"Please Tell Me Where's Her Head"
Pearl Bryan in Song and Story

By Paul Slade

All the material in this book first appeared in Sept. 2011 on
www.PlanetSlade.com

Please visit the site for information on many other murder ballads, including *Stagger Lee*, *Frankie & Johnny*, *Knoxville Girl*, *Hattie Carroll* and *Tom Dooley*.

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Chapter One

In which a pregnant girl's body is found, but not her head.

"The lives and deaths of Pearl Bryan, Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling had everything to make a great story. It had mystery love, tragedy and pathos. Its brutality was enraging and its inhumanity sickening,"
– Joe Doran, *Cincinnati Post,* May 8, 1930.

"There was the image of a young country girl meeting her tragic end in the big city, there was the scandalous subject of out-of-wedlock pregnancy. There was a question of innocence or guilt. And there was a missing head."
– George Stimson, *The Cincinnati Crime Book.*

His first guess was that the girl must have passed out from too much drink.

John Hewling often stumbled across women in that state on his Saturday morning walks into work, and this corner of his employer's orchard always seemed to be the spot where he found them. The three-board fence separating it from Alexandria Pike road was easy to climb, and led directly to a disused wagon track inside where thick privet bushes hid everyone from view. The young farmhand knew that soldiers from the nearby fort often entertained the local whores here, and he'd gotten used to finding the debris of their parties strewn around when he arrived for work next day. "It was a lonely spot, and they used it for a trysting place," he told reporters. "We had to run lots of women out of there who were drunk." (1)

Something about this particular girl stopped Hewling from trying to rouse her. She was lying on her back, angled down the slope of a bank with her feet at the top and her arms flung up over her shoulders - a position that would make sleep difficult however drunk you were. Her clothes were in disarray, with the skirt of her long green dress pulled up to conceal everything above her waist.

The sun was still rising on this cold, foggy February morning, so that's about all Hewling would have seen on his first inspection. It was enough to convince him this was no routine drunk, though, and that he didn't want to get any closer to her just at the moment. Instead, he ran straight to his boss's house to raise the alarm.

John Lock, the farmer who owned the land, sent Hewling off to summon the police from the nearby town of Newport, and then to alert Colonel Cochran, who commanded the US infantry regiment at Fort Thomas itself. Jule Plummer, the county sheriff, Bob Tingley, the coroner, and Lock himself led a small party back to the orchard, arriving there a little before 10:30am. Now there was enough light to see the whole scene.

"As they approached, they noticed that the ground was torn, leaves were scattered about and bushes were trampled," writes the *Cincinnati Post's* Joe Doran. "Spots of blood flecked the privet bushes to a height of two or three feet. Beside the woman lay a tan kid glove. The woman's dress, which covered her

head, was pale green. […] A short distance from the body was a woman's white corset, with part of the left shoulder strap cut away.

"Coroner Tingley walked to the woman, grasped her foot, and tumbled her down the bank into the roadway. The small party started back in horror at what his move revealed. When the woman fell to the road and her dress slipped down from her neck, the men found themselves staring at a headless body.

"'When I saw that, I got weak and sick,' Hewling said. 'It was the most gruesome sight I have ever seen'."

With the skirt pulled away, it was also obvious that the girl had been half stripped. "Officers were at first inclined to believe that the woman had been outraged before she was murdered," says the *Cincinnati Enquirer*. "The upper part of the woman's dress was open, as was the garment beneath and her bosom was bare. The skirtband was unloosed, and the skirt of the dress was gathered up above the waist. Beneath the stump of the neck, there was a large pool of blood." (2)

All this happened on Saturday, February 1, 1896, in the Kentucky town of Fort Thomas, just across the river from Cincinnati, Ohio. The crime uncovered that day was still producing headlines in both states' papers a century later, and has inspired as many as six different songs. It's become an archetype of the "Murdered Girl" ballad, recorded by everyone from Charlie Poole to The Crooked Jades, and a vivid example of the way that story's narrative stereotypes shape its telling. Most recently, Pearl's tale has been told by a dance troupe in San Francisco, where Kate Weare's company choreographed it as part of their 2011 show at the city's ODC Theatre.

Oh, and one more thing: They still haven't found her head.

The late 19th Century was a turbulent time for Newport and the other small Kentucky settlements lining the Ohio river's state boundary. Jim Reis's review of *Kentucky Post* front pages from that era lists an impressive selection of natural disasters, including an earthquake (1877), a steamboat sunk by ice floes on the river (1881), floods (1884), tornados (1890) and a bridge collapse (1892). (3)

Meanwhile, just across the river, Cincinnati was dealing with problems of its own. Settled in 1788, the city had grown rapidly to become what state historians call "the first American boomtown in the centre of the country". But the shift from steamboats to railroads slowed that growth dramatically and, by 1890, Cincinnati had fallen well behind its mid-west rivals, boasting only 297,000 residents against the burgeoning Chicago's 1.1m. Ten years earlier, you would have needed just two Cincinnatis to equal Chicago's population: now it was more than three.

One field where Cincinnati still led the way, however, was its consumption of beer. The city grew its population by just over a third in the 20 years to 1890, but trebled its beer production over the same period. About half of that beer was drunk in Cincinnati itself, which means the city's annual consumption rose from 26 gallons per person in 1870 to 40 gallons per person in 1893. The national figure in 1893 was just 16 gallons per person. (4)

In 1890, Cincinnati had 1,810 saloons for a population of just 297,000 people – equivalent to one for every 37 adult males in the city. The booziest streets of all were Vine Street, which had 136 saloons in 1890 and Central Avenue, which had 100. Close behind came Walnut Street and Main Street, with 55 saloons each, then Liberty Street with 41 and Court Street's 34. The single

block of Fifth Street linking Main and Sycamore had 20 saloons that year, which can't have left room for much else. (5)

It was around this time that the military barracks in Newport upped sticks to move four miles south-west and create what is now Fort Thomas. They made that move in the early 1890s, and many local businesses were forced to follow in the barracks' wake. These concerns, which included a pool-room, a barbershop, a hotel, several tattoo parlours and a host of Newport's own saloons, set up a new entertainment district called the Midway opposite the fort's new site in Tower Park. "It was a fairly rough and wild area of town at night because of all the soldiers stationed at Fort Thomas," one newspaper notes. It was along the Midway that these soldiers found the working girls they'd later sport with in John Lock's orchard.

Sheriff Plummer and the rest of the men now standing in that orchard arranged for the girl's body to be taken to White's funeral parlour in Newport for autopsy, and then set about gathering what evidence they could. There was a glove thrown to one side on the ground, and a scrap of the dead woman's dress found hanging on a branch several yards from the body.

Examining the footprints they'd found leading to the spot, Plummer concluded that a man and a woman had been walking side by side there. "For some reason, the woman had attempted to flee, and the man had followed and overtaken her," the *CE* reports. "The tracks were especially distinct here, for the woman had run through a very muddy spot, which she would have avoided had she been able to pick her way."

Plummer could see this was too big a case for him to handle alone, so his next move was to phone Larry Hazen, Cincinnati's chief of detectives, for help. "I'm the sheriff of this county, and I think I'm a good sheriff," Plummer explained. "But I know I'm not a detective." (6)

Hazen had two of his best men, John McDermott and Cal Crim, working a vice detail in Cincinnati's black district at the time. Everyone assumed that Plummer's headless girl would turn out to be one of the Midway's prostitutes, so it made sense to give McDermott and Crim the case. "The first impression was that the victim was probably one of our charges," Crim writes. "I went over to Newport to see Sheriff Plummer. He was pretty well worked up over the case and at a loss how to proceed."

Plummer took Crim and McDermott out to the orchard at about 1:00pm, where they set about searching for clues. "When the sheriff and I arrived, the body had been removed to an undertaker's in Newport, but the ground showed signs of struggle and was soaked with coagulated blood," Crim says. He noticed blood on the leaves of the bushes all around him, and on the edge of the bank. When McDermott pulled the leaves through his hand, he found the blood was still wet enough to stick to his fingers and leave a red mark.

Crim compares the blood spots to glistening rain drops, which shone with reflected light when he turned the leaves in his hand. "I found near these blood spots an impression on the ground as though someone had been sitting there," he says. "During the time I was there, some person took a stick and dug down six or seven inches. There was blood down as far as he went."

One of the soldiers aiding in the search also found a group of closely-spaced cuts in the earth where he thought someone had plunged a knife in and out to cleanse it of blood. Digging at the slits with his own pocket knife, he unearthed a clot of blood and some long blonde hairs. The clothes Hewling had found the

girl wearing that morning were too dry to have been caught in the previous evening's rainstorm, so the detectives knew she must have arrived in the orchard after that rain had stopped at about 10:30pm on Friday.

Examining the ground near where the body was found, Crim discovered a set of man's footprints leading across Alexandria Pike and up the hill to an abandoned cistern which had once been used to collect rainwater. The cistern was 15 feet deep, and partly covered by a large stone, where Crim found a handprint marked in blood. But the cistern itself was empty, and the footprints led on up the hill to the edge of Covington Reservoir.

Further searches that day produced a blood-stained scrap of cloth from a woman's chemise stuffed into some tree roots near the scene and a piece torn from a man's shirt-sleeve, also stained with blood. There were fresh wagon tracks on Alexandria Pike, leading back towards Cincinnati, and police found a woman's hat, crushed and broken, on the same route. The hat was tied to a stone with a blood-stained handkerchief, suggesting the killer's intention had been to dump it in the river as his wagon crossed Cincinnati's Central Bridge. Still there was no sign of the head.

Plummer's next call was to Robert Carothers, his family doctor and a professor at Ohio Medical College. Tingley, who had a parallel career in state politics which interested him far more than his medical work, seems to have fled for the state legislature in Frankfort immediately after the body was found, so Plummer needed someone he could trust to carry out the autopsy immediately.

Carothers was out on his rounds when Plummer called, and got home late that Saturday afternoon to find the sheriff's urgent messages awaiting him. "I called back and, without further explanation, he asked me to go immediately to a nearby undertaking establishment," he writes.

"I walked the short distance and, as I approached the address, I realised that something unusual must have happened. Crowds were milling about, voices were loud and angry, and women were hysterical. I pushed through the crowds, reached the door of the undertaking establishment, and gained entrance with two other men, who stated they were detectives from Cincinnati." Those two men, of course, were Crim and McDermott, now back from their first examination of the scene, and the undertaker was White's.

Plummer hustled them all to an upstairs room and told Carothers what he'd found. "Since the County Coroner was away at the time, Mr Plummer asked me to perform the autopsy," Carothers writes. "He said 'This is a big thing, and there must be no mistakes'." Plummer seemed quite relived that Tingley had dealt himself out of this one, Carothers adds. He knew that Carothers had a lot of experience in conducting autopsies, and thought he could rely on him to focus more seriously on the case than Tingley would have done.

The crowd Carothers describes at the funeral parlour shows how fast news of Hewling's grim find had got out. Contemporary reports agree that hundreds of curious visitors made their way to Lock's orchard that day, despite the heavy rain that fell all Saturday afternoon. They came on foot, on horseback, in their own carriages, or via Cincinnati's streetcar system, which had a convenient stop near the site. In the process of scouring the orchard for keepsakes, they destroyed what may otherwise have proved crucial evidence, as the Cincinnati printer Barclay & Co's 1896 account of the case makes clear.

"Relic-hunters were out in great force," Barclay says. "They almost demolished the bush under which the body was discovered, breaking off branches

on which blood spots could be seen. They peered closely into the ground for blood-spotted leaves, stones and even saturated clay. Anything that had a bloodstain on it was seized upon eagerly. Hairs of the unfortunate woman were at a premium, men and boys, and even young women, examining every branch and twig of the bush in the midst of which the struggle took place." Any evidence Crim and McDermott had not recovered already, they would have to do without.

While all this was going on, Carothers was back in Newport, preparing for the autopsy. Surrounding him in the room at White's as he began were the various effects police had collected from the scene. These included a blood-stained suit of long underwear found wrapped round a stone near the girl's body, the white corset with the severed shoulder strap, a chequered kimono and the dead girl's shoes, which lay perched on the room's mantelpiece.

Carothers could see from the softness of the girl's hands that she had not been engaged in any kind of manual labour. A number of pale impressions on her fingers told him she'd worn rings there until very recently, and Carothers guessed that these – like the head – had been removed by her killer to make identifying his victim as difficult as possible. There was no sign she'd been raped, but that was where the good news stopped.

"I determined that the woman was young, probably 20 or 21 years old, that she had been alive at the time immediately before her head had been completely severed, and that she had been between four-and-a-half and five months pregnant," Carothers writes. "The stomach contents also revealed a large quantity of cocaine."

He had good evidence for all those conclusions. It was the underside of the leaves they'd found that were most stained, so police knew the blood must have been travelling upward when it hit them. The torn-up earth showed the girl was flat on the ground when her neck was severed, and if she hadn't still been alive at that point, the blood would have had no heartbeat to propel it so high into the bushes around her. Judge NL Bennett, who'd been at the scene that morning, testified that as much as six pints of blood had drained from the girl's body into the surrounding earth, and Carothers knew that cutting the head off a dead body could not have produced that result.

The detail of his examination showed signs that the killer had slashed at the girl's throat before getting her down on the ground, and then cut through her neck from the back forwards. The fresh cuts Carothers found on her hands suggested she'd tried to fight off the attack.

"The free flow of blood from the arteries proved beyond doubt that the girl was alive just immediately before her head was completely severed," Carothers writes. Later, when asked by reporters to expand on this, he added: "It would be easy for a man to cut a woman's head off with a knife, even if he had no knowledge of anatomy. I could cut a woman's head off with a small penknife, and it wouldn't take long to do it."

As soon as news leaked out that the dead girl had been pregnant, interest in the case jumped up another notch. Carothers decided that he had better preserve the dead baby, so he sent a message to his friend John Youngblut, who ran a drugstore just one block away from White's. Did Youngblut have a container of any kind that might be suitable to keep a human foetus in?

"Mr Youngblut looked around, and really didn't think he had anything that could be used," Carothers writes. "Then he noticed his counter full of candy, and all those lovely jars containing peppermint sticks.

"He picked up a jar, emptied all the peppermint sticks on the counter, and handed the jar to the messenger, who delivered it to me as fast as he could. I put the foetus in the jar, added a preservative, and carried it back to Mr Youngblut's store to show him. I set it on the counter, and it immediately aroused the curiosity of the customers in the store. Within a few hours, Mr Youngblut's soda water business rose to enormous heights. The people in the neighbourhood heard about the 'baby' in the candy jar, and they all came for a look."

As Youngblut's customers examined the foetus, a train carrying Arthur Carter's famous bloodhound team was pulling in at Cincinnati's Grand Central Depot. Plummer had summoned the three dogs, handled on this occasion by Arthur's son William, from their home in Seymour, Indiana, to help police find the girl's missing head. Jack, Wheeler and Stonewall were canine celebrities in all the surrounding states, with the Carters boasting their tracking skills had helped to jail over 20 criminals and hang at least one more.

Plummer took Carter and his dogs to White's, where he collected some of the dead girl's clothes, and then they set off for the orchard. It was dark by the time they got there at about 6:30pm, but Plummer had brought enough lanterns to let them continue.

"Sheriff Plummer had the corset and the sleeve of an undergarment, and gave the dogs a scent," the *CE* reports. "The dogs, with noses close to the ground, ran hither and thither in a confused manner. It was evident that the dogs were useless, as all tracks left by the murderer and his victim had been obliterated by the thousands of people who had crossed over the place where the body was found."

Plummer and Carter persisted, leading the dogs to a less trampled place where police had earlier spotted those tracks leading up to Covington Reservoir. This time, they had more luck. "The dogs took up the trail and silently followed it," the *CE* says. "[There was] no sound beyond the sniffing of the hounds and the clink-clank of the chains by which the dogs were held. The officers felt they were on the right track. Arriving at the edge of the water, the three dogs stopped, gazed from side to side , and then, with heads thrown back, simultaneously emitted a prolonged howl. The howl was repeated, and Carter said: 'You'll find the woman's head right in there'."

Plans were made to search the reservoir on Monday – the earliest this could be arranged – and Plummer had no choice but to call it a day. The reporters at the scene rushed back to their offices, confident they now had enough to construct a suitably lurid account of the crime for the next morning's papers. It was those accounts which Barclay & Co pasted together in its quickie exploitation booklet.

"The murderer overtook his victim," Barclay says. "He choked her into silence and dragged her toward the bushy bank. She struggled desperately, and he tore a handful of cloth from her dress. He threw her to the ground and slid over the bank with her. He must have drawn his knife after the struggle began, otherwise he would have used it sooner. He slashed at her throat. She clutched at the knife […] and three times the blade laid her palm or fingers open to the bone. Her struggle was useless, and in a moment her life blood was pouring from a gaping wound in her throat."

Sunday morning's *CE* takes up the story from there. "He cut clean across the back of her neck, connecting the ends of the jagged wound on her throat, and then hacked away with his knife until the head was severed from the body," it

says. "He wrapped the head in the dead woman's cloak, thrust his knife into the ground once or twice to cleanse it of blood, climbed the fence at the edge of the yard and then started away, carrying the head."

The paper relates the killer's climb up the hill, describes the empty cistern with its bloody handprint, and then concludes: "He did not leave his ghastly burden here, but went on towards the reservoir. At the edge of the bank, overlooking the reservoir, all trace of him is lost. He may have thrown the head into the reservoir and the cloak with it, weighted with stones to sink it."

That was certainly what Plummer believed as Saturday drew to a close, and the version above is a fair summary of what the papers had been able to glean so far. What the their reporters *didn't* know was that, while they'd been following Plummer and his bloodhounds round the reservoir, Crim and McDermott were pursuing a foot trail of their own.

One of the people who came out to gawp at the murder scene on Saturday afternoon was LD Poock, the owner of a Newport shoe shop. Watching police gather up the girl's body and take it away, he noticed how unusually narrow her shoes were. Poock could see they were a relatively rare size, and came forward to tell Crim and McDermott this might help identify their owner. "Every shoe has a number stamped on it by the manufacturer for his records," he explained. "In this manner, we may be able to determine to what dealer the shoe was sold and to whom the dealer sold the shoe."

The detectives had already noted down an inscription reading "22-11-62458" from inside the shoes, but not realised just how helpful this number might prove. Now that he understood its significance, Crim collected the shoes from the mantelpiece at White's and took them to Cincinnati's Krippendorf shoe factory. The manager checked his books, found the number listed, and identified the manufacturer as a company called Drew Selby in Portsmouth, Ohio. The shoes were made of black cloth and leather with a button decoration, and "22-11" was Drew Selby's mark for size 3B.

"It was then past noon on Saturday, but I was able to get in touch with Will Selby at his home," Crim writes. "He graciously went to the factory where, after consulting records, he reported that shoes of that kind and size had been sold by his firm to Lewis & Hayes of Greencastle, Indiana, where DePauw University is located." The store had bought a dozen pairs of shoes in that style, three of which matched the dead girl's foot size.

It was Saturday night by the time the detectives knew which store had sold the shoes, and they would have liked nothing more than to set off for Greencastle immediately. Cincinnati didn't pay its policemen enough to front up the cost of the 130-mile journey themselves, though, and they knew they wouldn't be able to draw any city cash until Monday, so the trip would have to wait.

That was unfortunate, because the issue of identifying the body was becoming urgent. With no name to attach to the dead girl in their care, the police couldn't afford to dismiss anyone who claimed they could help. In the space of a single day, 24 people came forward to report missing girlfriends, sisters or wives, who they believed may now be lying dead in White's. If their description tallied at all with what police knew of the body, they were allowed to examine it in person. Many turned out to be time-wasters, who simply wanted an excuse to see such a notorious corpse for themselves, but others demanded more investigation.

One Cincinnati woman named Hart swore the body was that of her daughter, Ella Markland, who she'd last seen on Christmas Eve. Amid many sobs, Mrs Hart told police that she recognised the body from what Barclay calls "the peculiar shape of the legs from the knee down, and by the general contour of the breasts, waist and limbs." But Ella was later found alive and well, working as a domestic servant on Cincinnati's Ninth Street.

