Helping your children choose books they will love

I reading

Lovereading4kids.co.uk is a book website created for parents and children to make choosing books easy and fun

opening extract from

Master Crook's Crime Academy: Burglary For Beginners

written by

Terry Deary

published by

Scholastic

All Text is Copyright © of the Author / Illustrator

please print off and read at your leisure.

Lovereading4kids.co.uk

CONTENTS

Before word		1
Chapter 1 -	**Grave words of Granny**	5
Chapter 2 -	**Truncheons of fire**	21
Chapter 3 -	**Sacks of swag**	39
Chapter 4 -	**Speaking spirits**	55
Chapter 5 -	**Light of Lime**	71
Chapter 6 -	**Message of mystery**	86
Chapter 7 -	**Show Snow**	103
Chapter 8 -	**Green Fire**	117
Chapter 9 -	**Ship of safety**	133
Chapter 10 -	**Tray away**	151
Chapter 11 -	**Curtain of Crook**	164
Chapter 12 -	**Endings and starts**	177

Before word

You may not remember 1837. You are probably a bit too young. You may be one of those sad people who have been forced to go to school – a punishment far worse than five years in Darlham Gaol if you ask me! But, if you have been to school, your history teacher may have told you that 1837 was the year the old queen came to the throne.

It was quite a large throne because she had a large bottom, of course. In fact she was a short but wide young lady at the time. She grew wider as years passed. Several people tried to shoot her, as you know. They all missed. How they missed such a w-i-d-e target I'll never know.



Those are the sorts of things the history books will tell you. But the story I have to tell you is not so well known. That's because it all happened in a quaint, coastal town in a northern corner of the country. What happened there was sensational. Sensational. If it had happened in the capital of our country then the history books would be full of it.

But it didn't. It happened in the poor little, muddy

little, cold little, wind-wracked, wave-washed, smoke-choked, rat-riddled, sour-smelling little town of Wildpool. A town that time forgot. A midden that's hidden.



I like that phrase, don't you? Of course you youngsters may not know what a midden is. In these days of dustcarts and flushing toilets no one has a midden any more. It was a rubbish tip made up of ashes and all the disgusting things that nobody wanted. Just like Wildpool in fact.

So the story is almost forgotten. You can find parts of this tale in the pages of old newspapers, a few faded diaries and town council reports, the odd letter and scraps of dusty paper.

It would take a long time for you to gather the pieces and make sense of the story, so I have done it for you. I have spent a lifetime gathering the facts and the papers so I can share the story with you.

It is the story of a great plague of crime that swept over Wildpool like one of the winter waves on Wildpool beach sweeps over the pier. A crime wave!

Another little phrase I have invented and that I like a lot. I think it could catch on. But I am interrupting. "Again!" You cry. Sorry. I will try to control myself. Forgive me if I burst out into twittering notes like a skylark. It is the excitement, you know.



And 1837 was an odd time to see such a surge of crime. Your history teacher will have told you that in the 1830s the famous Robert Peel invented the police force to stamp out crime in the country.

So, why (you ask) did crime in Wildpool get worse, not better when the first police began to patrol?

I will tell you, I reply. That is what my story aims to do.

Who am I? and why am I so interested in the Wildpool wave of crime? You ask (you do ask a lot of questions, don't you?).

I will not tell you who I am. All I will say is this: I saw what happened because I was there at the time. I may appear in the pages of this superior story . . . but you will not know it is me.

Why? You ask. Why do I wish to stay hidden in my own tale? Well, some of the things I did were outside

the law. I am not ashamed of what I did. But I am too old to go to jail for crimes that happened over sixty years ago.

Read on for a chronicle of crime that will chill you colder than the East wind that whistled through the Wildpool streets that winter.

A tale of terror, of treasure and of Twistle.

Mr X

22 January 1901



No, Mr X is not my real name. In fact I may not even be a Mr. Perhaps I am a Miss or a Mrs, a Lady or a Lord! But I promised to stop cutting in with these needless notes, didn't I? So don't read this one.

Chapter 1

GRAVE WORDS OF GRANNY

"Never forget," Mrs Smith said. "Never forget what your granny said with her last breath."

"What was that, Mum?" a boy with ragged black hair breathed.

"Your granny looked up from her deathbed—"

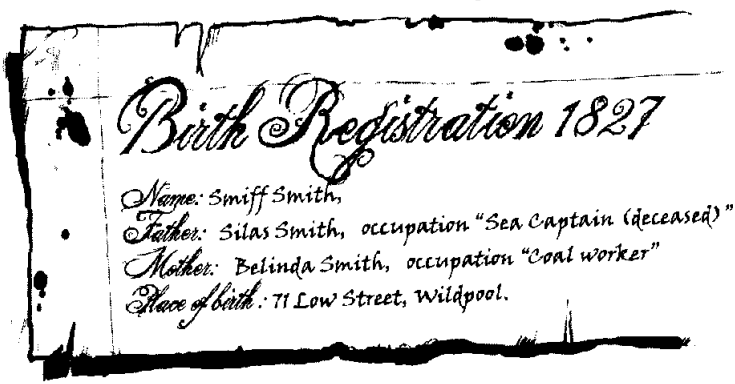
"I thought she was run over by a muck cart," the boy interrupted.

