. Some suggest neither.

Don't Go Down Those Stairs is his fourth novel and - according to the critics - his third equal best.

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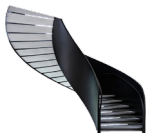
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PRELUDE

The skies over Dorset, 18th August 1940

The pilot of the Heinkel HE 111 knew he was in trouble. *"Damn those RAF swine-dogs in their 417 NM range, 39 ft 12 in wing span, 1280 hp Rolls-Royce Merlin XXV-powered highly manoeuvrable Hawker Hurricanes"*, he spat teutonically between his perfectly gritted Aryan teeth. *"They have shot us directly up the Arsch with several of their eight 7.7 mm machine guns and make no mistake meine freunde ... we must return to the fatherland very schnell indeed"*. *"But we have yet to drop our payload"*, his equally racially-pure co-pilot reminded him. *"Die Fuhrer did not make the bombs only for us to take them back to Germany. If we do so he may be most displeased and they say it is a side of him you do not wish to see in an eile"*.

"God's bumcheeks you are right Siegfried", Pilot Gottlieb van der Donkenbonkenschiksalied admitted before trying once more to shake his failing joystick into a more responsive state. *"At the very least we must release the bombs"*, Siegfried Rhinefahrt insisted. *"Very well, but halte deine Pferde"*, van der Donkenbonkenschiksalied agreed, *"I will attempt one more turn, but you must be schnell und lebhaft meine liebe pumpernickel or we will all be as getoastet as an English breakfast sausage"*.



Wynford Eagle, 18th August 1940

In the small town of Wynford Eagle Kathy Comehome was nearly at her wits end. After a long day working in the chicken factory, followed by an hour in the endless queue at the butchers shop, she had arrived home only to find that the twins had been fighting

again and that her mother was as usual spark out in the blue corner with a swelling the size of a golf-ball over her left-hand eye-brow. *When would they learn to pick on someone their own age?*, she wondered. Placing the 4oz of mixed gristle she had recently bought in the meat-safe, she wondered - not for the first time - how it had come to this. Her mother had told her that having children at the age of 26 was not the best idea in the world, but what was a girl to do with a war on, no prospects and not even a radio to keep her entertained? Most girls her age found 10 minutes of *Much Binding In The Marsh* a more than adequate prophylactic. Three minutes of "Stinker" Murdoch [*"Would you like to see my puppies?"*] was enough to put even the most priapic conscript off his stride and many a shotgun marriage had been avoided thanks to the BBC's wartime spirit-raising output. Kathy had not been so lucky - who'd have thought a failed Cossor valve and the absence of radio repair men seconded to front-line duties could have such disastrous consequences? One minute she was singing away to *Worker's Playtime* and nine months later ...

Cathy interrupted her own bleak thoughts and turned to the matter of tea. She was definitely keeping the gristle for Sunday so tonight would be a matter of make-and-do. Perhaps there was enough powdered-egg left to make a Beef Wellington or if not Tournados Rossini - without the meat obviously and - she checked; no flour - the pastry as well, but as good as ... *Well, first a cup of tea*, she thought *and then we'll see where we are*.



"Let go of the damned bombs Siegfried", Luftwaffenpilot van der Donkenbonkenschijsalslied implored, *"I can't hold it an longer; I am about to folgendurch and I don't want to arrive back in Berlin Scheiße bedeckt"*. Rhinefaht obeyed, releasing the bomb-bay doors. Ten seconds later he confirmed that both of the Heinkel HE 111

1,000 kg bombs had been successfully dropped. As the two men watched the almost balletic descent of the heavy munitions, outlined with startling clarity against the too bright lights of the city below, they signalled a satisfied *daumen hoch* and headed for home, hoping against hope that they would make it back in one piece and in time for the Marlene Dietrich special live from Salon Kitty at 10.30 CET.



“Come and eat your braised toe-nails”, Cathy called out to her errant children, knowing that there was barely enough for the three of them and that if she delayed much longer her mother would come to and want her share as well. Really this war was becoming impossible. What with lock-downs, curfews, self-isolation and social distancing it was getting harder and harder to maintain any semblance of normal life. Any day soon cinemas and pubs and theatres and cafes might have to close too, though Mr Churchill had said that would only be necessary if people didn’t start doing the right thing by staying at home and playing with themselves instead of going out clubbing, pubbing, whoring and lighting farts near broken gas mains. Careless talk cost lives. She knew that. She also knew that walls had ears - she’d heard next door at it only a week ago. But could she keep calm and carry on now that port and lemon was in short supply? Only time would tell.