On Sunday, February 2, a Mrs McDonald contacted the detectives from Chicago, saying her daughter Alva had been missing for nearly a week. "I dreamed that I saw my daughter's body lying in a pool, and became convinced that she had been murdered," she told them. Alva had last been seen in the Chicago neighbourhood of West Pullman, and her mother had no idea how she might have ended up getting killed in Kentucky. With no more reliable theory to go on, however, Crim and McDermott couldn't afford to rule Alva out.

Meanwhile, they were already chasing a lead from Cincinnati's Atlantic Garden tavern, where a regular patron called Mollie had not been seen for the past four or five days. The *CE* hinted heavily that Mollie had been one of the prostitutes who used Atlantic Garden to meet her soldier clients, saying the other girls there were already gossiping about her being the killer's victim. Police added both Alva and Mollie's name to their list of possibles, and circulated their descriptions to the increasingly rabid press, but nothing came of either theory.

The most promising candidate of all at this stage was Francisca Engelhardt, a Cincinnati woman who'd recently taken up with a Dakota doctor called Kettner. Engelhardt had disappeared from the boarding house where she lived, and it was Anna Burkhardt, her landlady there, who came forward. When allowed in to inspect the body, Burkhardt was more certain than ever. "I could recognise her hand out of hundreds," she said. "She had remarkably beautiful hands and always held up the right one in a peculiar position when speaking. When I saw the body at the morgue, I took her hand and placed it in that position, and the resemblance strongly confirmed my first conclusion."

Crim must surely have rolled his eyes at Burkhardt's testimony – first a dream identification, and now this! But there was good reason to take Dr Kettner seriously as a suspect. He'd just vanished from Cincinnati too, and police quickly discovered that he'd married Englhardt without troubling to divorce an earlier wife first. This discarded wife had been pursuing him from town to town ever since, and had refrained from suing him so far only because she lacked the funds.

Neither Burkhardt nor Engelhardt then knew that Kettner was a bigamist, but they didn't quite trust him anyway. When the landlady warned Englehardt to be wary with this one, she replied that she carried the wedding certificate on her at all times, tucked beneath the bosom of her corset. If Kettner had been anxious to recover that wedding certificate for fear it might incriminate him, then perhaps that would explain why the dead girl had been found half-stripped, but not sexually assaulted.

"Superintendent of police Deitsch and Mayor Caldwell considered this the best clue on which the detectives could work," Barclay tells us. "Dr Kettner had a motive, which made this clue seem the right one for such a deed as committed at Fort Thomas. Being a bigamist, and fearing that his first wife, who followed him so many miles, would prosecute him, his only hope was to secure the marriage certificate and other evidence against him." Police pursued this line for a few days, and eventually traced Kettner to Marquette in Michigan, where Francisca was found alive and well and still living with him. It turned out the couple fled

Cincinnati only because Kettner knew his real wife had arrived in town, and he considered that a little too close for comfort.

As long as the dead girl could not be named, most people still assumed she was a local prostitute, and that her killer was a soldier. I spoke to Debbie Buckley of Fort Thomas Military Museum during my visit there, and she told me Colonel Cochran's men would then have accounted for well over half of the nascent town's population. "At that time, the soldiers were just getting ready for the Spanish-American war, so the fort was a pretty big deal," she said. "I think there were something like nine bars in that area. People came from all over the place, and I'm told there were a lot of women of the night who came from Newport and Cincinnati to entertain the soldiers."

Bernie Spencer confirms this point on his Kentucky history site. "There was a lot of rivalry between the north, central and south parts of what is now Fort Thomas," he writes. "There was much dissension in the area, and much blame placed on what was interpreted as the general hooliganism of the fort." (10)

Cochran was well aware of all this, and wanted to be sure his men weren't unjustly blamed for the killing. "He will order a search of every man's clothing and quarters and a careful examination of the whereabouts of every man on the night of the murder," the *CE* reassured its readers. "He is confident no man of the regiment has anything to do with the cowardly crime. He merely wishes to clear them of all suspicion."

Cochran was determined no-one would be able to dismiss his investigation as a whitewash, so he invited the civil police to join the searches, and ensured they could thoroughly satisfy themselves that his men were innocent. This meticulous approach paid off, and Barclay reports that Crim and his colleagues were soon convinced no soldier had been involved. "Until that point, the community really was suspicious," Buckley told me. "A generation or two ago, moms didn't want their daughters coming down there near the fort because of all the soldiers. I'm sure that's been in play for a hundred years."

Chapter Two

In which we meet the victim and her killers.

When Monday morning came around, Crim, McDermott and Plummer got their advance train fare from the police accounts office, and set off for Greencastle. A group of reporters from Cincinnati's papers gave chase.

Calling at Lewis & Hayes, the shoe store they'd identified, the detectives got Mr Hayes to examine his records, and found that two of the shop's three pairs in the dead girl's size had been sold. "One was purchased by the wife of a soldier in Fort Knox, Kentucky," Crim writes. "A telegram to Fort Knox brought the information that she was there with her husband, safe and sound. The other pair had been bought, as part of her graduation outfit, by Pearl Bryan, the daughter of Mr and Mrs Alexander S Bryan, living on a farm on the outskirts of Greencastle."

Pearl, born on October 12, 1872, was the youngest of the Bryans' seven children, and had graduated from Greencastle High School at 19. "She had bright blue eyes, blonde hair that shaded to auburn, a pretty face [and] the flawless complexion of an unspoiled country girl", the *CP* tells us. "She had an attractive personality, a jolly disposition, and a confiding manner. She dressed well, and conducted herself modestly and demurely." Reis adds that Pearl was "a Sunday school and church worker, sprightly and vivacious, and a social favourite in her home". She was slender, and a fraction under 5ft 6ins tall. (11)

The Bryans had read about the decapitated girl found in Fort Thomas, and already started to fear that it might be Pearl. They'd heard nothing from her since she'd left home on Monday January 27, boarding a train at Greencastle station for what she told them was a visit to the Bishop family in Indianapolis. The newspaper reports said that the dead girl had marks on her fingers suggesting she might have been a seamstress, adding that a small wart had once been removed from the thimble finger of her right hand. That sounded enough like his sister for Fred Bryan to telegraph the Bishops, who told him this was the first they'd heard of any such trip.

Pearl's married sister, Mabel Stanley, had a hat shop in Greencastle, so Crim gathered up the evidence the detectives had brought with them from Cincinnati, and went there to question her. "When I arrived, I sensed that the purpose of my mission was suspected with dread," he writes. "Behind locked doors, the sister identified the kimono as her own. She had lent it to Pearl for her trip. Her brother, Fred Bryan, confirmed the identification."

Mabel and Fred took Crim, McDermott and Plummer out to the Bryan family farm. They arrived about 2:00am on Wednesday morning, showing Pearl's mother the clothes they'd brought with them by the light of a kerosene lamp in the front parlour. "Grimly, the detectives waited while Crim drew forth underclothing, shoes and the hat that had been found on the road from Fort Thomas to Cincinnati," Doran writes. "Bit by bit, the mother identified them. Each and every one had been worn by her daughter." The wart marks they'd found on the dead girl's hand and the hairpins recovered at the murder scene told the same story. Asked who her daughter might have visited in Cincinnati, the Bryans mentioned a young man called Scott Jackson, but could think of no-one else.

"Crim clinched the identification when he asked Mrs Bryan if Pearl's toes had been webbed together for quite a space from the foot," Doran continues. "They had, and so had the toes of the girl whose headless body lay in White's undertaking establishment." Mabel broke down at this point, sobbing that she and the other children had teased Pearl about her webbed toes when she was little. "Mrs Bryan," Crim said, "your daughter has been brutally murdered, and her body lies in Newport."

Crim returned to Greencastle, went to the town's Western Union office, and sent Deitsch a telegram saying he'd conclusively identified the body as Pearl Bryan's. Seeing this telegram, AW Early, the office manager, told Crim he thought his friend Will Wood might know something about Pearl's killing. Wood, a local clergyman's son, was a medical student at Greencastle's DePauw University, and a friend of the same Scott Jackson the Bryans had mentioned. They'd met when Jackson's widowed mother moved to Greencastle in around 1893. Jackson, then apprenticed to a dentist in Indianapolis, was in his early twenties at the time, and Wood a few years younger.

"Wood, being of a rather reckless disposition, would go to Indianapolis to see Jackson, and together they would have a big time in the city," Barclay reports. "Both being fond of ladies' company, they spent much of their time together in the company of women of loose moral character and were in several very unsavoury escapades, escaping notoriety under assumed names."

Wood was Pearl's second cousin, and most accounts agree that she treated him as a brotherly confidant. He introduced her to Jackson in the Spring of 1895. "To those not knowing his habits, [Jackson was] a handsome, affable, pleasing man of fine form and features," Barclay says. "He became attentive and, with a veneer of the usages of polite society, managed to fascinate the farmer's daughter. So great was his control over her that she is said to have kept appointments with him in the dental office where he was serving his apprenticeship."

Early told Crim that he'd seen Pearl and Jackson together in the telegraph office several times, and that they'd always seemed very friendly. Jackson transferred to the dental college in Cincinnati in October 1895, and his visits to Greencastle became far less frequent. Wood had shown Early a letter he'd received from Jackson at around this time confiding that he - Jackson – had been "too intimate" with Pearl and that, as a result, she was pregnant. Several other letters followed, suggesting various drugs and potions which Jackson urged Wood to obtain for Pearl in the hopes of terminating the pregnancy. Wood shared these letters with Early too, and seemed to carry out Jackson's instructions to the letter. But it was all to no avail.

"The drugs did not have the desired effect," Early told Crim. "Wood had written to Jackson, informing him that Pearl Bryan was showing the effects of her indiscretion. […] Jackson regretted that his recipes had failed, and suggested that the girl be sent to Cincinnati, stating that he could arrange to have an abortion performed on her.

"Wood told me after that Pearl had gone to Cincinnati to have a criminal operation performed, and had told her parents she was going to Indianapolis to visit friends. She had money with her, sufficient to cover any expenses she might incur in such an undertaking."

That was enough to give Crim a firm suspect in the killing, so he sent another telegram to Deitsch. "Arrest and charge with murder of Pearl Bryan one Scott Jackson, student at Dental College," he dictated. "About 24 years old, 5ft 7

or 8ins tall, weighs about 135 pounds. Blonde, nearly sandy moustache, light complexion, may have beard of about six months growth. Effeminate in appearance." Crim added a description of Will Wood, saying he should be arrested as an accomplice to the murder if Deitsch happened to find him in Cincinnati too.

Later than day, Crim, McDermott and Plummer shook off the reporters who'd been tailing them and left Greencastle for the 145-mile trip north to South Bend, Indiana, where they'd been told Wood was visiting his uncle. They arrived there in the early hours of Thursday morning, dragging Wood out of bed at about 4:00am to question him. He was reluctant to help them at first, claiming he knew nothing about Pearl's relationship with Jackson, but Crim soon changed his mind.

"I don't think you had anything to do with the girl's death," Crim told him. "We want you as a material witness against Jackson. You can either come with us without a fight, or I'll charge you with murder, take you back to Cincinnati and make you stand trial on that charge." Wood very sensibly chose the first option and, as he rode back towards Cincinnati on the train with his captors, he filled them in on just who Scott Jackson was. (12)

Scott Jackson was just 14 when his father died, and he began working as a messenger boy for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company in Jersey City. A few years later, he had risen to become a clerk there, and the company transferred him to its accounts receivable department where he worked for a Mr Letts. The two men became friends, and were often seen drinking together outside the office.

"Part of [Jackson's] job was to open the mail each day and add up the cheques to be deposited into the railroad's accounts," Greencastle's *Banner Graphic* reports. "His boss cooked up a scheme to steal some of the cheques, cash them and split the money. Most of the money was spent carousing at some of the most notorious saloons in Jersey City, and a good portion was bet on the horses. The theft amounted to over $32,000." (13)

Jackson's role in this scheme was to pocket the cheques and pass them to Letts, who would then cash them. The $32,000 they stole would be worth over $750,000 today, and it wasn't long before the company noticed something was wrong. An audit of Letts' department revealed the fraud, and both he and Jackson were charged with embezzlement. But the first trial ended in a hung jury.

"Before the second trial took place, the railroad company found such proof of Jackson's guilt that he found it healthy to turn state's evidence against Letts," Barclay says. "The latter was sentenced to a long term in the state prison. Jackson went free, and also went away from Jersey." Even Crim is unable to disguise his disgust as Jackson turning grass in this episode. "That was the kind of fellow he was," he snorts in his own memoir.

Jackson had a year or so as an advertising salesman in New York, again enjoying all the temptations a big city had to offer, and then followed his mother to Indiana. She'd moved to Greencastle after Jackson's sister married Dr Edwin Post, a Latin professor at DePauw. Jackson's mother was well-educated, and her daughter's good marriage meant the whole family was welcomed into the top tier of Greencastle's society. Jackson's good looks, manners and charm ensured he was a popular figure there. He studied at the dental school in Indianapolis, about 40 miles away, but spent most of his spare time in Greencastle itself.

One of the town's attractions was Pearl, who Jackson often encountered at dances and parties there. Jackson's father had been a transatlantic sea captain,

taking his young son with him on voyages overseas whenever he could, and this gave the lad a stock of exotic tales guaranteed to impress Pearl. "They had the same friends, attended the same parties, and their acquaintance ripened into friendship," the CP reports. "The youth's stories of far-away places and strange experiences fascinated the maid."

"Jackson was a dapper fellow," one of his Greencastle friends adds. "He had smiling blue eyes, a high forehead, correct and attractive features and a pleasant voice. He was careful in his appearance and bright in his talk. […] He was abstemious when it was to his advantage, but could drink heavily when he so desired."

With all this going for him, it's no wonder Greencastle's young ladies found Jackson so fascinating. "Pearl was stuck on Jackson from the first time they met," Wood said. "Jackson would come and get my horse and buggy and drive over to Pearl's house, where they would often go out driving together. Pearl was pretty and ambitious, but I never thought she would do wrong. Now I can see she was perfectly infatuated with Jackson from the start. I am convinced that she was completely in his power, and he took advantage of his influence over her."

We already know what form that advantage took. Jackson wasn't even introduced to Pearl until the Spring of 1895, and by that September he'd already made her pregnant. Nice girls weren't supposed to part their legs that quickly back then – particularly if they came from a well-to-do family like Pearl's – and the speed of her seduction shows what a fast worker Jackson could be. It may also tell us that Pearl was rather more worldly than her usual portrayal as a sweet, innocent country lass suggests.

Jackson got into a fight at the dental school in Indianapolis which led to him being arrested and fined. The *CP* says it was this incident which forced him to move to Cincinnati in October 1895 and resume his studies at the dental college there, but he may have been glad to escape Greencastle anyway. Soon after arriving in Cincinnati, he wrote to Wood seeking confirmation that Pearl was (as he euphemised it) "sick". Wood replied that this was true, and Jackson responded with the first of his abortion remedies. He also wrote to Pearl herself, assuring her that he missed her desperately in his lonely Cincinnati apartment, and wishing she could be there to cheer him up.

Meanwhile, he was juggling several other girlfriends. Letters which later surfaced from this time show Blanche of Ludlow, Kentucky, expressing her "great joy and delight" at receiving Jackson's recent letter. "I was under the impression that you was a person who would soon forget newly-made acquaintances and that I, with the others, had also been forgotten," she writes. "But I suppose I had wrongly judged." Another letter, this one from Mayre in Bennington, Indiana, assures Jackson that "it would take a year of Sundays for me to tell you how much I love you and how much I appreciate your letter this morning". Now that Jackson's in Cincinnati, she teasingly adds, "you are so much nearer to me than you were in Greencastle". [(14)]

These were not the only love letters Jackson received while he was with Pearl. "In others, the love of women breathes," the CE reported after seeing them. "Women of the smart set, schoolteachers and country belles who were fascinated with the young dental student of comely mien and debonair manners. From their tenor, it is clearly seen that Jackson made many conquests before he met the woman whose murder brought him to the scaffold."

When the potions Jackson recommended failed to do the trick with Pearl, he returned to Greencastle for the New Year holiday, and that's when he first mentioned the possibility of an abortion to Wood. "He said it was very frequently done, done every day and that if he had the instruments, he could do it himself," Wood testified. "Such operations, he said, were every day occurrences, and if we got it done, she would be all right in three or four days."

Wood said Jackson asked him to help persuade Pearl that she should come to Cincinnati for the operation, but claimed he'd refused to do in this. On January 4, 1896, Jackson returned to Cincinnati and, three weeks later, wrote to Wood again saying he'd found Pearl a room in the city. "She read [the letter] and expressed her intention of going on the next Monday," Barclay says. "Accordingly, on January 27th, she left Greencastle on the 1:35 train, going east."

Monday's official post-mortem on the body, conducted by a Dr Charles Phythian, confirmed all of Carothers' findings, most notably that the shock of finding herself under attack had jolted Pearl wide awake from her cocaine daze. "The post-mortem shows beyond a doubt that Pearl Bryan died by the knife, and was conscious when she was killed," Phythian announced. "The cut on her right hand shows that she fought with her murderer. The cut goes clear to the bone, and proves she did not receive it by making the weak attempt that a semi-comatose person would have made."

Monday also brought the promised search of Covington Reservoir, along with a few of the ponds surrounding it. Some reports say police spent $2,000 draining the whole reservoir, others that they merely dredged it, but either way the head was not found. The Kentucky police were faring no better. Cops in Ludlow, about three miles from Newport, arrested a couple of tramps on suspicion of Pearl's murder, but were forced to release them again almost immediately for lack of evidence. Deitsch must have been relieved to read in Crim's Wednesday telegram from Greencastle that they had a real suspect at last, and he decided to take personal charge of Jackson's arrest.

Telling detectives William Bulmer, German Witte and William Jackson to come with him, Deitsch led the way to Scott Jackson's boarding house rooms at 222 West Ninth Street. There was no sign of him there, so they staked the place out, with one detective inside the house itself and two more in the bar opposite.

After a while, Deitsch began to fear that his quarry may have skipped town. It was not until about 10:00pm that he got reports a man answering Jackson's description had been seen at Cincinnati's Palace Hotel, about six blocks away. Deitsch walked in that direction, saw the man for himself, and then alerted his colleagues.

"The fellow was watched, and was seen to walk slowly down Ninth Street," Barclay writes. "On reaching 222, he looked up at the windows. He strolled slowly to Plum Street, then stopped again and looked back at the house. He then walked rapidly north on Plum Street toward Court. When he had traversed part of the square, Detective Bulmer stepped up to him, saying: 'Your name is Jackson, isn't it?' The man turned perfectly livid and trembled like an aspen. As the detective continued to say 'I want you,' he exclaimed 'My God, what is this for?'"

Bulmer led Jackson south down Plum Street. "At Ninth Street, Colonel Deitsch met the prisoner and said 'Well, Dusty, we have got you'," Barclay says. "'Yes,' the prisoner responded. 'It looks like it'."

How Deitsch knew Jackson's nickname, I can't say, but he led the detectives and their prisoner straight to the nearby City Hall, where Cincinnati's police had their HQ. Jackson was booked and held on suspicion of murder there. The arrest had drawn enough attention for some curious waterworks employees and a couple of janitors to follow the party into City Hall's public lobby, where they watched the process with some interest. News of his arrest spread quickly through the city.

Jackson was taken to the mayor's office, where Caldwell and Deitsch could question him in front of the various cops and reporters assembled there. He confirmed his identity and admitted that he'd known Pearl Bryan. He insisted they'd been no more than friends, however, and claimed he hadn't seen her since his New Year trip to Greencastle on January 2. He confirmed also that he knew Will Wood, but denied knowing Wood was a medical student. He said they'd last met on January 6.

When Caldwell read out the official accusations against Jackson, he replied that these were all false and offered his own account of the past few days. According to him, he'd eaten supper on Friday evening at about 7:00pm, then gone to his room at about 7:30 to spend the evening studying. On Saturday, he said, he'd been to the theatre with a friend. He'd read newspaper stories about the murdered girl he said, adding that these had made feel quite sick, but claimed he had no idea Pearl had come to Cincinnati. He denied having been to Newport any time recently.

"The officers learned early that the youth's nerves were of iron, and that he apparently was devoid of feeling," Doran writes. "When he was arrested, he trembled, but while he was being questioned in Mayor Caldwell's office, he became calm. His face was flushed, it is true, but that appeared to be from the effects of heavy drinking. He answered all questions quickly and without hesitation. He had a ready alibi for any circumstances that appeared incriminating, and although his answers at times seemed vague, they came easily."