"She was, Smiff."

Yes, that is right. The boy was called Smiff Smith. His mother had to register his name in the church when he was born. When the clerk



asked the boy's name she said, "Smith" . . . as you would! The clerk wrote it down as his FIRST name AND managed to spell it wrong . . . he didn't want to cross it out or change it because he felt a bit of a prawn. So Smiff Smith was given his name.



The woman went damp around the eyes. "We carried her into the house and laid her on the kitchen table," Mrs Smith said and sniffed sadly.

"So it wasn't a death bed?"

Mrs Smith was starting to look a bit cross and her lips went thin and white. "All right. Your granny looked up from her death table and said, 'Never forget, Belinda . . . You can never have too many mop buckets!' "

"Too many mop buckets? What's that supposed to mean?" the boy asked.

Mrs Smith shrugged. "Dunno, Smiff. She died before she could tell us. Oh, how I cried!"

"Because Granny was dead?" He asked gently.

"No, because we couldn't afford a funeral!" she snapped.

"What did you do?"

Mrs Smith shrugged. "It was the muck cart that ran her down, remember, so it was the muck cart that carried her away to the town dump. She didn't mind. She was dead."

Smiff peered at his mum through the sputtering light of the mutton-fat candle.

"Are you lying, Mum?"

She smiled her twisted smile. "All our family tell lies, Smiff. It's what we do best. You know that. But I've never forgotten your granny's last words and I've never been short of mop buckets. Go out and get me one, son."

Smiff sighed. The coal fire was glowing warm. The street cobbles outside were covered in ice and he had no shoes to his name.



That's an odd thing to say. No shoes to fit "name". Why don't people say, "I had no shoes to my feet"? Or "No shoes to my shoe-cupboard"? I don't know. I thought you might know. Excuse me for asking.

Smiff was thin as a rat's tail and had no fat to keep out the cold from his bones.

"Aw, Mum!" he groaned.

Mrs Smith grabbed him by the collar and hissed at him through her yellow teeth. "You wouldn't refuse a dying granny's last wish, would you?"

"No, Mum," he sighed. The boy wrapped a blanket around his shoulders, took one last loving look at the fire and pushed the door open.

The wind was sharper than a butcher's knife, slicing through his blanket and thin shirt. "Why doesn't Mum ever send me out to steal something useful," he muttered through his chattering teeth.



The teeth were chattering to each other as there was no one else in the street to chatter to. But at least they had each other. It is very lonely having no one to chatter to. Granny had a lonely tooth before she died. A single tooth in the middle of her mouth. She was the first woman in the country to have central eating.

"Something like a warm, woollen coat?" But she never did.

He stepped over the horse droppings and crossed

the road by the green-glowing gas lamp. The wind stabbed at him as he climbed up the steep hill of Low Street. At the top he turned towards the High Street. He hurried past dark alleys. A clumsy dust-cart driver almost ran him down . . . Smiff thought the man may have been trying to. "Mum would send me to my funeral on your cart!" he shouted at the man but the clattering hooves and rattling of wheels on the cold cobbles drowned his voice.

At last he reached the row of shops. The apothecary with glowing glass globes of red, blue and yellow liquid cast their rainbow light on the pavement. Smiff hurried past. The wizened wizard who owned the shop was as scary as a rat with rabies and twice as ugly.

He trotted on past the grocer, the greengrocer and the baker, the hat shop and the pawnbroker till he reached the hardware shop with its tin pots and clothes pegs, china cups and pewter mugs. Smiff slipped through a maze of ropes and riddles, candles and cart-grease, buckets and brooms, knives and forks, hammers and handsaws.

The boy picked up a hammer. He picked up a mop



bucket. He looked around. He felt something was watching him. There was no one there . . . or so he thought.

He smashed the hammer against the side of the mop bucket then marched up to the counter.

A thin old man stood there, as grey as the boy's blanket, and peered at him. "My mother is mad," Smiff said.

"Then see a doctor," the old man told him in his creaking-floorboard voice.

"I mean angry-mad. You sold her this bucket and it has a dent in the side!" Smiff showed him the dent he had just made. "She wants a new one, or else!"

"Else?"

"Else she'll come down here with her wet mop and shove it up your nose . . . she says!"

"Better take a new one, son," the shop owner sighed. "I'll lose the money it cost me," he said, shaking his head.

Smiff almost felt sorry for him. But when the old man stepped from behind the counter the boy saw he was wearing boots. He must be rich, Smiff decided.

The boy left the shop with a shining new mop

bucket wrapped in brown paper.

A man in a shabby top hat stood on the street corner. His gooseberry-green eyes glowed in the gas-light. His fingers were fine as twigs on a vine. They rippled when he talked.

