

The First Two Pages: *Called to Justice*

By Edith Maxwell (Midnight Ink)

Called to Justice is the second book in the Quaker Midwife Mystery Series, and as with any recurring characters and settings, I need to show the reader the protagonist, location, and time period without hitting them over the head with it. I must also satisfy both returning readers and ones new to the series.

The day had seemed an unlikely one to include death.

This is one of my favorite first lines. Contrast it with the second paragraph in which we see the scene.

On a sunny, hot Independence Day, citizens from miles around had flocked in carriages, by trolley, even on bicycle to the streets of Amesbury, Massachusetts, to celebrate our country's one-hundred-and-twelfth birthday. Colorful buntings hung from buildings, including John W. Higgins, Boots and Shoes, across from where I stood. I strained to keep my place at the edge of Main Street that morning while others jostled for an advantageous spot from which to watch the parade.

We go from talking about death to a sunny, celebratory scene on the nation's birthday. I unobtrusively slide in the year, important to this historical mystery, and the town.

The next paragraph provides a bit of background, including knowing that Rose lives close enough to walk downtown and that she has a beau who is a doctor. We also get more visual and aural color from the celebration.

I'd walked down from the modest home where I lodged with my late sister's husband and his five children. My beau, David Dodge, was taking me to watch the fireworks tonight, but he needed to make rounds at the hospital today so I was on my own for the morning.

I was laughing along with the crowd at one of the horrors, a policeman dressed as a British bobby pulling an outhouse on a cart labeled "Amesbury Lockup," when someone tugged at my sleeve.

And then something disturbing happens.

"Rose," she whispered.

"Hannah," I said to the young woman at my side. Hannah Breed was a Quaker like me and one of my niece Faith's fellow employees at the Hamilton Mill. The smile slid off my face when I focused on her pale visage and drawn, frightened eyes. "What's wrong?"

"Faith has said thee is a midwife."

In these lines we learn the young woman's name and Rose's, and that Rose is a midwife.

"I am." I touched her shoulder. "Thee is troubled."

Here I might have described the feel of the cloth of her dress—is it worn? Cotton, linen, or wool? But I didn't want to slow the urgent conversation.

"I need to talk with thee."

A young, troubled woman and fellow Quaker, needs Rose's help.

Next we get a glimpse of Quakers' views on the military and include the sense of sound.

I barely heard her, because the drums and brass of the Newburyport Cadet Band struck up a tune. The band was followed by the marchers of the Eighth Regiment. The soldiers, walking purposefully in step, wore purple hats and carried rifles with bayonets. I had no desire to watch such a display of militarism, so I took Hannah's hand and pushed through the crowd behind us until we gained the relative quiet of Currier Street.

We moved down the hill until Currier joined Mill Street and opened up to the rushing lower falls of the Powow River. I stood facing Hannah in the welcome shade of one of the Salisbury Manufacturing Company's buildings.

Here I missed an opportunity to bring in the smell of the river or of the hot pavement. Too late now!

"Please tell me what ails thee," I said, although I suspected the cause. She attended Amesbury Friends Meeting, as did I, and I'd detected a change in her the last couple of months.

Hannah gazed at the embroidered handkerchief she twisted in her hands. As she glanced up at me, a roar erupted from the crowd we'd left behind.

More sounds contrast with the quiet spot where they've found to talk.

"I'm in trouble, Rose. I don't know where to turn, what to do." I clasped my hands and waited without speaking. As a member of the Religious Society of Friends, I was accustomed to silence. When we gathered in worship, we sat silently, waiting on the Light.

We get a sense that both Rose is someone people turn to for counsel and that she is comfortable in silence.

“I have not been well. I’m sick often throughout the day. I thought it was a touch of illness.” She paused, lifting her chin. “But then I missed my monthly.”

As I thought. “How many times?”

“Three.” She laid a hand on her belly. “I have felt it move.” Indeed her simple forest-green dress strained around her chest and waist. So far her figure only appeared thickened, but it wouldn’t be long before the bulge of a growing child in the womb would be unmistakable.

Here we learn what women called their periods a hundred and thirty years ago, and that Hannah is past the initial stages of pregnancy. Unmarried Hannah is indeed in trouble.

The book goes on from there, of course, with amateur sleuth Rose Carroll to the rescue.

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Agatha- and Macavity-nominated Edith Maxwell writes the Quaker Midwife Mysteries, the Local Foods Mysteries, and award-winning short crime fiction. *Turning the Tide* is her latest historical mystery. As Maddie Day she writes the popular Country Store Mysteries and a new 2019 series. Maxwell is president of Sisters in Crime New England and lives north of Boston with her beau, two elderly cats, and an impressive array of garden statuary.

Maxwell blogs with the Wicked Cozy Authors, at Killer Characters, and at Under Cover of Midnight, and hopes you'll check out all her writing and her social media links at her web site.