The exact sequence of events becomes a little confused at this point, but we do know that Jackson was booked on suspicion of murder and locked in a police cell. Detectives Bulmer and Witte searched him there, stripping Jackson naked and finding two scratches on his right arm. One began just below the elbow and ran nearly three inches down towards his wrist. The second was much shorter, and made on the wrist itself. The detectives also found spots of blood on Jackson's undershirt, which he'd tried to wash away.

Police knew from the knife wounds on Pearl's own hand that she'd tried to fight her attacker off, and Jackson's scratches were just the kind a frightened girl might have inflicted with her fingernails. When they challenged him on this point, Jackson said he'd been bothered by insect bites a night or two ago, and given himself the marks while scratching away at these bites. Continuing their search, the detectives found two carriage tickets in Jackson's pockets, showing he'd recently crossed Cincinnati's Central Newport Bridge into Kentucky. There was nothing to suggest that particular journey had any sinister motive, but the tickets did show he'd lied when Caldwell asked him about visiting Newport.

Newspapers throughout Ohio and Kentucky were still going to town on the murder, and they all made the most of Jackson's arrest. In streets and saloons all over Cincinnati and Newport, angry men discussed what an evil bastard Jackson must be, and talked of lynching him. A Cincinnati shooting gallery placed a sign outside its door reading: "Put a bullet in Scott Jackson's brain, and win a 5-

cent cigar". Inside, the owners had put up an effigy of Jackson for customers to shoot at, and this attraction did a brisk trade.

Police took the threats of violence against Jackson seriously, and thanked their lucky stars he was being held in Cincinnati rather than Newport, where the urge to lynch him was even more pronounced and the small jail much harder to defend. Jackson, too, seemed to think lynch mobs were a real possibility. Around midnight on Wednesday, he called Curren, the guard, over to him and said: "I want you to get a chair and sit in front of my cell all night".

"Are you afraid of getting lynched?" Curren replied.

"Well, never mind that. I prefer to be well-guarded whether I'm in danger or not."

Even with Cullen right in front of his cell, Jackson remained restless, rolling back and forth on his bunk, but unable to sleep. At about 2:00am, he approached Cullen again, and asked: "Hasn't Walling been arrested yet?"

The police knew that Jackson shared his Ninth Street room with another dental student named Alonzo Walling, but until now they'd had no reason to think Walling might have been involved in the case. "Why should he be arrested?" the puzzled Cullen asked. Jackson clammed up again at that point and refused to discuss Walling any further. When Cullen told his boss, Lieutenant Corbin, what the prisoner had said, Corbin went straight round to the boarding house and, by 3:30am on Thursday, Walling was in custody too.

Jackson and Walling first met at the dental school in Indianapolis, but knew each other only slightly there. They renewed their friendship in Cincinnati in October 1895, when Jackson was just starting his first term as a student in the city. Walking down West Ninth Street, he'd run into Walling outside McNevin's boarding house. Both men were now enrolled at Cincinnati's dental college and, on the strength of their old acquaintance, decided to share a room together at Mrs McNevin's.

Walling was about seven years younger than Jackson, and had none of his friend's luck, cunning or easy charm. His own father died when Walling was about five years old, leaving the boy and his mother no choice but to abandon their home in Mount Carmel, Indiana, and stay with various Ohio relatives instead. His mother worked and saved hard, and was able to move them to Greencastle in around 1890, where she began taking in boarders. Walling, then about 13 years old, started working as a glass blower to help support the family, but lost his job there after four years when the factory closed. With help from the rest of the family, his hard-pressed mother then managed to send him to Indianapolis dental school, where Jackson was already enrolled.

"Walling was the opposite of Jackson," one friend told the *Post*. "His mind was slow, his experience limited. He had a strong body, but lacked amiability. He was weak-willed and easily swayed by someone with a stronger mind." Reis describes him as "a stolid and morose character", who was "5 feet 8 inches tall, with dark hair and hazel eyes under heavy eyebrows that almost met."

Crim, McDermott and Plummer handed Wood over at the Central Police Station in City Hall as soon as they got back to Cincinnati on Thursday, February 6, where he was registered as a material witness and then released on bail and allowed to take a room at the city's Grand Hotel. Crim and McDermott went to search Jackson's accommodation at the boarding house, where they found a pair

of lady's stockings stuffed behind his trunk and, inside that trunk, a lady's pocket book with a piece of gold chain inside.

The papers now had Walling's arrest to report too, and redoubled their coverage as a result. This fresh wave of stories produced two crucial witnesses from the city's taverns. The first to come forward was a saloon keeper called John Kugel, whose bar was on the corner of Ninth and Central, just a few blocks from both Jackson's boarding house and his new home in a City Hall cell. Kugel walked into City Clerk Vickers' office on Thursday and said he had a valise that Jackson had left in his bar for safe-keeping on Monday night. Vickers told him to go and fetch it quick.

Kugel returned a few minutes later carrying a tan-coloured leather bag, about 15 inches long, with handles rather than a shoulder strap. Vickers took the bag to Deitsch, who examined it, finding there was nothing inside but that the inner lining was badly stained with blood. "Deitsch closed the valise and asked Kugel who gave it to him," Barclay says. "Kugel said that, on Monday night, about eight o'clock, a young man with a blonde moustache walked into his place and asked him to take care of the valise, saying he would call for it the next day." But Jackson had never returned, which is why Kugel still had the bag.

Police later discovered that Jackson had brought the same bag into a saloon called Wallingford's a couple of days earlier. That was Saturday, the day after Pearl had been decapitated. "I noticed that he set [the bag] down rather heavily, and I asked him what was in it," David Wallingford, the bar's owner, testified. "He said: 'Oh, some underclothes', and we both laughed." Deitsch asked if Jackson had been his usual merry self that night. "No, he was rather depressed," Wallingford replied. "He said his head hurt him devilish bad, and he looked worried."

Jackson picked up the bag again and left Wallingford's. He walked three blocks north to Legner's Tavern, at Ninth and Plum, just opposite his rented room. John Legner, who ran the joint, told police that Jackson had been a regular drinker there, and that he'd come in between 7:00 and 8:00 o'clock on that same Saturday evening. "He opened the door, and asked if he could have permission to leave a satchel there," Legner testified. "I told him certainly he could. He set the satchel down close to the ice chest, left it there, and went away. The satchel remained there until Sunday evening, about 10:00 o'clock, when he came in and took it away."

By the time Jackson collected the bag, Legner too had noticed it seemed oddly-weighted, so he jokingly asked Jackson if there was a bowling ball inside. Jackson did not answer, but simply took the bag and left. "On the following Monday, he came and brought it [back], and set it down in the same place," Legner continued. "It remained there until 10:00 o'clock - or a little bit earlier - then he came and took it away again." Legner was shown the bag Kugel had produced, and confirmed it was the same one. His young daughter Dot added that the bag had seemed much lighter than before when Jackson left it at Legner's for the second time.

Legner seems to be an hour or two out in estimating the time Jackson collected the bag on Monday night – it was probably about 8:00pm rather than 10:00pm – but otherwise that's a remarkably consistent account. Jackson was seen with the full bag at Wallingford's around 7:00pm on Saturday, February 1, the day Pearl's body was found. He took it from there to Legner's, and left it at Legner's around 8:00pm on Saturday. At that point it was still full. He collected it

from Legner's at about 10:00pm on Sunday, and returned the empty bag to Legner's at some point on Monday. He picked it up again from Legner's on Monday evening, took it to Kugel's and left it there at about 8:00pm, intending to collect it again in the next couple of days. In fact, he never got the chance to do so, because Deitsch arrested him first.

Deitsch had Jackson brought up to the mayor's office again. "Do you remember leaving a valise in Legner's saloon last Saturday night?" he asked.

"I do," Jackson replied.

"Why did you leave the valise at the saloon?"

"I was just going as far as the corner, and I didn't want to carry it."

"Did you take it away the same day?"

"Yes, I think I did."

"What was in it?"

"Nothing."

"How far was it from your room?"

"Just across the street."

"You say there was nothing in the valise?"

"I don't think there was."

"Where did you get it?"

"I bought it in Indianapolis."

"Where is it now?"

"I loaned it to a student by the name of Hackelman."

"What did he want with it?"

"I didn't ask him. I took it to him at the college."

"What kind of valise was it?"

"Tan-coloured."

"Strap or handbag?"

"Handbag."

This was a masterful performance by Jackson, telling the truth whenever he could see Deitsch must already know it, but leaving himself a little wriggle room on any claims that might later be disproved. Deitsch had an ace up his sleeve, however. He produced the bag Kugel had handed in, set it on the floor next to Jackson's chair and told him to pick it up. Jackson did so, calmly laying the bag in his lap. "Open it," Deitsch ordered, and once again Jackson obeyed.

"What is in there?" Deitsch demanded.

"Nothing that I can see, except that it is stained."

"What is it stained with?"

"It looks like blood."

"Don't you know it is blood?"

Barclay's transcript of this interview seems to draw from an eye-witness report by one of the watching newsmen. "Jackson's face flushed and his eyes twitched," it says. "He pulled his moustache and ran his fingers through his hair. He was only a moment answering, but it appeared to be an hour to those who were waiting for a reply."

Finally, Jackson moistened his lips, and said: "I think it is blood, but I have not examined it carefully." Deitsch was relentless. "Well, then, examine it carefully", he said.

"Jackson picked up the valise and held it close to his face," Barclay reports. "He peered down into the blood-soaked bag, and his eyes rolled around his head." Putting his hand to his forehead, Jackson replied:

"Yes. That is blood."

"Isn't that the valise in which you carried the head?"

"I guess it is, but I did not carry it."

"Well, who did?"

"Walling."

Deitsch asked Jackson where the head was now, and he said he assumed it was in the Ohio River. The superintendent then called Kugel in, who confirmed that Jackson was the man who'd left the bag in his saloon earlier that week. That put paid to Jackson's lie that he'd last seen it with the mysterious Mr Hackelman.

"What did you leave it in Kugel's saloon for?" Deitsch asked.

"I wasn't going to leave it there. I was going to get it and do away with it."

"Why did you want to get rid of it?"

"Well, it was better out of the way."

"Why?"

"I wanted to shield myself of all those things."

"What were you so anxious to get rid of them for?"

"I just didn't want them about."

"What was in it first?"

"A lot of clothing and such things."

"Whose clothing was it?"

"Miss Bryan's I think. There was a skirt, a petticoat, some stockings and other things."

"Where are they now?"

"I guess they are in the river too."

When Deitsch pressed him further, Jackson said he'd taken some of Pearl's clothes to the Ohio River suspension bridge on Saturday night and thrown them in. His story now was that Wood had made Pearl pregnant, and asked Jackson for his help in solving this problem when Jackson visited Greencastle at New Year. Jackson said that Wood had asked him to perform an abortion on Pearl, but that he had refused to do so.

"Who do you think murdered the girl?" Deitsch asked.

"Alonzo Walling."

"And to shield who?"

"William Wood. […] Wood wrote to me telling me of the trouble, and asking me to assist him out of it. I showed the letter to Walling, and he volunteered to undertake the job."

Back in 1896, asking a dentist to carry out an abortion for you was not the bizarre idea it now seems. Dentists then, like the barbers of Victorian London, would turn their hands to any bit of minor surgery their customers may require. Students at Cincinnati's dental college would have been familiar with much more than just teeth, often pursuing their studies by cutting up human corpses to examine the organs inside. Jackson himself confirmed this when he told police that, at the moment of his arrest, he'd been on his way to there "to see if the boys were doing any dissecting".

"At that time, dentists were more than just dentists," John Mendell, a local Pearl Bryan expert, told me in Fort Thomas. "At a pinch, they were medical people too. They were like two-bit doctors. They actually worked on cadavers there, and the furnace was so hot it would burn human remains."

It was only a short walk from Legner's to the dental college, and that fact left Crim in no doubt what had really happened to Pearl's head. "Jackson took the

grip out, and brought it back empty," he writes. "It was only two squares to the dental college where the furnace not only heated the building, but also served as an incinerator. […] I don't think that the final disposition of her head is much of a mystery."

Crim never wavered in his belief that Pearl's head had finished up in the dental college furnace. Interviewed by the *CP's* Joe Doran, he phrased his reply to suggest Jackson and Walling had disposed of the head together, but otherwise gave exactly the same account.

"I'm convinced Pearl Bryan's head was in the valise when it was left at Legner's Saloon," he told Doran. "When they came and got it [from Legner's], they slipped over to the dental college. The furnace there was specially constructed for burning parts of human bodies without leaving an odour or a trace. They went down to the cellar in the dental college, the door to which was unlocked, put the head in the furnace [and] went back to Legner's. We proved they were gone just about long enough to do that." (15)

Believing all this was one thing, but proving it was quite a different matter. By insisting that Wood was the father of Pearl's baby, and Walling the would-be abortionist who killed her, Jackson managed to concoct a version of events which painted him as the only innocent party in the whole affair.

Police took this account to Wood, who told a very different tale. He denied ever sleeping with Pearl, but said Jackson had told him in September that she was pregnant, and confessed that he – Jackson – was the father.

"What did he say?" Deitsch asked.

"He said he was going to have an operation performed on her if he could get hold of enough money. He said he had procured a room in Cincinnati, and that she would be taken care of by an old woman."

"What else did he say?"

"He said that the operation would be performed by a doctor and a chemist who was an old hand at that kind of business."

"Did he mention the name of the doctor?"

"No. He said the party was a friend of Walling."

Deitsch also asked Wood about his conversation with Pearl as she prepared to leave Greencastle for her trip to Cincinnati. Wood said he had spoken to her about the operation and, when Deitsch asked him if she'd seemed relieved at the prospect, replied: "I never saw her so happy in my life".

Deitsch had Caldwell telegraph the Postmaster at South Bend asking him to intercept any letters addressed to Wood there, and then moved on to question Walling. He decided to go in hard.

"I have just talked with Jackson, and he puts all the blame on you," Deitsch said. "He says you performed the abortion somewhere across the river. […] Jackson says that you threw the head into the river and that the next day you told him to get rid of anything lying around loose at the boarding house by throwing it into the river."

Walling had tried to protect both himself and his friend until then, but now he could see that Jackson was perfectly willing to see him hang if that saved Jackson's own neck. Once he'd realised that, the account he gave police of Pearl's death was the fullest and most credible they'd heard yet.

Chapter three

In which Miss Bryan's final hours are described.

According to Walling, he first heard that Pearl was pregnant on Christmas Day 1895. "Jackson took me into a corner of the room and told me that he and Billy Wood had got Pearl into trouble, and that he must get rid of her," he told police. "He suggested two ways in which it might be done. One of the plans he suggested was to take her to a room, kill her there and leave her. Then he spoke up suddenly and said 'No, I will instead cut her to pieces and drop the pieces in different vaults around town'."

A few days later, Walling added, he and Jackson had been drinking at Wallingford's when Jackson asked the other medical students there which poison would kill a person the quickest. They replied that hydrocyanic acid or prussic acid would be quickest of all, but that a large dose of cocaine wasn't far behind. "Jackson would sit in our room and read a medical dictionary to learn all about poisons," Walling said. "He finally selected cocaine." The drug was then a legal remedy, so Jackson was able to buy all he needed at Koeble's, the neighbourhood pharmacy.

"Did you know where he was going to take her?" Deitsch asked.

"Yes. He said he was going to take her to Fort Thomas."

The next development came towards the end of January, when Jackson asked Walling if he would help the girl out of trouble. "I said I would," Walling admitted. "Last Monday night, he told me the girl would be here that night. The next day, Jackson told me the girl was at the Indiana House hotel, and asked me to go down there. I went with him, and he went to her room while I waited downstairs. The next day, he told me he had an engagement with the girl at Fourth and Plum Streets, and for me to go there and tell her he would meet her in the evening. […] I think he went to see the girl at Wallingford's saloon. I was there, but I did not go into the back room where she was."

Walling claimed he hadn't seen Pearl again until the night of her murder. "I was in Heider's Restaurant eating my supper," he said. "Jackson called me out and told me to go to Fountain Square and wait with the girl until he came back. He said he would not be gone over 10 or 15 minutes. He came back, and I left. I believe he went to the room and got the hypodermic syringe and the poison."

According to Walling, Jackson and Pearl rode off towards the bridge in a cab together, leaving him behind in Fountain Square. That account conveniently left him out of the murder itself, but much of the rest of it rang true.

Walling told police that Jackson had prepared a solution with four grains of cocaine in 16 drops of water, a dosage which matched that later found in Pearl's stomach. Jackson hoped this would paralyse her vocal cords. "She would be unable to scream or talk, and then he was going to cut her head off," Walling said.

"Do you think he did that?"

"Yes, I am almost sure that was the way he killed her. I don't know how he gave her the poison, but I think she took it before getting into the cab, so it would have its full effect before she was driven over to Fort Thomas."

"What do you think he did with the head?"

"In my opinion, he buried it in this neighbourhood."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, last Monday I was standing on Ninth and Plum, and Jackson came along. He had a valise, and asked me to go with him. I told him I didn't care to, and he left. He had the same valise which is now in the possession of the police with the bloodstains in it."

Challenged to produce some physical evidence that supported his story, Walling sent the police to a sewer at the corner of John and Richmond streets, where he admitted he'd disposed of Jackson's jacket for him. Detective Witte went to that corner, where he dug a bundle wrapped in newspaper from the sewer mud and found a blue-black jacket inside, which matched the clothes worn by Jackson when he was arrested. There were blood spots on the sleeves and, stuffed inside the pockets, three lady's handkerchiefs which Pearl's family later identified as hers. Also in the pockets, Witte found traces of tansy flower, a herb whose tea was known to produce miscarriages. A wider search of the city's sewers produced a bundle of Pearl's clothes, weighted down with a piece if old railway iron, which Jackson later admitted he'd dumped there. This was one of five such bundles which he and Walling had pushed into the sewers or dropped in the Ohio River.

Police also searched the two men's personal lockers at the dental college, where they found a pair of Jackson's trousers. These were muddy at the knees and flecked with blood down the legs. Lab tests showed the mud on these trousers, on the jacket, and inside the tan leather valise all matched that at the murder scene. The leaves found inside the bag were privet, which grew in great profusion there.

The mud analysis was carried out by a firm of chemists called Dickore and Morgan, whose results were later leaked to the *CE*. "The mud found on the knees of Jackson's pants, which were taken from Walling's locker by police, has been shown to be the same as the soil at the spot where Pearl Bryan's body was found," the paper confirmed. "This shows that whoever wore those pants knelt at that particular spot when the ground was soft and sticky from rain, probably on the night of the murder, as it rained then. The question to be settled is: who wore the pants on the night of Friday, January 31? Jackson says that he did not." (16)

Some other accounts say the trousers were found in Jackson's own locker, not Walling's, but Barclay's transcripts are clear that Jackson admitted he owned them. His story was that Walling must have borrowed the trousers without permission, and gotten them dirty while he – not Jackson – was slitting Pearl's throat. He admitted to buying the cocaine, but said he'd done so only at Walling's request, and handed the drug over to him straight afterwards. Walling denied both these assertions.

Bit by bit, the police pieced together the independent evidence they needed to confirm most of Walling's story. A cab driver called John Belli told them he'd picked up a girl matching Pearl's description from Cincinnati's Grand Central Depot at about 7:30 on the evening we know she arrived there. "She asked to be taken to the dental college and, when we got there, she sent me upstairs to ask for Scott Jackson," Belli said. "I couldn't find him, and then she had me drive her to the Indiana House at 139 West Fifth Street". Examining the hotel's register for that night, police found Pearl had signed herself as in Mabel Stanley, her sister's married name. (17)

The next witnesses to come forward were workers at the John Church Music Publishing Company, which had its shipping office at the corner of Fourth Street and Elm, directly on the route between Indiana House and Grand Central Depot. Church's workers told police they'd heard a furious row in the street

outside on Friday, January 31, the day Pearl would be killed. They were just starting their lunch break at the time, and the office's windows were open, so they had both the time and the opportunity to sit back and enjoy the show.