With no reponse from the twins, she got up from the table intending to shout to them upstairs. But as she moved from the kitchen to the front room, she heard a noise in the basement and noticed that the door, behind which the stairs to the basement stood, was open and that there was light seeping through the gap.

“Well that’s strange”, she thought to herself, Wilfred the not-very particular lodger had moved out of the coal bunker weeks ago. But

as she moved towards the door to investigate further, a deep, fathomless boom, a flash of unimaginably bright light, an explosion of disintegrated brain-flecked colour and a pain of momentary but almost ecstatic force, announced that nothing in Cathy Comehome's world would ever be quite the same again. In fact nothing in Cathy Comehome's life and world would ever be again at all.

CHAPTER ONE

Wynford Eagle, 10th June 1946

The bulldozer crawling over the wreckage idled before an unusually large pile of rubble standing at the point which had once been the boundary between Nos 5 and 6 Chorleywood Street. Its driver, who had cleared the way for more than two hundred prefabs in just this way, wiped his brow with a less-than immaculate handkerchief and lit up for the 30th time that morning. It was unseasonably hot and smoking - along with peeing down his own trouser leg was the only way Sid Oats knew to cool down.

He lowered the bulldozer's blade as though in silent acknowledgement that - deserve it or not - it was time for both man and machine to take a break. It was Thursday - cheese and pickle day - and he reached around to find his sandwich box, tucked as always in his carrier bag along with a copy of the *Sydling St Nicholas Sun* and his flask of tea.

The descending blade came momentarily to rest, before falling a few inches further as the ground on which it had briefly stood gave way. Seconds later a larger hole began to form and before long a small crater in the midst of which was a set of largely undamaged steps.

At precisely the same moment there appeared - as though by some environmental sleight of hand - a large dark cloud in the otherwise uninterrupted blue of the mid-summer sky. Spots of rain refracted in the still strong sunshine, but were gone almost before Sid could register their appearance. A chill touched the back of his neck as he descended from the bulldozer's seat. A strange chill, an unaccountable chill, an unearthly chill - not at all like the one he usually felt when a fitfully sleeping Mrs Oats turned

over and unexpectedly glanced his long-retired bedroom warrior.

He peered into the hole but seeing nothing untoward, his thoughts returned to his lunch and the hope that Mrs Oats hadn't been as mean with the Branston as she was with the cocoa.

Several children appeared on the scene, eager to see what if anything the bulldozer's recent traversals had unearthed. Gas masks were always good to find as were any kitchen or other appliances that had survived the blast and could be exchanged for real money which in turn bought either sweets or matinee tickets at the Roxy. Sometimes the treasure trove was enough to get a "*cop and a feel*" from Dirty Rosie behind Timothy Whites.

Seeing them approach the edge of the still unstable crater, Sid was on his guard. "*Now you be careful young'uns*", he said in his faintly comical pot-boiler-novelist-imagined rustic tones. "*That be a dangerous old 'ole that be and what I rek'on is, is that that hole ain't finished of a' movin yet. And as for they stairs. Well I rek'on you don't want to know what's down there. So I says to you, I says, if you don't want to be a'feared for your soul for the rest of your natural, then you'll heed one as knows. And I'm tllin' you: Don't go down those stairs*"

NOW READ ON



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DON'T GO DOWN THOSE STAIRS

A Locke & Roome Mystery Thriller

"Crimeshelf's latest Private Dick
is the real deal"

ELEANOR BEECHWOOD

Praise for E S Collator's **DON'T GO DOWN THOSE STAIRS**

"I'm never going down a set of stairs again"

Elsie Stanner

"A stairway to terror I could never support"

Roger Bannister

*"Not one to read when in lock-down in your
own home"*

Pandemic Advice Weekly

"A self-isolating nightmare if ever I read one"

Illustrated Dorset Panic

*"I'd rather have a three day asymptomatic virus
than read this one again"*

Jeremy Coronabyn