

# **‘The Copper Kettle’**

by

**Edward Richardson**

*For Gladys. The pretty red-haired girl  
I first met when we were children,  
then again when she married Colin Pope.*



***January 1950***

Eddie Pope lived almost ‘on the job’, for the railway signal box he worked in overlooked his house and garden.

He could easily keep watch over his property, but it was a lengthy walk from his home to the box, for there was no way to get through the fence bordering the railway. Part of this walk was across land that once had been a local rubbish tip – it was overgrown by the time Eddie went that way.

Early one morning, when he was on the 'six-till-two turn', he was walking carefully using his hand lamp for illumination. The lamp provided a small pool of light, and he was reluctant to turn up the wick, for that made the lamp smoke and the glass would need cleaning. The light was sufficient for him to see obstacles, but little more.

He tripped on something and stopped to see what it was. Whatever it was glinted like gold. That certainly aroused his curiosity.

It was about ten minutes to six, so he had time to investigate. He couldn't be late, for the man on the 'night turn' would want to be relieved on time.

What Eddie found, almost completely buried in the soil, was an old copper kettle. It was dented, but looked to be in reasonable condition, and the lid was still in place. Using the signal box door-key as a trowel, he lifted the kettle carefully from the ground and took it with him.

### ***February 1950***

Edward looked at his new bicycle; a Christmas present from his parents. The insignia on the frame said 'C W S'. He knew it meant 'Co-operative Wholesale Society', though Rita, the girl next door, said it stood for 'Cows Walk Sideways.' He wondered if that could be true ...

It was a Saturday; and the significance was that he would be riding his new bike the three miles from Shelfield to the home of Mr & Mrs Pope at Newtown, Brownhills, where he would collect fresh eggs, for Mr Pope had a large garden and kept chickens and pigs; they were the means of supplementing his income as a railway signalman.

At Newtown, Mrs Pope welcomed him and the eggs were ready, but it wasn't simply a business transaction, for the Popes had two boys, Colin and Peter. Colin a few years older than Edward, Peter a few years younger.

During most of the year, the three boys would have been out on their 'adventures', but a cold February morning kept them indoors, sitting in front of a roaring fire. Mrs Pope plied them with tea and cakes – and what boy could resist Mrs Pope's cakes?

Edward had a sip of tea, then reached for a cake, but was distracted by something new on the hearth in front of the fire; a small copper kettle, sparkling and golden.

Mrs Pope noticed his interest. "Eddie found it on his way to work one morning," she said. "It isn't any use. The spout dropped off."

Edward looked at her, "May I touch it?" he asked.

"Yes Teddy, pick it up. I'd polished it before the spout came off. If that had happened before I started polishing, I'd have thrown it out."

"Oh don't do that Mrs Pope. It's beautiful."

You may conclude that small boys have strange ideas about what is beautiful, but to Edward, it was.

"Well, perhaps I might keep it. Eddie soldered the spout back on, and it does look nice with the other bits." The 'other bits' being highly polished anti-aircraft shell cases, and old horse-brasses.

### ***December 1953***

Edward was now fifteen. Boxing Day came on a Saturday that year, and as with so many years before, he and his parents had gone to Popes' for a second 'Christmas Dinner'. Mrs Pope loved to cook for family and friends, and Edward's father, also a railwayman, had been friends with Eddie since before the War.

Having left Sheffield Secondary School a week prior to Christmas, Edward was due to start work at the Crabtree electrical factory in Walsall the following Tuesday. This Boxing Day meal was a 'send-off party' to launch a boy into the working world. Mrs Pope made sure it was memorable.

The table was cleared, but Mrs Pope said the washing-up could wait, for she had something to say. The room fell silent.

"Teddy is about to start work," she said. "We wish him well. He's been a regular visitor over the years, and admired the copper kettle I keep by the fire. I'm going to give it to him – but not yet." She paused, then went on, "One day he'll get married, and when he does, I'll give him the kettle."

Edward did not know what to say, and apart from a mumbled 'Thank You', said nothing. A boy of fifteen has not given much thought to marriage.

### ***February 1972***

Nineteen-seventy-two was one of those unusual years; it had an extra day in it.

On that 'Leap Year Day', at Tilehurst in Berkshire, Edward married Miss Heather Templeton. Among the guests were Mr & Mrs Pope. At the reception, Mrs Pope took something from a paper bag and gave it to Edward, it was the copper kettle.

**The End**

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