A woman was shouting at two men in the street, threatening them that she'd go back to Greencastle if they didn't sort themselves out. "The gist of her ultimatum was that she was taking the noon train, that she would tell her brother who was responsible for her trouble, and that he would see the wrong was righted," Crim says. "Witnesses identified the three as Pearl Bryan, Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling." Returning to the incident in a later interview, Crim adds: "Witnesses heard her tell Jackson, 'I'm going back home and tell my folk'. Jackson knew too well what the penalty would have been."

Eventually, Jackson and Walling managed to calm Pearl down, and Church's workers watched as they led her away from the station again. Many people assume the row must have started because Pearl had just discovered that Jackson had an abortion in mind for her rather than a wedding, but Wood's earlier testimony seems to rule that out. It's equally possible that Jackson had gambled away Pearl's Cincinnati stake, or let slip that the promised abortion was likely to be a more squalid affair than she'd imagined.

Pearl was next spotted that evening at Wallingford's, where both David Wallingford, the owner, and Allen Johnson, a black porter, told Deitsch they'd seen her. Wallingford said he was certain it was Pearl because he'd since seen her photo, and that Jackson led her into the back sitting room where female patrons generally sat. He had a tan leather bag with him, which he seemed to be carrying for his lady friend. Jackson ordered whisky for himself, and a sarsparilla for Pearl. Something in their manner drew Johnson's attention, and he saw Jackson slip something into Pearl's drink while she wasn't looking.

Jackson and Pearl left the bar in a carriage together, Wallingford said. Johnson added he'd recognised the carriage driver as Fred Albin, a Cincinnati barber who'd known Walling for about two years and Jackson for the past four months. He was also adamant that he'd seen Walling outside the bar with Jackson and Pearl when the carriage drove away. Albin denied ever having been at Wallingford's that night. Walling's account of his own actions was muddled, sometimes admitting he'd been at the saloon on Friday night, and sometimes denying it.

It was no small matter for a black man to accuse any white man of a crime in 1896 America – let alone one as serious as aiding in a murder - but Johnson was fearless. "You know you were there Friday night, and there is no use you denying it," he told Walling. "You lie, and you know you are lying." Albin continued to insist he'd never been at Wallingford's that night and Walling, after his initial confusion, settled his own story on a denial too. (18)

Caldwell's request to the Postmaster at South Bend produced an intercepted letter from Jackson to Wood, which he'd mailed from Cincinnati on Wednesday afternoon, a few hours before his arrest. That fitted with the story Deitsch had from Walling, who'd already revealed that Jackson had gone to the Palace Hotel to write some letters that day. "I asked him who he was going to write to, and he said to Wood," Walling told police. "He said he was going to enclose a letter purporting to be from Pearl Bryan to her mother, and he was going to have Wood send it. […] He said he was going to do this to throw Mrs Bryan off the track."

Jackson had evidently decided to let Wood compose the fake letter rather than doing so himself, but otherwise it was just as Walling had said. Knowing how incriminating the letter would be if police ever saw it, Jackson mentioned Pearl only by her nickname of "Bert" and switched her pronoun from "she" to "he" throughout. He also abbreviated Indianapolis to a more cryptic "I" and signed the letter only with a "D" to indicate his own nickname of Dusty.

"Hello Bill," the letter began. "Write a letter home in Bert's name telling the folks that he is somewhere and going to Chicago or some other place – has a position etc – and will advise later about it. Say tired of living at home or anything you want. You know about the way he writes.

"Send it to someone you can trust – how [about] Will Smith at La Fayette. Tell the folks that he has not been at I. but at La Fayette and travelling about the country. Get the letter off without one second's delay, and burn this at once. Stick by your old chum Bill, and I will help you out the same way sometime. Am glad you are having a good time – D." There was a brief postscript: "Be careful what you write to me". (19)

When Deitsch confronted him with this letter, Jackson had his usual ready answer. "Walling told me to write it," he claimed. "He said that something had to be done, and I did it."

So, let's recap. Deitsch knew now that Pearl had been pregnant, and that she'd arrived in Cincinnati on the Monday evening, looking for Scott Jackson. He had Wood's testimony that Jackson had hoped to arrange an abortion for Pearl, and Walling's that Jackson had talked of killing her instead. Jackson himself admitted to buying cocaine a few days before Pearl was killed, and that was the same drug Carothers had found in the dead girl's stomach. Wallingford and Johnson had seen Jackson with Pearl in the tavern a few hours before her death, where Johnson had also seen him slip something into her drink. The post-mortem had already confirmed Pearl had no needle marks on her body, so it made sense to assume Jackson had administered the cocaine orally rather than using his syringe.

The amount of blood spilt at John Lock's orchard and the fact that it had spurted so high into the surrounding privet bushes established that as the spot where Pearl was killed. Mud from that orchard had been found on a jacket and a pair of trousers known to belong to Jackson, which he'd been very anxious police should never find. Various items of Pearl's clothing or effects were found after her death either in the pockets of Jackson's discarded coat or in the room he shared with Walling.

Pearl's killer had taken her severed head away with him when he left the murder scene, and that head was still missing. Deitsch had three tavern owners who'd seen Jackson with Pearl's tan leather bag soon after her death, two of whom were convinced there'd been something heavy and round inside it. That something had gone by the time Jackson returned the bag to Legner's on the Monday, leaving just its blood-soaked lining, some more mud from the murder scene and a few privet leaves inside.

Jackson and Walling each claimed the other had committed the murder, but every copper's instinct made Jackson the more likely candidate. By his own confession, though, Walling had helped to deliver the girl to Jackson on the fatal night, and helped Jackson dispose of some very damning evidence afterwards. Johnson put him at Wallingford's tavern on the Friday night too, so perhaps he'd been more involved in the murder itself than he'd so far let on.

Deitsch could now account for Jackson and Pearl's movements until the moment they left Wallingford's saloon on Friday evening, and knew they'd both arrived at the orchard some time after that night's rain stopped at 10:30pm. All that was missing was some indication of how Jackson and Pearl had got across the river from Cincinnati to Fort Thomas on the night of her death and who, if anyone, had accompanied them. It wouldn't be long till Deitsch had an answer to those questions too.

Pearl's inquest was held on Tuesday, February 11, with Coroner Tingley struggling to subdue a large and unruly crowd of spectators in the Kentucky courtroom. "They overflowed outside the building, and it was necessary to provide extra police to control them," Doran reports.

All the medical evidence discussed above was heard, plus some additional testimony from the fort's Dr Heyl, who confirmed that Pearl's murderer must have some degree of basic medical training. The inquest jury found that the dead girl was Pearl Bryan, that she'd been given cocaine shortly before her death and that she'd still been alive when decapitation took place. When the court asked Crim who he thought had killed her, he replied without hesitation: "Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling". (20)

It was around this time that Deitsch started getting reports someone had seen Jackson and Walling hire an elderly black carriage driver at the corner of George and Elm streets late on the night of the murder, and then driving off with him in the direction of Central Bridge. That corner was just one block from Wallingford's saloon, where Pearl had last been seen alive. "If this driver will come to us and tell his story, we will not only grant him immunity, but pay him a reward," Deitsch told the newspapers. (21)

A few days later, a patrolman called Ed Swain was passing one of the grand houses in Cincinnati's McGregor Avenue, when an old black groundsman working there called him over. The old man's name was George Jackson, and he nervously raised the subject of Pearl's killers and their mysterious driver. "Could they do anything to the fellow that hauled them across the river if it was shown that he was forced to do so at the point of a pistol?" he asked Swain. "If they find him, will he be hanged?"

The officer reassured him, saying that, assuming the carriage driver had committed no crime himself, the police would warmly welcome his help. Far from having anything to fear, Swain went on, the driver would be congratulated for helping to convict the killers. "Come back at 7:00 o'clock," George told him. "I may have something to tell you."

Swain returned to the spot at 7:00pm and heard a story which proved crucial to the whole investigation. The old man told him that he'd been talking with a group of his friends at the corner of George and Elm streets, when a white man walked up to them and asked if anyone there wanted to earn $5. "None of the others volunteered," he said, "so I finally asked him what he wanted done. 'Just drive me and another fellow to Newport,' he told me. I agreed to take the job, and then he told me that he was a doctor. He said that he and another doctor had to take a patient across the river."

George waited on the corner as he'd been asked to do and, about 45 minutes later, the same man drove up in a cab drawn by a grey horse. He handed over the reins to George, who took up position in the driving seat, and then joined the man and the woman already in the cab's rear section. These, George assumed,

must be the second doctor and the sick girl he'd been told they were transporting. (22)

"When we got to Newport, the fellow who had hired me got out of the back and came up on the seat with me," George said. "Just then, I heard a woman groan in the cab, like she was in awful pain. I got scared and wanted to leave. The fellow on the seat drew a gun and said: 'If you get off this cab, I'll blow you to hell'. Then we drove on again, the fellow sitting beside me and telling me where to go.

"When we got out on Alexandria Pike, they told me to stop and, when I did, the fellow got down from the seat. The two of them dragged a woman out of the cab, and hauled her off the road. She moaned as they took her out, and then I heard her moan some more after they took her into the bushes." (23)

A moment later, the old man heard the girl give a terrible scream, and that was enough to turn his fear into outright panic. These guys weren't going to want any witnesses left around to describe their night's work.

"Now I was afraid they would kill me," he said. "I got scared, and jumped down off that cab. I hitched the horse with an iron weight, I started to run, and I never stopped till I got back to Cincinnati." Later he added: "I got home about 4 o'clock, and I went straight to bed and didn't say a thing to a living soul." In his haste to get down from the carriage and escape, George said, he'd dented the lamp on its left-hand side.

Swain took George to police headquarters, where he was presented with an identity parade. "Out of a long line of prisoners, he picked Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling as the two men who had been his fares on that grim ride," Doran writes. "He asked them to speak before picking them out definitely, but his identification was positive." Walling was the man who'd climbed out to threaten him with the gun, George said, and Jackson the one who stayed inside with the girl.

Police set about trying to trace the hired carriage and the grey horse George had described. They found both up at Cincinnati's Walnut Hills Cab Company, where the owner said he'd rented them to a man he later identified as Scott Jackson on the night Pearl was killed. Some accounts have it that the carriage was returned to Walnut Hills in the small hours of Saturday morning, others that it was found abandoned somewhere else in Cincinnati. But all agree that, when the company got it back, it was covered in mud and freshly dented on its left lamp. Searching its interior, police found scraps of blonde hair which matched the colour of Pearl's, traces of mud from the murder scene, and a few blood spots.

George was ordered to drive each of the company's grey horses in turn, and said he recognised one particular horse from the way it pulled on the bit so strongly. Chester Mullen, the owner there, confirmed this was the horse he'd hired out with that particular carriage on Friday night.

There was other evidence that supported George's story too. Police found a toll collector who remembered a carriage driven by an old black man passing through the bridge's open gate towards Newport late on the night of Pearl's murder. A Mrs O'Brien, who lived near the murder scene, had heard the same scream George mentioned, and her guess at the time this happened confirmed his own. The bit of old railway iron he described matched the one police had found weighing Pearl's clothes down in the sewers, suggesting the two killers had brought it back to the city with them for just that purpose.

This testimony formed a vital link in the story's chain, not least because it was the only account police had that put both Jackson and Walling at the murder scene. There was plenty of forensic evidence that Pearl had been alive when her head was cut off, but George's account of hearing her groan just minutes before that happened would bring that fact powerfully home to a jury. With all this in mind, Crim and his colleagues wanted to be very sure that George's story would stand up to everything an aggressive defence attorney could throw at it.

"Crim devised the hardest test of all for the Negro to undergo," Doran writes. "At 00:50 in the morning, he was placed in the seat of a cab, given the reins, and told to retrace the course over which he had driven Walling, Scott Jackson and Pearl Bryan. Crim, McDermott, Plummer, other officers and newspaper men formed a procession behind the Negro as he as started out on his drive through the black night."

George set the horse in motion at the corner where he'd been hired, and then led the way down Elm Street, turned left on Third Street, right on Broadway and straight to the Central Bridge. At the other end of the bridge, he turned right onto Newport's Third Street, then drove via Central Avenue, Chestnut Street, Isabella Street, Keturah Street and Patterson Street to a spot outside C. Robinson & Sons Distillery. He drew the horse to a stop and peered into the darkness.

"This is where I tried to jump out," he said. "I had heard the girl's moanings long enough. I was scared, wished myself shot of the job, and was determined to get away. Walling pulled a gun and began to swear at me. 'You black bastard, if you try to jump out here, I'll send you to hell!' There wasn't much said, but he made me drive on."

A little further down the road, George spoke again. "Walling was still mad when we got here, and cursed me some more for trying to get out," he said. "He told me there were 15 of their friends who would kill me if I ever told anything about their drive."

The procession drove a little way past a farm owned by the Siebert family, and then George stopped his horse again. "I don't seem to remember this," he said. "I'm afraid we're not on the right track." He retraced his path as far as the Siebert's farm and then said: "The road lies that way, down toward the barn", Plummer was sceptical, as he didn't know of any road there that could possibly lead to Alexandria Pike, but he held his tongue and followed along with everyone else.

"The road had become exceedingly rough, and led through creeks and ruts that appeared as though they had never been used," Doran writes. "The Siebert family were awake mourning the death of a small child, and the party obtained lanterns and went ahead. One carriage was over-turned, and it took some time to right it. Some of the newspaper men got mad, and thought Jackson was crazy. 'They were all for lynching him, but we restrained them and went ahead,' [Crim said]."

That casual reference to lynching George for no more than a moment's confusion on his part underlines again just how brave men like him and Allen Johnson had been to volunteer evidence against a couple of white men in the first place. In the racial climate of that time, any attempt by a black man to challenge whites was likely to be slapped down very hard, and the mere fact that the black man's accusations were true would do nothing to save him.

Fortunately for his health, George's sense of direction turned out to be right all along. The road – which even Sheriff Plummer had never suspected was

there – led them all out on to Alexandria Pike, a little way south of Fort Thomas. George was sure he was on the right route again, and led them confidently onwards.

“Near Colonel Lock’s farm, he stopped and again peered intently into the darkness,” Doran writes. “An outcropping of rock caught his eye. ‘I remember it now,’ he cried. ‘There’s the house on the hill. There’s the three-board fence with the board off, where they took the girl over into the orchard. Over there is where the groans came from’.”

As George spoke those words, he was standing just 75 yards from the spot where John Hewling had found the dead girl two weeks earlier. “[George] Jackson had kept his word,” Doran writes. “The final and most convincing link in the chain of evidence against Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling had been forged.”

Chapter four

In which the first Pearl Bryan songs are heard.

George Jackson's testimony clicked the last missing piece into the story of Pearl's death, and that meant the newspapers were now free to start casting the main characters in whatever role they could most usefully play.

In her 1973 book *Poor Pearl, Poor Girl*, Anne Cohen points out that reporters and balladeers alike often shoehorn the story they're telling into a ready-made template, such as "murdered girl" or "criminal-brought-to-justice". The names of the individuals will change, but the stereotypes they're asked to embody never do.

It may even be that this process is an unconscious one, resulting not from cynical manipulation, but from an instinctive need to nudge each tale towards the archetypal forms we learn in childhood. Any untidy facts which don't fit the chosen template's requirements are quietly downplayed or ignored altogether. Newspapers can't be quite as cavalier with the facts as ballads can, but they're by no means exempt from the process.

"Both media tell the story from the same moral stance, express the same interpretation of character, and are interested in the same details," Cohen writes. "The result of this formulaeic filter is that stories tend to be altered progressively towards greater and greater similarity to the model. […] It is exactly this process which we see occuring, over a 70-year timespan, in the Pearl Bryan ballads." (24)

We'll come to the ballads in a moment, but let's first examine that process at work in the newspaper stories. Cohen identifies the three stereotypes required by the "murdered girl" template as the victim, the lover-murderer and the grief-stricken family. Pearl's real story was able to supply all those characters, but each required a little tweaking before they slotted in as neatly as reporters would wish.

"According to the stereotype, the victim of the murder must be young, trusting and innocent," Cohen writes. "She must be helpless vis-à-vis her betrayer. She is greatly attached to her home and family where she is cherished."

The papers started off on the wrong tack here, with all their early stories assuming the dead girl must have been a prostitute. Initial reports described the garments she'd been found in as clothes "of the cheapest kind", and presented this as evidence of the girl's low character. As soon as Pearl was identified, the papers realised there was more milage in painting her as a naïve girl who'd been led astray, and those same cheap clothes became honest, homespun garments.

Taking this line meant the papers were opting for the "murdered girl" template, and their descriptions of Pearl's character instantly changed to fit that model. "When Pearl's body was first found, she was described as 'an abandoned woman from Cincinnati,' and 'a woman of the town'," Cohen writes. "As soon as it was discovered the corpse was pregnant, the description changed to 'innocent trusting girl, whose only offence was having loved too well'."

Adopting that depiction of Pearl meant she couldn't be seen as complicit in the abortion plans that led to her death. Wood's account suggests she co-operated in taking the abortion remedies Jackson recommended, and knew perfectly well she was travelling east for what would then have been an illegal operation, but that awkward fact was dropped from reports very early in the story. Instead, the papers suggested Jackson had promised to marry her in Cincinnati,

and that she came there expecting them to raise the child together and live happily ever after.

It strains credulity to think a girl worldly enough to make those assignations with her lover at the dental office, provide herself with funds for the trip to Cincinnati and lie to her family about going there would really be that naïve, but that was how Pearl had to be painted to fit the story's template. No wonder the papers were so willing to take Pearl's character at her own family's estimation. "Pearl never was away from home alone," the *CP* quotes her mother as saying. "The girl knew nothing of the world. She was a trusting person, and easily could be overcome by anyone of a designing nature."

Much of the reporting that followed attempted to confer a sort of retrospective virginity on Pearl, stressing for example that she was eventually buried "in the pure white garments she had worn when she graduated from the Greencastle High School". You could forgive Jackson a snort of cynicism if he ever read those stories for himself. After all, as Oscar Levant once said of Doris Day, he'd known her before she became a virgin.

Having tastefully adjusted Pearl's character to suit their readers' expectations, the papers moved on to consider the lover-murderer role. Their problem here was that two men had been arrested for Pearl's killing and, although only one of them seemed to have been her lover, there was some initial doubt over whether Jackson or Walling would emerge as the lead villain. Having two killers in the story cluttered its narrative line, so reporters were anxious from the start to conclude that one must be the mastermind and the other his dupe. But which was which?

On their arrest, both Jackson and Walling were subjected to the Bertillon method, a system which measured the prisoner's height, armspan, facial features, finger length and other physical dimensions very precisely. Fingerprinting was still about ten years away in the US, and a set of any individual's Bertillon measurements was the best way police had to record his identity for future reference. Bertillon measurements weren't intended to offer psychological insights any more than fingerprinting is today, but sometimes got confused with the pseudoscience of linking certain facial features to a criminal "type".

That's exactly what Sergeant Kiffmeyer, the man in charge of this new technology at Cincinnati's police HQ, did when reporters asked him what Jackson and Walling's measurements had shown. Drawing on data such as Jackson's unusally long skull, Kiffmeyer announced confidently that he was "a natural monster" with "all the characteristics of a criminal" in his nature. "Jackson has the cunning to plot and plan and to conceal," Kiffmeyer summed up. "He has a head such as Napolean would have."

Well, that looked clear enough: there's our monster, case closed, pass the typewriter. The trouble was, police seemed convinced Walling was just as bad. "[He] is supremely indifferent to the consequences and to the crime committed," Kiffmeyer said. "No appeal, not even the fear of punishment will have any impression on Walling."

Matthew Pinkerton of the famous detective agency certainly believed that Walling was equally culpable. "There seems to have been a strong affinity between these two young men, and that it arose from a common lack of all moral principle, a fiendish and most unnatural disposition, cannot well be doubted," he writes. "The light regard in which they held human life and the brutal manner in

which they consumated the terrible crime argues that they were both victims of the homicidal impulse." (25)

With Jackson's cunning mind on the one hand, and Walling's chilling calm on the other, reporters hedged their bets for a while. Two weeks into the investigation, it was still possible to find reports which talked up Walling's unflapability and contrasted it sharply with Jackson's more agitated behaviour. The implication was clearly that Walling had an inhuman, robotic control of his emotions, while Jackson might at least have the excuse that his passions had got the better of him.