As Smiff walked past him he clapped his hands softly. "Well done, my little thief," he said. "You almost got away with that."

The boy shivered and it wasn't with the cold. "Are you a watchman?" he asked.

The man smiled and ivory teeth glowed under his thick, dark moustache. "No. Not the watch. I am Samuel Dreep, a teacher."

"I've heard about teachers," Smiff shuddered. "They take rich children into schools and beat them till they learn."

"I don't work for that sort of school," Dreep laughed. "I will walk with you back to your house in Low Street and explain. . ."

"You know where I live?"

"Oh, yes, young Smiff. We know a lot about you. You are the sort of young man who will do very well in our new school."

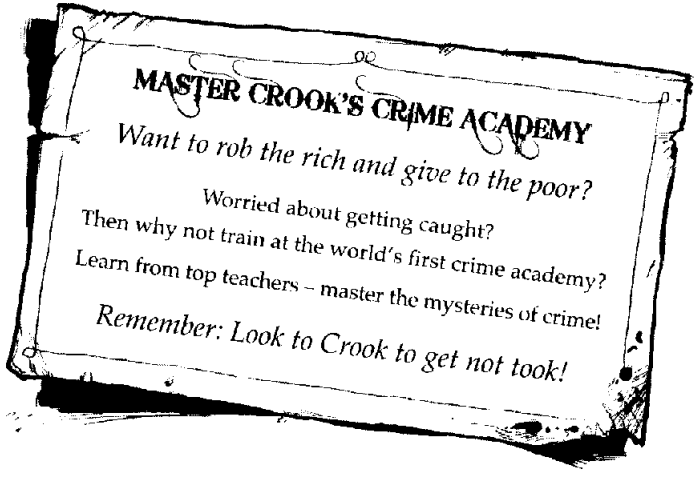
"But Mum taught me how to read and do letters," Smiff boasted.

"Ah, no," Dreep said shaking his head. The two walked down Low Street and the man trod carefully so his leather boots didn't slip on the icy cobbles. "I am a teacher at the famous Master Crook's Crime Academy and I believe I can help you. Come with me."

"Master Crook's Crime Academy? I've never heard of it."

"It's secret . . . but the name is famous in certain parts of the city. Let me show you."

He pulled out a neat piece of cardboard with a printed picture of a fine house. The boy held it under the light of a flaring gas lamp to read it.



"Get not took?" Smiff blinked.

"Get not caught . . . don't get caught," Dreep shrugged. "But 'get not took' sounds better. It's poetry."

Smiff shook his head.

"My mum needs her mop bucket," he said and hurried on.

"She has enough mop buckets," the tall man cried.

"You can never have too many mop buckets," Smiff said. "Never!"

He led the way through the battered front door into the dark hallway of his house. It smelled of dead cats and cabbage. "Hi, Mum! We have a visitor," he said and hurried into the warmth of the living room that smelled of dead cabbage and cats. "This is Mr Samuel Dreep."

Mrs Smith looked up and patted her bird's nest of hair. "Ooooh! Mr Dreep, sir, you caught me all unprepared. Smiff shouldn't go bringing gentlemen in without warning. I mean . . . with my make-up on and my best dress I look ten years younger. Ooooh, I don't know where to put myself."

Samuel Dreep stepped forward and took Mrs Smith's hand. He raised it to his lips and kissed the grubby paw.

"Mrs Smith, you already look ten years younger."

"Ten years younger than what?"

"Ten years younger than Granny," Smiff muttered.

"Your son is so talented," Dreep went on. "A thief as skilful as a cat in a cream factory."

"He is that," Mrs Smith beamed. "Taught him myself."

"I am here to make you an offer. Send him to Master Crook's Crime Academy and he will make you a nice little income for your old age."

"Old age?" she said sharply.

"And your young age! We will train your son in the art of crime. No more stealing trifles like mop buckets. He will bring you diamonds to sparkle like your bright eyes, gold to fill your shining silk purse and dresses of satin to show off your fine figure!"

"Ooooh! Mr Dreep," she giggled like a girl being tickled in a feather factory. "You are naughty." She turned to her son. "Here, Smiff, fill the mop bucket from the pump in the yard and boil some water over the fire. I'm sure Mr Dreep would like a cup of tea."

"Aw, Mum! I just got warm again."

"No tea for me," Dreep put in quickly.



Can you blame him? I mean, Mr Dreep liked tea – we all do. But to know it was boiled in a mop bucket is not a nice thought. Mop buckets are very useful . . . as we shall see . . . and you can never have too many. But please don't use them to make tea.

"I am from Master Crook's Crime Academy and I want to invite young Smiff to join. I can make him a master of the art of crime. The school opens its doors for the first time tomorrow. Your son can be one of the first pupils. He can make it to the very top."

Dreep pulled a square of paper from inside his coat and slipped it on to the table in front of Mrs Smith. Smiff looked at it. Mrs Smith looked at it.

"We call it a school-home contract," Dreep explained.

"Ooooh! There now, Smiff!" she sighed.