As more and more independent accounts of Jackson's actions dribbled in, it became clear that he was not only the father of Pearl's baby but also – in all probability – the man who'd slit her throat. That lover/killer character suited the "murdered girl" template perfectly, and reporters were content to give him the lead role from that point on. Earlier assessments of Walling's sinister character were set aside and, in every story that followed, he became a sort of Millhouse figure to Jackson's Bart Simpson. It was even suggested that Jackson might have literally hypnotised him into participating in the crime against his will.

"Walling was cast as a supporting character rather than as a principal because there was no place for him in the popular conception of what the drama of the murdered girl required," Cohen writes. "The approach taken by the papers was to assign to Walling the role of Jackson's tool or puppet. Although four hands may have assisted at Pearl Bryan's demise, only one will was at work."

Of the three main roles required, that left just the grief-stricken family to deal with. As Cohen points out, the "criminal-brought-to-justice" template generally gives this role to the killer's parents, and milks whatever pathos may be had from that. In the "murdered girl" formula, however, it's always the victim's parents who get the spotlight, and that meant reporters had to focus on the Bryans. The stereotype here, Cohen continues, demands that Pearl's parents be depicted as "grief-stricken and care-worn by events, devoted to their children, but helpless to alter their unhappy fates. Particular notice is given to the mothers."

In fact, the Bryans were far from the baffled country bumpkins this role requires. They had the money to hire lawyers they thought could help the prosecution case, and argued fiercely for Jackson and Walling to be tried in Kentucky, where they thought a death sentence was all but certain. When Walling's prison chaplain called out at the Bryan farm begging them not to insist that both men must hang, Fred Bryan stopped him at the front door and told him not to bother.

One report insists that, days before Jackson was even arrested, Fred Bryan was seen hunting him in Cincinnati with a large butcher's knife in his hand. Others claim men from the Bryan family were involved in the lynch mobs hoping to abduct Jackson before his trial. "Twice, members of the Bryan family visited the spot where Pearl's remains were found, examined the blood-stained ground, and quizzed the owner of the land about the discovery of the body," Cohen writes. "Fred Bryan twice and his sister once confronted Scott Jackson in prison."

None of this offers much evidence of the passive, poor-but-honest family the stereotype demands. Instead of stressing these elements, however, the papers talked up the "little parlour of their home", Pearl's "doting mother", her "aged father" and their loss of "a favourite daughter". The mere sight of Pearl's mother in court, one account tells us, "brought tears to every eye and a sob to every bosom".

I don't mean to mock the very real pain Pearl's family must have suffered, but only to demonstrate how their portrayal was subtly twisted to improve on an inconvenient truth. Pearl's real family was vengeful rather than saintly – just as you or I might have been in the circumstances - and took an active role in ensuring that vengence came to pass. By the time the papers had finished with them, though, mother, father and siblings could all be clicked into the template prepared for them with perfect precision. Jackson, Walling and Pearl herself were subjected to a similar alchemy, and the version of their story that produced influences our view of them even today. I've no doubt it's shaped my own account too.

The various Pearl Bryan ballads written from scratch about the case followed much the same line as the newspapers. Before these started to emerge, though, her story was already being sung on the streets of Cincinnati as a simple rewrite of an old ballad called *The Jealous Lover*. This ballad derives from a C19th century English folk song called *The Murder of Betsy Smith*.

In its standard American form, *The Jealous Lover* tells of a girl called Florella (or Lorella, or Luella), whose boyfriend William (or Willie, or Edward) takes her off into the woods and murders her there. The suggestion is that she's pregnant by him and hopes he'll keep his promise to marry her, but that he kills her instead so he can stay single. With this plot already in place, all *The Jealous Lover* needed to adapt it for Pearl's case was a simple substitution of the names involved. The tune had already proven itself eminently suitable for such tales, a fact recognised by Woody Guthrie when he borrowed it for his own murder ballad *The Philadelphia Lawyer* some 40 years later.

Doran mentions that a Pearl Bryan song was already circulating in Cincinnati by the time Ed Swain and George Jackson first met, and it's almost certainly this *Jealous Lover* variant he has in mind. It was first recorded by Charlie Poole & The North Carolina Ramblers in 1927. They called their version *Pearl Bryant* and it goes like this:

Way down in Yander's Valley,
Where the flowers fade and bloom,
Our own Pearl Bryan is sleeping,
In a cold and silent tomb.

She died not broken-hearted,
Nor by disease she fell,
But in one instant parted,
From the home she loved so well.

One night when the moon shone brightly,
The stars were shining too,
Then to her cottage window,
Her jealous lover drew.

'Come Pearl and let's go wander,
Down in the wilds so gay,
Come love and let us ponder,
Upon our wedding day.'

Deep, deep into the valley,
He led his Pearl so dear,
Said she in sorrow only,
'Why am I wandering here?'

The way grows dark and dreary,
And I'm afraid to stay,
Besides, I'm worn and weary,
I must retrace my way.

'What have I done, Scott Jackson,
That you should take my life?
I've always loved you dearly,
And would have been your wife.

'Farewell, my loving parents,
My face you'll never see more,
How long you'll wait my coming,
To a little cottage door.

'Farewell, my faithful sister,
My peaceful, happy home,
Farewell, my dear old schoolmates,
With you no more I'll roam.'

When the birds were singing sweetly,
Their bright and joyous song,
They found Pearl's Bryan's body,
On the cold and silent ground.

I've never seen a version of the song in its original form that specifically mentions a sister, but most do include the girl's farewell to "parents, friends and home", so that's a relatively minor tweak. Aside from the new names, everything in Poole's lyrics is drawn from *The Jealous Lover's* original, and the resulting hybrid fits the facts of Pearl's death pretty well. Its depiction of the victim as an an innocent, home-loving girl slots Pearl neatly into the character template found in the newspaper stories.

In *The Jealous Lover* itself, the girl often forgives her killer even as he plunges a knife into her breast, but that verse is seldom included in the *Pearl Bryan* adaptions. Perhaps the balladeers involved felt Jackson was too evil to deserve any mercy from his victim, and excised the forgiveness verse for that reason.

Some early versions of the adaption use a different final verse, tailoring the song more closely to just how Pearl was killed:

"While the banners waved above her,
The shrill was a mournful sound,
A stranger came and found her,
Cold, headless on the ground."

With such a striking detail to impart, and a walk-on part for John Hewling too, you'd think that verse would have established itself very firmly in the song. Cohen has collected a lot of Pearl's *Jealous Lover* variants, though, and her research shows that's not the case.

"Headlessness appears in 11 out of 24 texts up to 1927, in two out of seven between 1928 and 1938 and not at all after 1938," she writes. "In other murdered-girl ballads, victims are stabbed, beaten, drowned and poisoned, but beheading is not in the repetoire of allowable methods. Thus, a sensational feature of the story, which one might expect to be memorable and hence retained, is quick to disappear."

I can't claim to have studied as many *Jealous Lover* adaptions as Cohen has, but the handful I do have certainly back her conclusions. Olive Woolley Burt, in her book *American Murder Ballads & Their Stories*, recalls a 1913 visit to her uncle's ranch in Utah, where she heard a shepherd singing *The Jealous Lover* with Pearl and Scott's names inserted. Song collectors visiting one of California's migrant work camps in 1940 recorded a similar version by Lois Judd, an inmate at the camp. Judd told them she'd picked the song up in Kentucky, adding it was "about the first song I ever learnt". The same lyrics were still circulating in Kentucky as late as 1977, when the song collector Burt Feintuch found a dairy farmer called Gladys Pace singing them there. None of these versions mention the decapitation.

Burnett and Rutherford don't mention it in their 1928 recording either, which adds the surprising element of a kazoo solo to the tune. Their lyrics stick fairly close to Poole's model, but give Scott Jackson a spot of first-person narration in the opening verse:

Way down in Yonder's Valley,
Where flowers fade and bloom,
I placed my own Pearl Bryan,
In a cold and solomn tomb.

That place name, incidentally, seems to be an import from *Tom Dooley*, who killed his lover Laura Foster in the real Yander's Valley, North Carolina, in 1868. As with Tom's own ballad, "Yander's Valley" was quickly changed to a more generic "yonder valley", and we see that process already underway in the Burnett & Rutherford recording.

Pearl would get her own bespoke ballad soon after the *Jealous Lover* variant started circulating, but this patched- together adaption has proved surprisingly persistent. *The Penguin Book of Folk Ballads* logs examples in Indiana and West Virginia, both states bordering Kentucky and Ohio, but the Utah and California sightings show it's travelled much further than that.

Police now knew enough to be sure Pearl had died in Fort Thomas rather than Cincinnati, and that meant Kentucky must be given the jurisdiction of any murder trial that resulted. Even so, the Ohio authorities were nervous about the prospect of moving Jackson and Walling across the state line, because they feared Kentucky's lawmen may not be able to control the lynch mobs there.

The two men themselves didn't much fancy a move to Kentucky either. "The Newport jail was old and flimsy," Doran writes. "And both prisoners

cowered in their cells whenever reporters mentioned they probably would be taken to Newport." There were repeated rumours that they'd be moved across the river any day now, and police discovered one plot involving a gang of 50 Kentucky men, who planned to kidnap Jackson and Walling in transit and hang them while they were still on the bridge. Even the police chief in Newport acknowledged that bringing the two men there would be a risky business, and was forced to make a public statement that any sign of mob violence would be met with mass arrests.

Keeping Jackson and Walling in the cells beneath Cincinnati's City Hall was no simple matter either. Everyone in town wanted to see Pearl's killers for themselves, and huge crowds gathered anywhere people thought this might be possible. "The corridors of City Hall and the streets outside police headquarters were thronged each day by persons eager for even a glimpse of the youths accused of Pearl Bryan's death," Doran writes. Things became so impossible at City Hall during Jackson and Walling's initial questioning that police had to clear the crowded public corridors there by force. Nothing like this had ever been seen in Cincinnati, Barclay adds.

Deitsch took any threat to his prisoners seriously, and ensured they had a heavy guard every time they had to be moved around the building. "The gravest fears were entertained by the officers," Doran writes. "Cordons of police lined the passages from the Mayor's and Superintendent's offices to the cell rooms below where the prisoners were confined. Every movement was guarded with the most jealous care."

Faced with all this, the Ohio police decided to transfer Jackson and Walling to Hamilton County Jail, a lower-profile location on the edge of Cincinnati, where feelings against them ran less high. They were safely installed at Hamilton by February 11 but, even there, they continued to attract attention. The new jail allowed them to have visitors, and thousands of people trekked out there just for the opportunity to stare at two such notorious figures. "On one day alone, Jackson received 505 visitors," Doran reports. [(26)]

Across the river in Fort Thomas, John Lock's orchard was still packed with souvenir hunters. Albert Stegman, whose grandfather was one of the first Newport residents to visit the scene on the day Pearl's body was discovered, never forgot the tourist trade that sprung up there.

"Many enterprising entrepreneurs set up roadside stands along the Pike, and apparantly sales were brisk," he writes. "With the new merchants from the recently-established Midway operating these places, Mr Lock decided to give them some competition by having souvenir and food stands along his own little lane. As he was in the grocery business, with a very successful store in Newport, he had an advantage. He not only sold Pearl Bryan souvenirs, but also offered lemonade, sandwiches, soft drinks and candy." [(27)]

At least one of these stores was still trading in 1910, when William Foster Hopkins visited the spot as a boy. The trip was organised by Hopkins' father – known as "the Governor" – and William's brother Rob came along too.

"Off to Fort Thomas on the little green streetcar we went: me, Rob and the Governor," Hopkins writes in his autobiography. "At the end of the line, we got off. He led Rob and me into a dark and dusty but cool little store, that sold just about everything. He fed pennies into the kaleidoscope there for us, told us to look in, and there, flickering before our very eyes, unfolded quick segments of the Pearl Bryan drama. After looking at the pictures, we went out back to where they

found her body. […] Several times after that, Rob and I rode bikes to the end of the trolley line where, with shovels, we dug, looking for the lady's head. We never found it." (28)

Hopkins adds that his dad organised the trip because he wanted the two boys to share his own fascination with the case. It seems to have worked, because Hopkins credits the visit with prompting him to persue a career in the law - and that decision eventually led to him becoming Cincinnati's most famous criminal attorney.

Debbie Buckley shook her head in amazement when she came to this part of the tale during my own visit to Fort Thomas. "I'm just amazed that this this story drew so many thousands and thousands of people over the years to see the scene of the crime," she told me. "The fact that John Locke was able to sell sandwiches and cookies and lemonade and make a buck! It's hard for us to imagine in this day and age that it would be such an entertainment." (29)

Lock eventually tired of the disruption so many visitors were causing to his farm's main business, and also realised that his own souvenir store might make even more money if its female customers didn't have to struggle through such an overgrown lane in their long, thick skirts to get there. His answer was to relocate the store to a more convenient spot a little further up the hill, and assure anyone who didn't know better that *this* was the authentic scene of the crime. By 1910, I should think most of the other souvenir stores would have moved on, so it was probably Lock's relocated store that the Hopkins family visited.

Jackson and Walling were formally indicted for Pearl's murder by a Kentucky grand jury sitting in Newport on February 12, 1896. Ohio's authorities still didn't trust Kentucky to keep them safe, though, so they changed their own state documents to define the two men as "fugitives from justice". That meant Kentucky would have to obtain and serve official requisition papers before it could force Ohio to hand over the prisoners, and Cincinnati viewed that as a useful delay. At the very least, it would give Newport time to complete the building work needed to strengthen its tiny jailhouse.

"From the start, it was evident a big legal battle was on," Barclay writes. "The attorneys made the claim, and attempted to prove it, that the lives of their clients would not be safe in Kentucky." William Bradley, the state's governor, countered this by saying he'd make the entire Kentucky state militia available to Sheriff Plummer to ensure Jackson and Walling were safe from lynch mobs there. As the lawyers hired by Jackson and Walling's families prepared their case against Kentucky's extradition plans, police in Cincinnati continued to press the two men for a full confession and to reveal where they'd dumped Pearl's head.

It was around February 15 that Pearl's mother Susan, her sister Mabel and her brother Fred all arrived in Newport. They were allowed to take her body over the river to John Eppy's funeral parlour in Cincinnati so it could be prepared for shipment to Greencastle, where the family had a cemetery plot waiting. They gave Pearl a casket covered in white cloth, trimmed with cord and tassle, plus silver handles and a silver plate carrying her name on the lid.

"The body was clothed in a cream white silk dress, the same the girl had worn when she graduated from high school in Greencastle," Barclay writes. "Inside, the casket was full satin-lined and handsomely trimmed. The absence of the head was made scarcely noticable by the placing of a square satin pillow in the head of the casket down to the shoulders of the corpse." (30)

Jackson and Walling were each still telling the police that the other had murdered Pearl and disposed of the head alone at a secret location he'd never revealed. Jackson in particular was determined to insist he knew nothing whatsover about the head's disposal, presumably because he knew that any hint of knowledge he offered on this subject could only incriminate him further.

Knowing the body would soon be lost to them, and that Pearl's family probably wouldn't be in town for long either, the police took drastic measures to discover the head's location at last. They asked Mabel and Fred Bryan to stand next to Pearl's open coffin at Eppy's, and then brought Jackson and Walling in to confront the horror they'd caused.

"Detectives Crim and McDermott arrived with the prisoners," Barclay writes. "Crim had Walling in charge and McDermott Jackson. The latter was placed at the head of the coffin, and Walling near the foot. Both faced the brother and sister of the murdered girl, who were on the other side of the casket.

"Jackson was terribly excited, and nervously clasped and unclasped his hands. His eyes roved from one end of the body to the other, and he shook his head and sighed deeply. His face was terribly flushed, and he looked as though he might break down every second. On the other hand, Walling was to all appearances the coolest man in the room. He gazed at the corpse without a shiver, and looked around on the faces of those present. His only noticable display of agitation was to tap his foot nervously on the floor."

Deitsch was there too, and began the encounter by questioning first Walling, and then Jackson, as they stood round the coffin. Both confirmed they knew the body in front of them was Pearl Bryan's, Walling saying he based this on what Jackson had told him, and Jackson that he recognised her relatives beside the casket. Deitsch asked Walling who had killed her, and he replied: "I think, from what I have been told by Jackson, that he did". Jackson's answer to the same question was: "I think Walling did. I am reasonably sure of it from what Walling has told me." (31)

All this time, Crim was looking on. "I have seen survivors and relatives of the victims of disasters in the agony of their grief, seen men executed, and I guess I am a rather hard guy," he later wrote. "But the one scene that remains in my memory and got under my crusty surface was that enacted in the funeral parlour on Ninth Street when Scott Jackson was brought in. The family of the dead girl, fully believing that he was responsible for the girl's death, pleaded with him to return her missing head, or reveal its hiding place."

Doran's account has this episode as first-hand dialogue, though his source for this is not clear. The papers seem to have been given extraordinary access to every other phase of the investigation, however, so it's possible that at least one reporter was allowed to watch and take a shorthand note as Mabel Stanley stepped forward to question Jackson for herself. Here's how Doran quotes what followed:

Mabel Stanley: 'I ask you, Scott Jackson, to tell me what you have done with poor Pearl's head.'

[Jackson did not answer]

MS: "For the love of Heaven, tell me what you have done with poor Baby's head. Think of her mother if nothing else! I am going to her tonight, and I want to tell her where her baby's head is!"

SJ: "I can't tell you anything about it."

Jackson's reply came in what Doran calls "an even voice". When Mabel confronted Walling with the same question, Doran says, "he also refused to answer".

This scene is vividly depicted in what seems to be the first bespoke Pearl Bryan ballad to emerge. Oscar 'Doc' Parks, then aged 71, sang an extract from this version for the song collector Pat Dunford when Dunford visited his home in Alton, Indiana, back in 1962. Parks said he'd first heard the song when he was "just a little boy" which, given that he must have been born in 1890 or 1891, suggests it was already in circulation by the turn of the century. Olive Woolley Burt agrees it was "probably the original ballad of Pearl Bryan".

Here's the crucial verses as Parks sang them:

Then in came Pearl Bryan's sister,
Falling to her knees,
Pleading to Scott Jackson,
For sister's head, oh please!

Scott Jackson sat there stubborn,
These are the words he said,
'When we meet Pearl in Heaven,
There'll be no missing head'.

Parks' family had lived in Kentucky, about 130 miles from Cincinnati, and they knew the song as *Pearl Bryant*. "I remember my daddy a-comin' from Livingston, sitting by the fireside after he got his horse put up, and telling Mom that story about Pearl Bryant and about them killin' her," Parks explains. "And then not too many years after that, the song come out. You see, people back there in them hills then, they never got any news unless they went to some town. Newspapers didn't float out in the country, they had to go to some town before they could get any news." [(32)]

Parks' version of the song is just six verses long, but also manages to include mentions of Fort Thomas, Cincinnati, the Carter bloodhounds and the difficulties police had identifying Pearl's body. Unlike the *Jealous Lover* adaption discussed above, this song is frank about the decapitation. In other ways, though, it sticks quite closely to Cohen's strictures about the stereotyped roles the "murdered girl" template demands. Take this verse, for example, which squeezes Pearl's innocent country roots, the contrasting city corruption which led Jackson to seduce her, and her grieving mother back at home into just 24 words:

Pearl went to Cincinnati,
She had been never been there before,
She was stolen by Scott Jackson,
For to never see Mama no more.

The *Penguin Book of Folk Ballads* has a much fuller version of this particular Pearl Bryan song, comprising 13 verses against Parks' six. It goes like this:

Young girls, if you'll listen,
A story I'll relate,

That happened near Fort Thomas,
In the old Kentucky state

On January the thirty-first,
The dreadful deed was done,
By Jackson and by Walling;
How cold Pearl's blood did run!

But little did her parents think,
When she left her happy home,
Their darling girl just in her youth,
Would never more return.

How sad it would have been to them,
To have heard Pearl's lonely voice
At midnight in that lonely spot,
Where those two boys rejoiced!

And little did Pearl Bryan think,
When she left home that day,
The grip she carried in her hand,
Would hide her head away.

She thought it was her lover's hand,
She could trust both night and day,
Although it was her lover's hand,
That took her life away.

The driver in the seat is all,
Who tells of Pearl's sad fate,
Of poor Pearl Bryan away from home,
In the old Kentucky state

Of her aged parents we all know well,
What a fortune they would give,
If Pearl could but to them return,
Her natural life to live.

In came Pearl Bryan's sister,
And falling to her knees,
Begging to Scott Jackson,
"My sister's head, O please!"

Scott Jackson he sat stubborn,
And not a word was said,
"I'll meet my sister in heaven,
Where I'll find her missing head."

The jury gave a verdict,
And to their feet they sprung:

"For the crime these boys committed,
They surely must be hung."

The two verses I've left out, which come near the end of the song, are incomplete in the Penguin version, but comprise a plea for mercy from Walling's mother. I've never heard these used in any recording of the song, however, perhaps because – as Cohen remarked in her own research – the killer's parents are generally felt to have no place in a "murdered girl" ballad.

The first verse here, addressing the song specifically to "young ladies" fits my pet theory that songs like these would have been a useful way for mothers to remind their daughters not to believe everything a randy young man might tell them. The warning's reinforced by a couple of optional verses sometimes tacked on to this incarnation of the ballad:

Now all young girls take warning,
For all men are unjust,
It may be your truest lover,
You know not whom to trust.

Pearl Bryan died away from home,
On a dark and lonely spot,
My God, My God, believe me girls,
Don't let this be your lot.

Cohen calls this version of the ballad "Pearl Bryan I", and divides it into two further categories: "Dalhart" and "non-Dalhart". This refers to the country singer Vernon Dalhart, who cut the first record of this song under the name Jep Fuller for Vocalion in 1926. His version, and the branch of the song's history that's followed it ever since, is easily identifiable by the fact that it dates the murder to "late in January" rather than, as the Penguin version does, "January the 31st". The lyrics on Dalhart's record, which otherwise follow the Penguin words quite closely, are credited to John and Rosalie Carson, who often wrote songs for Dalhart at that time.

Vocalion's paperwork is less confident however, entering only a question mark in the column normally reserved for the holder of the lyrics' copyright and noting the tune as that of the old folk song *Little Mary Phagan*. Whoever finalised the words used on Dalhart's recording, they obviously didn't feel entitled to claim the copyright on them. Cohen's guess is that the Carsons made a few quick changes to an existing broadside's verses about the case, and then bolted on a familiar folk tune that happened to fit.

Before we leave this version of the ballad altogether, it's worth just returning to its habit of depicting Mabel falling to her knees as she begs Jackson to tell her where Pearl's head was dumped. This gives the balladeers a handy rhyme with "please", another word that helps them reinforce Mabel's desperation, but there's precious little evidence that it has any foundation in fact.

The closest the contemporary accounts come to confirming it is Barclay's description of her "*almost* begging on bended knees". Crim writes about "the sister going down on her knees to him", but produced that account a full 50 years after Pearl's death, by which time his recollection would have been corrupted by

many inaccurate tellings of the story – and perhaps by hearing a few of the ballads as well.

Most printed accounts of Pearl's tale take it as read that Mabel must have knelt at Jackson's feet, and even where they fudge that issue in the text, she's always pictured that way in the accompanying illustrations. It's now become impossible to imagine her in any other position as this scene plays out, and perhaps that's because it's just too compelling an image for any singer, writer or artist to resist. Barclay gave us just enough of a hint to steer everyone in that direction, his careful qualifier was soon forgotten, and poor old Mabel's been trapped on her knees ever since.

Chapter five

In which police utilise an ingenious listening device.

Cincinnati stalled the process of arranging Jackson and Walling's requisition hearing as long as possible, hoping that time would help to cool tempers across the state line. "Mob violence was feared," Barclay writes. "And this fact more than any other caused the delay in the hearing of the arguments on the requistion papers. It was feared the lives of the prisoners would be placed in serious jeopardy if they were sent to Kentucky before the excitement had in some measure died out."

As February came to an end, the issue could be put off no longer and police prepared to take Jackson and Walling from Hamilton County Jail to the nearby courthouse so a date could be fixed for the hearing itself. Even this short trip – a few streets at most – meant they had to worry what might happen if the two men appeared in public and the crowds got out of control. Fortunately, the jail's original planners had foreseen that situations like this would sometimes arise, and ensured the builders dug an underground tunnel running directly from the jail to Hamilton County's courthouse.

Even so, the move would not be a simple matter. "Rumours of all kinds prevailed, and squadrons of police were placed in line, guarding closely every inch of the way from the jail to the courtroom," Barclay reports. "The tunnel was cleared of every obstacle, but when all was in readiness, it was discovered that the key to the massive gate at the entrance to the tunnel from the jail yard had been misplaced, and could not be found."

Police were forced to take Jackson and Walling through the streets instead, and this seems to have been accomplished without too much fuss. The full hearing was set for March 7, and they were returned to their cells.

Colonel Robert Nelson, who had a reputation as one of Kentucky's most able and agresssive prosecutors, volunteered his services to help ensure that Jackson and Walling were not only tried in the state but successfully convicted there. I don't know whether he was proposing to work for free, but if so he'd presumably concluded that such a high-profile case would do his career no harm. He certainly took the opportunity to grab a bit of free publicity from his offer, telling reporters Jackson and Walling were "villains of the deepest dye" who were "guilty of the most heinous crime ever put upon the fair name and fame of Kentucky".

Meanwhile, people all over Cincinnati were still gossiping about the case. One of Pearl's brothers heard rumours that a black man had been seen leaving some of her effects at a house on East Sixth Street in Newport. According to him, this man had then left town, taking a train to Greencastle on the morning Pearl's body was discovered. Crim and McDermott investigated the lead, but could find no such house at the address they were given. At least two people came forward saying they'd seen Pearl at a hostel on Cincinnati's Elm Street, but this too proved impossible to confirm.

At about 1:00am on March 6, a Sergeant Clawson opened his police patrol box at the corner of Eighth and Baymiller in Cincinnati to discover a note for Deitsch poked inside. "Jackson and Walling cut off Pearl Bryan's head and buried it in the Dayton sandbar," the note read. "When the time comes, I will tell all. I

was in hiding at the time, and followed these fellows to where they buried the head." The note was signed "F.A.M", and gave a Post Office box number for any replies the police may care to send.

Any murder that gets as much ink as Pearl's uncovers its fair share of nutcases among the general public, and there's no evidence the police took this note at all seriously. A few days later, another time-waster claimed he'd seen Pearl and Walling together on a train from Indianapolis to Cincinnati on January 30, but then proved unable to identify Walling when police placed the man two feet in front of him.

With still no sign of Pearl's head, the papers were beginning to lose patience. "The oft-repeated assertion that Jackson and Walling are gradually breaking down does not seem to have much foundation in fact," the *CE* thundered on March 6. "Both are growing stouter and healthier, and each day finds their nerves steadier. All hope of getting any confession from the prisoners has gone glimmering. Acting under the advice of their attorneys, they will not talk at all about the murders.

"Jackson's greatest anxiety seems to be to learn each day what new evidence has developed against him. His first question addressed to the newspaper man who approaches him is: 'What's new today?' Not so very long ago, the thought of going to Kentucky seemed to worry both the men. Now, however, they are indifferent about the matter, and say they do not care whether they are taken over the river or not."

March 7 was a Saturday – not the most obvious day of the week to hold a requisition hearing – and it was hoped this choice of date would help to wrong-foot the riotous spectators who might otherwise turn up. As an additional precaution, the court refused to say what time the hearing would begin. "In order to avoid any undue crush, it has been decided that no-one shall be admitted to the courtroom who has not a clear right to be there," the *CE* warned. (33)

Everyone expected Kentucky to win at the hearing, and that morning's papers were full of speculation about what would happen next. The prevailing theory was that Sheriff Plummer hoped to drive the prisoners across the state line at breakneck speed as soon as the hearing finished. This was confirmed when the *CE* later reported that Kentucky had placed a six-seater carriage outside the courthouse, with two speedy horses, an experienced driver and at least one detective waiting inside.

The hearing began on the dot of 9:00am, about an hour before the court normally began its day's business. This allowed police to get Jackson and Walling into the court without any trouble, and there were only about half a dozen people in the public gallery as they prepared to start. Police stationed in the corridors outside insisted that all the attorneys and officials produced proper identification before letting them into the courtroom. Unfortunately, anyone the attorney vouched for as his assistant had to be allowed in too, and many of these people turned out to be no more than curious friends whom the attorney owed a favour.

Word soon got out that the hearing had begun, and the crowds waiting outside the jail for Jackson and Walling to emerge flooded into the courthouse corridors instead. Police barred them from entering the hearing itself, where the attorneys' friends filled every spare seat in what Barclay calls "an immense throng". Also in court was Pearl's father, Alexander Bryan, with his three sons Fred, Frank and James. They'd brought a ten-strong legal team with them from Greencastle to help Kentucky ensure the requisition went through.

Pearl's case was national news by now, and the *New York Times* had a man in court to watch as Jackson and Walling entered. Jackson was handcuffed to a Sheriff Archibald, but Walling walked in free beside a court bailiff. "Jackson sat in the jury box, looking in an absent-minded manner out of the windows," the *NYT* man reports. "Walling, who is the more communicative, talked with several friends as he laughed and stroked a scant growth of beard." (34)

The same *NYT* story gives the lawyers' names as Ermston (arguing Ohio's case to keep the two men) Lockhart and Nelson (both fighting for Kentucky), Shephard (representing Jackson) and Andrews (for Walling). The case would be decided by Judge Buchwalter, who had recently refused to deliver a black murder suspect to Kentucky because he believed the man would not be safe there.

Ermston began Ohio's case by arguing that there was still no certainty on the
issue of where or how Pearl had been killed. Kentucky's requisition documents relied only on a *belief* that Jackson and Walling had been involved, he added, rather than giving any outright statement that was the case. The papers also failed to specify any date for the killing, or to establish a motive on Jackson and Walling's part, he said.

Andrews claimed that, given the opportunity to do so, he could show that Walling hadn't even been in Kentucky at the time Pearl was killed. This line of argument proved a mixed blessing for his client because, although it hinted that he might have a alibi, it also amounted to confirmation that Kentucky should have jurisdiction of the murder trial.

Nelson poured scorn on Ohio's case, sarcastically congratulating Cincinnati for its kindness in giving Kentucky's criminals a safe haven. He demolished Ermston's technical arguments one by one, pointing out for example that Ohio law required no specific crime date in the papers for a case like this. Buchwalter said he'd announce his decision at 2:00pm, and cleared the court for lunch.

"There was a rush of spectators from the room to see what the crowd would do on the street," the *CE* reports. "There had gathered a large crowd on both North and South Court Streets while the hearing was in progress, waiting for the prisoners to be brought out and taken to Kentucky. Again, they were disappointed, for the prisoners were simply returned to jail to wait until the afternoon session of the court." (35)

The police had stationed a couple of patrol wagons near the jail just in case, but as it turned out, these were not needed. The crowd followed Jackson and Walling all the way back to the jail house, but made no attempt to attack them.

When Buchwalter returned, he ruled in favour of Kentucky's requisition request. Jackson and Walling would remain in their Hamilton County cells for one more week, he said, and if no appeal court reversed his decision during that time, they'd be taken across the river on March 14. "No matter how much Judge Buchwalter may have disliked to honour a requisition from Kentucky, he saw that public feeling was in no humour to be trifled with," Barclay says.

The bravado they'd shown before the hearing was forgotten when Jackson and Walling heard Buchwalter's decision. Barclay tells us Jackson grew "as pale as death" and was "visibly agitated and trembling" when he heard the news. "Jackson wept when he was told he would be taken across the river," Doran adds.

"Of course I do not want to go to Kentucky," Jackson told the reporters who questioned him. "I not only fear that we would be mobbed, but I don't

believe we would be given a fair trial. How can I think otherwise when an authority like Sheriff Plummer told us that, if we were taken over to Newport, the people there would lynch us for sure. […] Since he told me that, I have not had any great longing to visit his state."

"We have fought desperately to prevent going there," Walling added.

As the two men's final week in Ohio dragged on, the papers dug up whatever scraps they could find to keep the story alive. The *CE* was clearly determined to run a Pearl Bryan story every day, no matter how little new information it had to impart. On March 8, it revealed that Carothers and the doctor who'd analysed Pearl's stomach contents for him had both submitted their bills to Newport's commissioners. On March 9, their big story was that George Jackson hadn't changed his mind about anything he'd already told the police. On March 10, it was that Walling was being bothered by rats in his Hamiliton County cell, but that the same animals left Jackson in peace. (36)

This phase of the paper's coverage hit its all-time low with a March 9 story headlined "Pegging Away", which appeared on page 2 of its main section. This is the lead paragraph in full:

"There were no developments in the famous Pearl Bryan murder case in police circles yesterday. Detectives Crim and McDermott worked on some matters of minor importance in reference to the evidence in the case, but their work is of no interest to the public at this time. Chief Deitsch was not feeling well yesterday and did not leave his home in Cumminsville. The other officers of the police department did not gather anything pertaining to the Ft Thomas mystery." (37)

With stories like this filling their pages, the papers must have been mighty relieved when the day came round for Jackson and Walling's trip to Kentucky at last. Before he let them leave Ohio for good, though, Deitsch had just one more card to play.

Crowds of spectators and newspapermen gathered round Hamiliton County Jail every day during Jackson and Walling's final week there, but there never seemed to be anything to see. Even March 14, the Saturday Judge Buchwalter had specified for the two men's transfer, produced no sign of action.

All that changed on Tuesday morning, the 17th, when a police patrol wagon backed as close as it could get to the jail's entrance. The jail door flew open, and five men ran out. They dashed across the few yards of open space remaining, then leapt into the wagon and slammed its doors shut behind them. The stunned crowd had just enough time to recognise Sheriff Plummer, with Jackson and Walling handcuffed to two detectives behind him. Crim had charge of Walling, while McDermott was looking after Jackson. A cry went up: "They're going to Kentucky!"

The crowd erupted. Reporters rushed to the nearest telephone so they could order a cab. Anyone with a wagon nearby was bribed or bullied into co-operating too. By the time the patrol wagon could pick its way through the excited mob, there were already a dozen or more vehicles ready to follow it. Reaching the open street at last, the police driver whipped his reins to spur the team on.

"The horses were forced to run, and those following increased their speed accordingly," Barclay writes. "Fear was unmistakably seen on the countenances of both prisoners. Down Sycamore Street to Eighth the horses went on a wild run. Before reaching Eighth Street, Sheriff Plummer said it would be impossible to

thwart the fast-increasing throng and, in order to throw them off their guard, ordered the driver to turn west off Sycamore on Eighth and drive to the Central Police Station.

"A large crowd awaited them there, and the prisoners were quickly hustled into the cells. The crowds increased until the large iron doors had to be closed to keep the crowds from the driveways and corridors of the big city building. The prisoners were kept there for two hours or more."

Barclay's account here matches what all the newspapers thought at the time – reflecting his cut-and-paste approach to producing the book – but the motive for the detour was actually very different. Deitsch had prepared a special cell for Jackson and Walling in Central Police Station's basement, and that's why they had to be delayed there.

"The cell was so arranged that it amplified any sound within it," Doran writes. "Through small holes in each end, wires led along the water pipes. These were arranged under the direction of Thomas Sullivan, who was then superintendant of the police telegraph service. In a room far removed from the cell, the wires were connected to earphones."

Sullivan cobbled this ingenious bugging system together from the station's existing telephone equipment. Telephone mouthpieces were pressed into service as remote microphones, and the earpieces cannibalised into primitive headphones. He called the result a "sensitive cell", and it's thought to be the first room like it America.

Jackson and Walling had been kept separate ever since their arrests, because police didn't want to give them any chance to cook up a story in private. At Central Police Station, though, they were thrown into the sensitive cell together, and left to their own devices. Crim and the other officers listened to what they said via Sullivan's equipment, while a secretary called Minnie Fey transcribed it all.

When Jackson's case eventually came to trial, the judge ruled Fey's full transcript inadmissable, which means reporters were never given a chance to see it. As far as I've been able to discover, no copy exists. Crim was allowed to summarise the results of the exercise in court, though, so at least we have that.

First, Crim said, he'd heard Jackson and Walling encouraging each other to keep their nerve and tell the police nothing. "Once Jackson asked Walling if he thought they would drive over the same way they had gone that other time," Crim testified. His understanding was that Jackson meant the coming trip to Newport, and was comparing it to their journey there on the night of Pearl's death. [38]

Jackson and Walling didn't know it but, by the time they'd finished their chat that afternoon, the nooses round both their necks had drawn a little tighter. There was no definitive smoking gun in their conversation – no outright admission of guilt or revelation about the head's disposal – but it did confirm their guilt in several smaller ways. Most importantly, there was nothing there that forced police to abandon anything in the case they already had against the two men, which Crim called "one of the most complete pictures ever built by circumstantial evidence".

Satisfied he'd got all he could from the ruse, Deitsch told his men to fetch Jackson and Walling from the cell, and load them in a wagon again for the last leg of their journey to Newport. There were still huge crowds waiting outside the police station when the big iron gates shot open again, and a police patrolwagon

rushed into the courtyard. Plummer, Jackson, Walling, Crim and McDermott quickly bundled themselves inside.

"A wild drive to Newport was made," Barclay says. "East on Eighth Street to Broadway dashed the team of splendid police horses, down Broadway to Second and over the Central Bridge on a full run. Thence up York Street in Newport, up to Third and the jail.

"Everywhere, people stopped and stared at the strange chase, as patrol and vehicles containing press representatives galloped by, throwing mud and snow in all directions. […] On the Central Bridge, the horses broke into a gallop, and everybody in sight began to run. Before the Newport end was reached, a surging crowd pushed up York and down Third Streets on both sides, but they were not fast enough for the horses."

The jailers at Newport had been warned Jackson and Walling were on their way, but didn't expect them to make the journey so fast. The route Barclay describes covers about two miles – much of it through busy city streets - but the driver managed to complete it under 15 minutes. As the carriage approached, Police at Newport jail were already struggling to control a crowd there, which the papers guessed must contain at least a thousand people.

At about 4:00pm, a cry of "Here they come!" went up from the people on York Street, and a few seconds later the patrol burst round a corner into view of the jail. The crowd hurried after to try and halt it, and packed the street leading to the jail's entrance with a makeshift blockade of human flesh. Somehow, the carriage managed to fight its way through.

"Sheriff Plummer stepped from the wagon, and was closely followed by Walling, handcuffed to Detective McDermott, and Jackson, handcuffed to Detective Crim," Barclay reports. "Both prisoners were pale and trembling, evidently believing the crowd was there for reasons other than curiosity." In fact, the crowd just glared mutely at Jackson and Walling as they were hurried into the jail's admissions office and the door slammed behind them. Even the reporters who'd followed them all the way from Cincinnati were not allowed in.

As Jackson and Walling's mad dash over the bridge concluded, Pearl's parents were getting ready to cross a river of their own. They took her remains to Greencastle's Forest Hills cemetery on the same day her killers were moved to Newport, but Alexander Bryan couldn't quite face burying his daughter yet. He insisted she must be kept in an above-ground vault at the cemetery instead, hoping desperately that her head could still be found, and interred with the rest of the body. It took ten days of gentle persuasion for the family to change his mind.

Pearl was finally laid to rest on March 27. "Following the casket was one of the largest crowds ever seen at a funeral in Greencastle," Barclay tells us. "The headless body of Pearl Bryan, dressed in her magnificent white dress in which she graduated from the Greencastle High School, borne by the loving classmates in thet graduating class, was consigned to the earth from whence it came."

Soon after the funeral, visitors at Pearl's grave began the custom of leaving a Lincoln penny heads-up on her gravestone as a symbolic replacement for the head she'd otherwise be lacking on Judgement Day. Other visitors preferred to chip away a pebble or two from the gravestone itself to take away as their own personal souvenir. When I visited the grave myself in September 2010, the grounds keeper there told me Pearl's family had replaced the damaged stone at least once, but that the vandals attacking it proved so persistent that they were

eventually forced to give up and have it interred with Pearl herself. There's just a bare foundation stone there now, and visitors have to be content with leaving their pennies on that instead.

Chapter six

In which both Jackson and Walling are condemned to hang.

Jackson and Walling were formally arraigned for Pearl's murder at Campbell County's Circuit Court in Newport on March 23. Just like their requisition hearing, this was an event everyone wanted to see for themselves, and anyone with strings worth pulling in town angled desperately for one of the 300 official tickets. All but about 20 of these tickets went to men, and only the four seats reserved for the prisoners and their guards were left empty when proceedings began at 9:30am.

Judge Charles Helm cleared about 15 minutes worth of routine business and then called for Jackson and Walling to be brought in. Each man had a leading member of the Kentucky bar to look after his interests, with Leonard Crawford representing Jackson and Colonel George Washington speaking for Walling.

Reporters on the scene thought Jackson and Walling seemed pale as they entered the room, but rather less haggard than they'd been at the requisition hearing. "They both looked well, and gave evidence that they enjoyed their Kentucky fare," Barclay says. "Walling retained his paleness throughout the proceedings, but Jackson, after taking his seat and looking over the assembled crowd, flushed up a little."

Both men, speaking through their attorneys, entered a plea of not guilty, which meant prosecutors would be forced to prove the case against them in court. Helm asked each attorney whether his client wanted a separate trial or a joint one, and Crawford said he didn't want to make that decision just yet. Washington settled the matter by asking immediately for Walling to be tried on his own, and Helm agreed.

Helm set Jackson's trial to begin on April 7, prompting protests from Crawford that this would not give him enough time to prepare his client's defence. Helm brushed these objections aside. In the event, the April 7 court date was used only to clear a few procedural matters arising from Jackson's case, and his trial proper didn't start till April 21. Much of that extra two weeks was taken up by the court's efforts to find 12 Newport jurors who didn't already feel convinced that Jackson was guilty. The final jury was made up of local merchants and tradesmen, including four grocers, two carpenters, a plumber and a man who ran his own coal yard.

The understanding from Helm's ruling was that Walling's trial would start as soon as Jackson's was done. Rumours flew that Walling had demanded a separate trial because he might be willing to turn state's evidence against Jackson if prosecutors reduced his own charges in return. If so, the deal seems to have fallen through.

A crowd gathered outside Newport's courthouse when April 21 came round but most people knew they had no hope of getting inside. Many of the tickets available had been grabbed by Campbell County's own lawyers and their friends, who were as keen to watch Jackson being tried as anyone else. Local politicians used their own access to ensure relatives got into the viewing gallery or to buy future favours from the county's most powerful men. Refined spectators like these were thought less likely to cause trouble in court, so this arrangement

suited the authorities too. Everyone else would have to rely on dispatches from the six reporters' tables grouped closely round the witness stand.

The prosecution team on the day was: M. R. Lockhart, Kentucky's Commonwealth Attorney; Ramsay Washington, the County Attorney; Robert Nelson, the show-boating lawyer who'd helped win the requisition hearing; and Silas Hayes, a Greencastle lawyer representing the Bryan family. Once again, it was Judge Helm on the bench.

Jackson's defence was again led by Leonard Crawford, who at the age of just 37 already had one nomination as Kentucky's Attorney General under his belt. Doran calls him "one of the most successful practitioners of the Campbell County bar". Walling was allowed to have George Washington in court to challenge any lies that Jackson might tell about him there. The Ramsay Washington on Jackson's prosecution team was George's son.

Reporters wandered through the crowds outside the courthouse gathering comments as everyone waited for Jackson to arrive. Many murderers of the day won a perverse sympathy from crowds like these, but not Jackson. "Nothing but deep-seated and virulent hostility was manifested by 99 out of every 100 of those who gathered about the courthouse," Barclay reports. "'He'll hang and he ought to - damn him!' said one fellow at the centre of a listening group. 'Yes, and Walling ought to follow him in five minutes!' said a bare-headed working woman, as she shifted a baby from arm to arm. The same sullen antipathy was apparent as Jackson passed through the crowd. It was indisputably general."

Jackson himself seemed unmoved, showing far less fear of this Newport crowd than for the ones he'd confronted at the jail there or outside his arraignment hearing. He walked into the court beside Crawford with what Barclay calls "a nervous smile and a forced jauntiness". He was seated left of the witness box, slightly towards its rear, where reporters watched him listening carefully to everything said.

Lockhart began his case for the prosecution by referring to a sensational 1886 novel which would still have been fresh in the jury's minds. "We will show that this man has been a veritable *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*," he promised. "We will show you that this fellow led a double life. Up in Greencastle, he was a gentleman, but in Cincinnati he was in society of ill repute.

"We will show that, a week or two before the crime was committed, he displayed a fine dissecting knife, and that he was experienced in the use of a knife that could have done that kind of work. We will show that, after blasting her life, he deliberately enticed this girl from her country home and then, taking her to Fort Thomas, cut off her head while she struggled against the monster." (39)

That set the tone for much of the first day, as Allen Johnson, George Jackson, Coroner Tingley and John Hewling all told what they knew of Pearl's fate. Johnson explained how he'd seen the defendant drug Pearl at Wallingford's saloon and then leave with her. George Jackson described being forced to drive Scott and Pearl across the river at gunpoint. Tingley provided the medical evidence showing she'd been alive until the moment her head was severed, and Hewling gave vivid testimony of the state her body was in when he found it.

This account built quickly into a sense of utter revulsion towards Jackson, which showed itself in one small but telling incident. At some point in the day – perhaps at the lunchbreak – Jackson left his seat to return to the ante-room adjoining the court. To do this, he had to pass closely by three well-dressed women sitting on the front bench of the spectators' area and, even for these

respectable ladies, the provocation was too much. "One of the women suddenly reached out and kicked Jackson twice," Barclay says. "She put all her strength into the blows. Jackson flushed and then smiled a smile which, in his case, is better evidence of internal anguish and agitation than is a tear on the face of most men."

Meanwhile, Deitsch's men were engaged in a constant struggle to maintain order, both inside the courtroom and on the surrounding streets. "Every day the police fought to keep the courtroom from overcrowding and to control the crowds on the outside," Doran writes. "One by one, the witnesses in the show paraded on the stage, spoke their lines and passed back to the wings."

Day two brought a particularly theatrical moment, as the prosecution produced a headless dummy dressed in Pearl's blood-stained clothes and set it up facing the jury. Nelson insisted innocently that this was intended only as a educational tool, but Crawford challenged the stunt's legality, and Helm ordered the dummy removed. The clothes were laid out soberly on a table instead, where Mabel Stanley and her mother confirmed they belonged to Pearl. Mabel also identified the handkerchiefs police had found in Jackson's abandoned coat, and recalled the day Pearl bought them in a Greencastle store.

Mayor Caldwell and Inspector Deitsch told the court what they'd learned from questioning Jackson, and set out the tale of Pearl's valise and its strange progress round Cincinnati's bars. The saloon keepers John Legner and John Kugel appeared too, confirming their own part in the valise story. While watching Caldwell speak, Barclay says, Jackson "became flushed and nervous", fixing his eyes on the witness box "with an intensity that became painful".

All this was really just a prelude to Cal Crim's appearance. "For three days and more, he sat in the witness chair while first the prosecutors and then Crawford fired questions at him from all angles," Doran writes. "The answer to one scarcely had left his lips before he was faced with another. And, through it all, he unfolded steadily the story of that grim trail he had followed with Jack McDermott and Sheriff Jule Plummer."

Crim recalled the experience in his *CE* piece 50 years later. "It was not a new role for me," he writes. "I stuck to facts and carefully avoided opinions and inferences, for which there were many opportunities. As a result, the cross-examination was no ordeal. In fact, after I had finished and come over the river for lunch, I met Colonel Crawford of the defence, and he took occasion to commend me for a straightforward testimony of facts, without frills. He insisted on taking me to a leading store and making me a present of a fine hat."

Crim's testimony joined with that of the other witnesses to give the jury the full account of Pearl's downfall which I've detailed so exhaustively here. Now it was the defence's turn. Crawford began his case by placing Jackson himself on the stand, and inviting him to tell the court his own version of events. "All the man's natural shrewdness came to his aid while on the stand," Barclay says. "His words were clear, frankly spoken, and there was no hesitation in his manner. He acted the innocent man to perfection."

Jackson's story was that William Wood had actually been responsible for sending Pearl to Cincinnati. His own role, he said, had simply been to try and find the girl some better accommodation when he discovered her at the city's Indiana House hotel. He'd been seen with her valise because he'd taken it with him on the search, intending to leave it in the new room before returning for Pearl herself. His room-mate Alonzo Walling had become confused and panic-stricken when

the first reports about Pearl's body emerged, and insisted that Jackson help him dispose of all the girl's remaining belongings.

Jackson stopped short of any outright accusation that Wood had made Pearl pregnant, or that Walling had agreed to perform an abortion at Wood's request. But the implication was clear on both counts. "His narrative was very smooth," Barclay says. "Neither does he accuse anyone of the murder. He merely adheres to his theory that Walling is guilty – that is all."

The two main witnesses called on Jackson's behalf both seem to have been bribed to appear by his friends or family, and strictly coached on exactly what they must say. Rose McNevin, the landlady at his boarding house, testified that Jackson had been home in his room on the night of the murder, insisting that she always knew exactly when every one of her 14 roomers entered or left the house. The papers marvelled sarcastically at what a phenomenal memory she must have to achieve this feat, and no-one took her evidence remotely seriously.

The second bought witness was William Trusty of Urbana, Illinois, who Crawford produced at the last minute. Trusty swore on oath that he, not George Jackson, had driven Pearl across the river to John Lock's orchard, and that she'd already been dead when he took charge of the carriage on the Cincinnati side. He said Jackson and Walling told him she died in a botched abortion carried out by the elderly doctor who accompanied them all to Fort Thomas in the carriage.

That still left Jackson as having apparently agreed to help dispose of the body, but at least it suggested someone else had killed Pearl, and that she was already dead when her head was cut off. Whoever paid Trusty for his testimony must have hoped it would plant just enough doubt in the jury's mind to prevent them calling for a death sentence.

In fact, Trusty's account was disproved almost the moment he uttered it. "He broke down on cross-examination, and it was revealed that he had been coached by his uncle John Seward, a detective," Crim writes. "Subsequently, they confessed, and were sent to the Kentucky Penitentiary, one for perjury and the other for subornation." Somewhere along the line, it seems, one of Jackson's friends or relatives had found a bent copper and persuaded him to get his nephew involved in the scheme.

By May 12, both sides were ready to give their closing statements. Nelson summed up for the prosecution with a speech Barclay says was "intensely dramatic and spell-binding in its eloquence". Crawford responded ably enough for the defence, but could do only so much with the case Jackson had given him to argue. As the jury retired to consider its verdict on May 14, police stationed guards throughout the courtroom and around the building to prevent any trouble if Jackson was acquitted or the jury found itself unable to agree.

They needn't have worried. After a short consultation, the jury returned to announce Scott Jackson was guilty of first-degree murder and should hang for it. "Jackson slumped in his chair, all the colour drained from his face," Doran writes. "Alonzo Walling, when he was told of the verdict, merely said: 'I am not surprised. That's the way I thought it would go'."

After the trial, Jackson rejoined Walling at Newport jail to await news of his execution date. Two days later, at about 8:00pm on May 16, the other inmates there sawed through the hinges on the tiny jail's rear door and fled into the night. "All escaped except Jackson and Walling," next day's *New York Times* reported. "The alleged murderers of Pearl Bryan refused to leave, thinking they might be lynched." (40)

That sounds a little far-fetched, but the accounts I've read of Newport jail at around this time suggest it was no bigger than a couple of modest terraced houses. I doubt it held more than about a dozen prisoners even when it was full to capacity, so the idea of all but two escaping is quite plausible. The really striking thing about the episode is that, even with a judicial death sentence over his head, Jackson preferred to take his chances with the legal system rather than face Kentucky's people in the street.

As Newport's jail now lacked a back door, Jackson and Walling were transferred to nearby Covington jail instead. By that time, however, the concern was less keeping them in than keeping the lynch mobs out. Jackson's bid for a retrial was turned down, and his execution date set for June 30. Meanwhile, Walling still had his own trial to look forward to.

Jury selection for Walling's trial began towards the end of May, and the hearing got under way on June 2. Walling was represented by Washington again, this time aided by another prominent and capable attorney called Shepherd. The prosecution team was the same one Jackson had faced and, once again, it was Judge Helm who presided. The court was packed with curious spectators, who competed keenly for the best seats.

The case against Walling was essentially the same one Jackson's jury had heard, and much of the same evidence was produced for a second time. Jackson's efforts at his own trial to implicate Walling in the murder did nothing to help Washington's case. "Walling's defence was made the more difficult because Jackson had taken the stand and tried to throw suspicion on his erstwhile pal," Crim writes. "This did not help Jackson, but it did not do Walling any good. It was a typical Jackson stunt."

The trial concluded on June 19, when the jury returned after only a few minutes deliberation to give their verdict. "We find the defendant Alonzo Walling guilty of the murder of Pearl Bryan, and fix the punishment at death," the foreman announced. "Walling looked straight before him, not deigning to glance at the jury or the spectators who gaped hungrily at him hoping for a sign that he was affected," Doran writes. "He was led back to his cell."

This scene struck home with the *New York Times'* reporter watching too. "Walling was the most unconcerned man in the crowded courtroom when the verdict was given," he wrote next day. "He smiled and, when asked if he had anything to say, replied with an oath.

"His brothers, Charles and Clinton, broke down and wept bitterly for nearly an hour. […] Walling's venerable mother heard the verdict at her home in Hamilton, Ohio, was completely prostrated, and is in a precarious condition. The verdict is generally approved, though many believe that the evidence did not warrant the extreme punishment." (41)

Crim for one. "I am glad I did not instigate [Walling's] arrest," he wrote many years later. "I have always felt that he was only a simple country boy who fell under the blighting influence of an older and much more sinister man, for whom he became a more or less willing tool. His weakness was his enemy. "

Washington, like Crawford before him, filed papers asking for his client to be given a fresh trial, but Helm turned his request down too. A week later, he set Walling's execution date for August 7. The legal battle wasn't over yet, though, and both Crawford and Washington took their protests to the next level up by involving Kentucky's Court of Appeals. This began a long process of each

execution date being postponed to await the outcome of the next appeal, then rescheduled, then postponed again.

Christmas came and went, dragging the process into 1897, and still there was no resolution in sight. There was some light relief just after New Year, when a convicted killer called Robert Laughlin, another inmate at Covington jail, told the *Bourbon County News* that he planned to return in spirit form after his own execution to watch Jackson and Walling hang. Laughlin was hanged on January 9, and attention turned back to Jackson and Walling's appeals.

Kentucky seemed in no rush to get this issue settled, perhaps because the authorities there wanted to continue pressuring Jackson and Walling to help them find Pearl's head so whatever was left of it could be given a decent burial. By holding out the hope that one or both death sentences could still be commuted to life imprisonment, they thought Jackson or Walling might be induced to tell all they knew at last. But both men insisted they had nothing to add to the accounts they'd already given in court. "Have it your way," Kentucky's Governor William Bradley replied, marking up another couple of fresh execution dates on his calendar.

Jackson and Walling persisted with their appeals anyway. "Up and down went their hopes and spirits as the lawyers carried their pleas first to the Kentucky Court of Appeals and then to Governor Bradley," Doran writes. "Date after date was set for their execution, and then each date was cancelled. Eventually the last hope, appeal to Governor Bradley for clemency, was denied, and Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling were sentenced to be hanged simultaneously on March 20, 1897." (42)

With nothing more to lose, Jackson issued a statement to the *New York Times*, accusing the police of outright perjury, which the paper published in its February 28 issue. "The State's case was a manufactured one, with no real evidence whatsoever," Jackson asserts. "Facts which should have been a part of the evidence were suppressed because they did not agree with the perjured statements of policemen." Jackson declined to say just what those perjured statements had been, or to set out any of the rival evidence he claimed had been suppressed at the trial, so no-one took his statement very seriously. (43)

The same day's *NYT* revealed that Walling had given what the paper called "a full confession" to Reverend Lee, the prison chaplain, and asked him to take it to the Bryan family. When they'd read the confession, Walling said, Lee should ask them again to petition Governor Bradley to commute his sentence. The suggestion is clearly that this confession contained something very convincing which helped to clear Walling from the murder charge.

Unfortunately, Lee's mission is the one I mentioned earlier, which Pearl's brother decided to cut short. "When [Rev. Lee] was half way to the Bryan homestead, he was met by Fred Bryan, who very plainly told him he would have to discontinue his mission, as the Bryan family would not consider the confession," the *NYT* reports. "Lee gave up his mission and returned to Cincinnati." The wording there suggests Fred Bryan didn't even bother to read the confession, and I've never seen an account of its contents.

There was some trouble at Covington Jail at the beginning of March – the details of which I don't know – so Jackson and Walling had to be moved 11 miles away to Alexandria Jail instead.

A *CE* reporter was there to watch on March 3, as Covington's prison barber gave them a shave before the trip. Neither man had yet realised that the road they'd take that morning would lead them directly past John Lock's orchard, and the spot on Alexandria Pike where Pearl had met her end. They were in good spirits.

"Walling's face was more than usually youthful and innocent in appearance," the *CE's* man wrote next day. "As he smilingly talked with the guards, it was hard to believe he was destined to go to death upon the gallows almost within a fortnight.

"Jackson had been shaved, and was preparing for his departure. With his keen glance and smooth-shaven face, his lithe, quick movements, and his general air of calm independence, he looked like an athlete. This effect was heightened by the fact that he wore a red sweater and small corduroy cap, the latter having been loaned to him by Guard Murray. He made his adieux noisily, and with much laughter. Turnkey Murray's little Yorkshire terrier, which had made its home in Walling's cell, came in for an affectionate and romping good-bye." (44)

Sheriff Plummer and his team loaded the two prisoners into a carriage at about 8:30 that morning, and off they went. As usual, there was a busy throng of people outside the prison, who'd gathered there hoping to glimpse the notorious killers for themselves, and the carriage had to force its way through to reach the open road. "As they passed the spot where Pearl Bryan had been murdered, it was called to their attention," Doran writes. "Both glanced nervously toward the lonely spot where they were believed to have carried out the brutal crime."

That night after supper, Jackson broke off from pacing nervously up and down in his Alexandria cell, beckoned the *CE's* reporter over and announced he had something to say. Jackson's attorney, Leonard Crawford, had tried without success to discredit the coachman George Jackon's testimony in court, and now Scott Jackson repeated the same accusations for himself.

"Sheriff Plummer knows, and Nelson knows and Judge Helm knows and Deitsch knows that the story of George Jackson was an infamous fabrication," he told the scribbling reporter. "We drove over a part of the ground today that George Jackson says he drove over. It is the first time I ever saw it in my life. I was astonished when the State threw the story of George Jackson at Mr Crawford and myself, but after seeing a portion of the route which he claims to have covered, I am simply astounded to think that his story was accepted by the jury so fast."

Finishing his statement, Jackson called Walling over to endorse it, and he obliged by vigorously nodding his head. Then the two men returned to their pacing, Jackson still agitated but Walling apparently calm.

I've dealt more fully with the accusations against George Jackson below. For the moment, suffice to say that Scott Jackson had every incentive to lie about this particular testimony, that he offered no evidence to back up his claims, and that his version of events is impossible to square with the independent evidence. For all these reasons, no-one was inclined to believe him.

As Jackson and Walling were riding towards Alexandria, their mothers were both travelling there too, anxious to bring what comfort they could to Scott and Alonzo's final few days.

Sarah Walling knew that a plea for clemency from Pearl's family might yet convince Governor Bradley to save her boy's life. She begged Pearl's mother to let her come and visit the Bryans' farm, and Susan Bryan agreed to give her a

hearing. Lottie Miller, the *CE's* ambitious young society editor, got wind of the visit and persuaded Sarah to let her tag along incognito. As far as Pearl's mother was concerned, Lottie would be no more than Sarah's supportive friend. Susan never suspected the truth, and Lottie got her scoop.

"Mrs Bryan greeted them hospitably when the pair called at her home, even inviting them to stay overnight when a storm arose," the *CE* crowed 50 years later. "The mothers comforted each other, and wept in each other's arms. Mrs Bryan acknowledged that the death of Walling would not bring back her daughter and expressed the belief that Jackson, not Walling, was the real offender in the crime. Reporters from other papers sniffed something new was stirring but, before they could track down any clues, [Lottie] had telegraphed her story to the *Enquirer*." (45)

Even after this touching meeting, the Bryans declined to interfere in the execution plans. Sarah had no more luck with Scott Jackson who – despite what she said was an old promise to save her son – told her he had no more to add to his earlier accounts. A few days later, Mabel Stanley called at Jackson's cell to ask him once again what had happened to her sister's head, but she got an equally stony reception.

Governor Bradley issued his final denial of Jackson's appeals on March 12, reconfirming that the March 20 execution date would go ahead. Told of this news, Jackson simply said, "Is that so?" and then relapsed into silence. Next day, Bradley granted Walling a brief delay, bumping his execution back to March 24, but then recanted a few hours later and restored the original date. Even by the standards of death row, that seems like a particularly cruel trick to pull, but Walling was unmoved. "Four days sooner or later would not have made much difference," he shrugged.

You'd guess from those remarks that both men were now utterly resigned to their fate. In fact, they made one final attempt to save themselves by issuing a joint "confession" just 48 hours before their double hanging was scheduled to begin. This time, they claimed Pearl had been killed by a Dr George Wagner, who then had a house in Cincinnati.

"It is alleged in the confession that Pearl Bryan was placed in care of Dr Wagner by Jackson, and that while she was in the doctor's house, she took a drug which Jackson had bought for her on a prescription written by the doctor," the next day's *New York Times* reported. "The drug killed the girl.

"Soon after her death, it is alleged her body was placed in a hack and taken into the country where, in the presence of Jackson and Walling, her head was cut off by Dr Wagner. It further is alleged that the doctor put the head in a satchel and carried it away. Jackson and Walling say they do not know what ultimately was done with the head." (46)

This failed to explain why the two men had never mentioned Wagner before, why the forensic evidence showed so conclusively that Pearl's head had been cut off while she was still alive, or why Jackson – not Wagner – had been seen carrying Pearl's satchel around Cincinnati with every appearance of it having a severed head inside. It was consistent with the story Trusty told in court, but he'd already been convicted as a perjurer anyway, so that didn't count for much.

Dr Wagner himself, now confined to a lunatic asylum in Eastern Kentucky, told police and reporters he did not know Scott Jackson, Alonzo Walling or Pearl Bryan. "I was not at home when the tragedy was committed or when the body was found," he said in the same day's *NYT*.

"I was at the home of my father-in-law, William Herndon, in Jessamine County. I went to Jessamine County in the latter part of January and returned to Bellevue, a very sick man, on Monday or Tuesday of the first week in February. I know absolutely nothing about this case. Pearl Bryan may have been at my house during my absence, but I never heard it mentioned."

Bellevue here presumably means the psychiatric hospital in New York. It may be that Jackson was aware of Wagner's breakdown, and tried to take advantage of his fragility by retrospectively blaming him for the crime. The other possibility is that Wagner really was involved somewhere on the periphery of Pearl's murder – although not her actual killer - and that Jackson had avoided mentioning his name so far only because he knew Wagner's role would implicate him too. But all this is pure speculation. All we know for sure is that Governor Bradley studied the new confession, declared it hopelessly inconsistent with the other evidence, and confirmed that tomorrow's joint execution would go ahead.

Chapter seven

In which Jackson refuses to save his friend.

As Jackson and Walling's last appeals dribbled through the system, preparations to hang them were already well underway in Newport.

The Pearl Bryan souvenir trade was gearing up again too. One Ohio carpenter hit on a novel angle, when he offered to build the new gallows platform Newport needed for the hanging. Far from charging for this work, he offered to pay $25 just for the privilege of being allowed to carry it out. His only conditions were that the wood he used for the platform must remain his property, and that he'd be free to demolish the gallows and take it all away again immediately afterwards. His plan, it emerged, was to saw this up into short lengths and sell each piece as a unique souvenir of the hanging. (47)

No doubt he'd have found a ready market, but Newport council vetoed the scheme and gave the gallows contract to a local carpenter called Horace Allen instead. Excitement about the hanging was so great that even Allen's Weingartner Mill workshop was besieged by curious crowds who hoped to glimpse the scaffold he was working on there.

There hadn't been a hanging in the Cincinnati area for over 12 years, and this seems to be the first one Sheriff Plummer ever had to organise. He knew it would be his job to pull the lever opening the traps beneath Jackson and Walling's feet when the fatal hour came round, but faced this prospect with great trepidation. He insisted that his old friend Dr Carothers must stand by him on the platform in case he found himself overcome at the crucial moment. More than anything, he dreaded having to go through the whole ordeal twice, so he told Allen to build a mechanism that could open both traps with a single pull of one central lever.

Despite his fears, Plummer was determined to see the responsibility through. "One must not shrink from his duty, however unpleasant it may be," he told the *Kentucky Post*. (48)

On the morning of March 19, Jackson and Walling said goodbye to their mothers at Alexandria and boarded the carriage that would take them to Newport Jail for the last night of their lives. When they arrived, they found the tiny jailhouse was already throbbing with activity. "Crowds milled about the small structure," Doran writes. "A company of the Kentucky National Guard was sent to guard the place, and hosts of special deputies were sworn in to maintain order.

"When they were led to their cell, the two men smoked in silence. Occasionally, they walked to the window and glanced at the gaping crowds, waving to friends whom they recognised. As the day drew to a close and the men watched the sun sink for the last time, they became increasingly nervous."

Plummer stopped by the cell at about 7:00pm to ask if either man had a statement he wished to make, but both declined. They passed the evening singing hymns with a guard called Billy Sutton. "Jackson's tenor and Walling's deep bass rolled forth in *Au Revoir* and *A Mother's Appeal To Her Boy* for the edification of the throngs that stayed about the place all through the night," Doran writes. Other accounts tell us that Jackson deliberately sung out of his window to entertain the people outside. "An awful silence settled on the crowd as Jackson sang, and he

apparently felt enjoyment in the sensation he was creating," one unidentified news clipping says.

The two men broke off their impromptu concert at midnight to eat a meal of hamburger steak and onions. "They'll make you sleep," Jackson said approvingly. They were then given a couple of after-dinner cigars and sat smoking them as they calmly chatted. At around 1:30am, Walling retired for the night, but Jackson decided to stay up a little longer. All around them, preparations for the hanging were still going on.

Sheriff Plummer arrived at Newport's courthouse yard, where the gallows was now being tested, at about 1:40am to deliver the restraining straps and black hoods he'd need later, then crossed the street to his prisoners' cells. He found Jackson still awake there, and asked him if he planned to make any final statements on the scaffold before Plummer pulled the lever. If he'd hoped Jackson might yet give Walling a last-minute reprieve by finally confessing to the murder himself, that hope was soon extinguished. "I don't think I will have any to make," Jackson replied. Plummer told him to be ready at 7:00am for the hanging two hours later, and reminded Sutton to wake Walling in good time for the same appointment. [(49)]

Walling slept through the night, but Jackson managed no more than a fitful doze. He finally went to bed a little after 3:00am, but started and woke very frequently before rising again at 5:45am. An hour later, Walling was up too, and they ate a hearty breakfast of buckwheat cakes and coffee. By now two coffins had arrived in the courthouse yard. Walling's girlfriend sent him a message: "Die Game".

Sheriff Plummer finished instructing his deputies on their duties at about 7:15am, then took Jackson and Walling the new suits Kentucky had bought them to wear on the scaffold. Both men joked about the suits' poor fit as they changed. Reverend Lee arrived just after breakfast too, prayed with Jackson and Walling for a while, and then led them in singing *God Be With You Till We Meet Again*, *Home Sweet Home* and *The Half Has Never Been Told*. "Jackson glanced at the crowd outside the window," Kuhnheim says. "He set a chair up, stood on it, and began singing hymns to the crowd."

Plummer had asked Ed Faught, the sheriff at Lexington, and Maurice Hook, who did the same job in Bracken County, to help him with the hanging's preparations. Both men were more experienced at conducting this grim task than Plummer himself, so he asked them to carry out the final checks. At 8:12am, Faught oiled the scaffold's ropes to ensure they'd tighten smoothly around the condemned men's necks, and then he and Hook checked every aspect of the mechanism to make sure it was working properly. Only when they were satisfied did Plummer confirm that the hanging would proceed on schedule at 9:00am.

It was a perfect Spring morning and there was already a big crowd waiting for the day's entertainment to begin. "Many of the people who crowded outside the Newport jail that day came for miles just to be near the scene of the execution," Doran writes. "They could have no hope of witnessing the hanging, and yet they came, and crowded closely on those around them. By 8:30am, it was estimated there were 5,000 persons outside the courthouse wall."

The walled yard behind Newport's courthouse where the gallows now stood could hold nothing like that number, so access was again closely guarded. Politicians handed out the coveted passes to friends, just as they had at Jackson's trial. "It was festival time," John Mendell laughed when we discussed the scene at

his kitchen table in Fort Thomas. "You had to be on the 'in' to get a ticket for the execution, and the politicians were paying back their favours. Probably, like our politicians today, they were selling tickets too. It was like a 'standing room only' affair."

Dr Carothers, who Plummer had ensured would be there to support him, was constantly pestered by people who assumed he must be able to get them in too. "About a dozen people asked me for permission to be present at the hanging, and they were terribly disappointed to learn I had no authority in the matter," he writes. "All morning long, people gathered outside the courtyard, hoping to gain entrance." The best estimates we have suggest about 500 people – men, women and children – managed to cram into the courtyard before the gates were finally locked.

At 8:55am, Sheriff Plummer assembled his execution party and prepared to lead Jackson and Walling to their deaths. And then – with just three minutes to go before the scheduled drop – Jackson spoke up. "Alonzo Walling is not guilty of the murder of Pearl Bryan," he told Plummer.

Jackson refused to answer questions or expand on this statement in any way, but did agree to put it in writing as a message to Governor Bradley. "Walling is not guilty of this crime," he wrote. "I am." He signed the note "Scott Jackson" and handed it to Plummer. "For God's sake, send that to the Governor," Walling cried. (50)

Plummer telegraphed the message to Bradley immediately, and sent Jackson and Walling back to wait in their cell. "While they waited, the two men occasionally walked to their windows and glanced at the crowds below," Doran writes. "Both clasped their hands and shook them at the crowd in the manner of prizefighters acknowledging applause." Every time they appeared at the windows, cries of "Die game, Lonny" or "Die game, Scott" went up in the crowd. At one point, Walling spotted a friend stuck outside, and shouted down offering to get him a ticket for the courtyard. But his friend was embarrassed, and pushed away through the crowd without answering.

Plummer got a reply from Bradley at about 10:15am, telling him to question Jackson further. If he would make a full confession – including the location of Pearl's head – then Walling's life could be saved. Anything less than that, and both men must hang. Once again, Jackson refused to add anything to what he'd already said. Even at one minute to midnight, it seems, he hoped he might somehow preserve his own life too. Asked to at least confirm Walling's insistence that he had not been with Jackson at the murder scene, he replied: "I can't say that. That's a trap. I can't say that without admitting I was there."

Meanwhile, Plummer had granted Walling's request that he be allowed to speak to Covington's Mayor Rhinock. Walling begged the mayor to petition Bradley for a 30-day reprieve. "Jackson can save my life if he will," Walling said. "But he won't. I have tried in every way to get him to do it, but he will not. He ought to save me."

"Now, Lon," Rhinock replied. "I want you to tell me where the head is."

"Mayor Rhinock, before God, whom I shall soon meet, I do not know. I will not lie now."

Plummer contacted Bradley again – by telephone this time –and told him the outcome of these new interviews. Bradley sent back a wire at about 11:15am repeating that, without the full confession he'd specified, there could be no reprieve for either man. He ordered Plummer to restart the twin hangings

immediately, and this time told him to get the job done. Plummer formed up the execution party again, which began its march to the scaffold just after 11: 30am.

As Walling left his cell for the last time, he pointed again at Jackson and said: "That man can save me if he will. I die an innocent man. I was not there when she was killed." Jackson made no reply, but Doran says his eyes were now reddened "as though he had been crying".

Jackson stumbled for a moment as he mounted the steps to the scaffold, prompting one wag in the crowd to recall a local superstition. "He won't get married this year," the man cried out. A variation of this belief, popular in Yorkshire, maintains that the stumbler must have an unconfessed sin on his conscience. (51)

Recovering his composure at the top of the steps, Jackson surprised the crowd by singing verses from a couple of popular hymns, including *The Sweet Bye and Bye*. His posture as he delivered these verses was more like an actor's on the stage than anything else. Walling stood beside him trembling, his eyes downcast.

Sheriff Plummer read out the death warrants, then asked Jackson again if he had anything to say. "Jackson hesitated fully two minutes before he replied," Reis quotes one eyewitness as saying. "Before he spoke, Walling turned expectantly, evidently believing that Jackson would speak the words that would save his life, even while he thus stood on the brink of death. […] Jackson, without looking at him, upturned his eyes and replied: 'I have only this to say: that I am not guilty of the crime for which I am now compelled to pay the penalty of my life'."

So now he was innocent again. The despairing Plummer turned to Walling, and asked him if he had any statement to make. "Nothing," Walling replied. "Only that you are taking the life of an innocent man, and I call upon my God to witness the truth of what I say."

Watching all this in the crowd, Cal Crim knew that Walling's last hope was now gone. He'd always believed Walling was complicit in Pearl's death, and that he should be properly punished for that, but never thought for a moment that Walling himself had killed her.

"Walling believed right up to the last minute that Scott Jackson would save him," Crim told Doran. "He believed Jackson, at the last moment, would reveal the true story of the death of Pearl Bryan and save him from the gallows." In his own memoir he adds: "I attended the hanging for one purpose only. I hoped that Scott Jackson would confess and assume the major blame to palliate the fate of his companion."

It was not to be. Reverend Lee stepped forward to pray with Jackson and Walling for a moment, read a few Bible verses, and then backed away and stood on the steps. "Goodbye, Scott. Goodbye, Alonzo," he said, his eyes now brimming with tears. He couldn't bring himself to watch as deputies Moore and Hindman drew the black hoods over the condemned men's faces. "The nooses were then placed about their necks," Doran continues. "As the rope tightened about his throat, Jackson groaned, and his skin turned ashen."

Plummer pulled the gallows lever at 11:40am, triggering the two traps simultaneously. Jackson and Walling fell 5ft 8ins before the ropes jerked them to a halt. They were still for a moment, then both men began to twitch and writhe in the most horrible way. Someone had miscalculated the drop needed to hang men

of Jackson and Walling's slender build and, instead of dying instantly as their necks were snapped, the pair were now choking slowly to death. Even in his worst nightmares about the day, Plummer had never imagined anything as hideous as this.

"When the ropes snapped taut, the two men swung round and round, their fingers clutching spasmodically at the air and their shoulders heaving convulsively," Doran writes. "At 11:50, almost ten minutes after Sheriff Plummer sprung the traps, the doctors listened for the heartbeats of the two men – and they still were beating." Walling was finally pronounced dead at 11:55, and Jackson six minutes later.

The bodies were cut down and placed in the waiting coffins. Even in death, though, Jackson's notoriety meant nothing could be simple. "Pressure was so great that it was found necessary to cremate Jackson's body immediately after execution so that souvenir hunters would have no chance at the ugly business of digging up a grave," Carothers writes. "Walling's body, however, was sent to his family for burial, and it was my thought that his sentence was too severe." Crim agreed. "I have always felt that [Walling's] execution was a grave miscarriage of justice," he wrote 50 years later.

Pearl was avenged at last, but the man who'd caught her killers took no satisfaction from the sight. "I stood where I could see them as they stood over the trap and before the black caps were drawn down over their faces," Crim adds. "The trap was sprung, and I turned away, as I have often wished I could turn away from many of the memories of the tragedy that, even after half a century, I would most gladly forget."

Chapter eight

In which the search for Miss Bryan's head resumes.

Jackson and Walling's execution was the last judicial hanging Campbell County would ever see, and you might have expected it to draw a line under Pearl's story as well. But even with all three of the principal players now dead, the case itself refused to lie down.

The first sign of this grisly afterlife came in June 1905, when Paul Millikin, the Cincinnati police chief who'd succeeded Deitsch, received a letter from Phoenix, Arizona. It was signed only "One who knows", and read: "You can find the head of Pearl Bryan, preserved in a jar of alcohol, walled up behind the grate in the room Alonzo Walling and Scott Jackson occupied on the night before the murder. The head was brought over from Fort Thomas and concealed there." (53)

Millikin dismissed the letter as a hoax, and told reporters he had no plans to investigate its claims. The owner of the old boarding house at 222 West Ninth Street, a Dr Haerr, told the *CE* that he'd had all the building's flues cleaned out just a week before the letter arrived and that, in any case, the walls there were not thick enough to conceal a jar that size. He refused to give permission for a hole to be knocked in the wall of Jackson and Walling's old room to let people peer inside.

The good folk of Cincinnati weren't going to let either Millikin or Haerr get away with that, and public clamour soon forced both men to change their minds. Writing his *Cincinnatus* column for the *CP* nearly 50 years later, the paper's veteran journalist Alfred Segal recalled being assigned as a young reporter to investigate what sound like exactly the same reports. "[I] accompanied the police to a house on West Ninth Street, to the front room fireplace where, it was reported to them, Pearl Bryan's head was embedded," he writes. "Jackson and Walling had been roomers in that house. The police dug into the fireplace with pick axes. No head." (54)

Three years later, in August 1908, Pearl's murder was making news again, this time thanks to someone discovering a bundle of Jackson's old letters in a discarded desk at Cincinnati's City Hospital. Many of these were from Jackson's mother, mixing simple love for her son with a little gentle chiding at how much money he seemed to get through. The newspapers preferred to spotlight the bundle's love letters to Jackson from Blanche and Mayre, which I've already quoted above, and hinted gleefully that they'd found other correspondence there which was far too saucy to print.

The reputation Cal Crim had made for himself in Pearl's case won him a promotion to chief of detectives in 1912, and he quit the force two years later. In 1917, he set up his own private detective agency, where Jack McDermott soon joined him. It was also in 1917 that Sheriff Jule Plummer died from injuries sustained in a car crash while driving a prisoner from Newport to Ludlow railway station for transportation on to the state pen.

Twenty years had now passed since Jackson and Walling were hanged, and yet visitors still flooded out to John Lock's orchard to get a look at the murder scene for themselves. Newspaper reports from 1917 say 20 people a day were still trekking out there, paying a dime each to see his collection of gruesome pictures.

According to figures gathered by Bernie Spencer of the *Northern Kentucky Views* website, about one in 25 visitors signed Lock's guestbook too, giving him a collection of some 50,000 signatures in his first two decades of business. "By that math, there were 1,250,000 morbid sightseers in the 20-year period," Spencer writes. (55)

All this time, the ballad's early versions were helping to keep Pearl's name in circulation. In November 1913, a New Jersey woman called Mrs Newall gave her sister, Mrs Henry, a written copy of what Cohen calls *Pearl Bryan VI*. Mrs Newall had been given the document – possibly a broadsheet – by her daughter, Marjorie White, who received it, in turn, from her friend Maud Clark's sister "who lived out that way where it happened". Mrs Henry completed the chain by forwarding a copy to the *Journal of American Folklore*.

The text they received contains many of the same verses Dalhart uses, but adds several fresh details from the reports of Jackson's trial. These include his chosen weapon, and the forged letter he urged Wood to write:

It was Scott Jackson and Walling,
That took Pearl Bryan's life,
On that dark and stormy night,
With a big dissecting knife.

[…]

Scott Jackson wrote a letter,
To Willie Wood one day,
Told him to write another,
To Pearl Bryan's home and say,

'I'm not in Indianapolis',
And sign her name you may,
Stick to your old chum Bill,
And I'll stick to you some day.

This particular take on Pearl's story seems to have died out pretty quickly. Cohen thinks this is because it places Jackson rather than Pearl at the centre of events, and therefore veers away from the "murdered girl" template which people prefer this particular story to use. The fact that it quotes so directly from 1896 newspaper reports suggests it's certainly one of the earliest *Pearl Bryan* ballads, though, and it may even pre-date the one Oscar Parks learnt in childhood.

In March 1920, West Virginia's state historian Clifford Meyers responded to a *Pearl Bryan* query from Professor John Cox, then researching his 1925 book *Folk Songs of the South*. "The song was very popular for a few years after the punishment of the criminals," Meyers told him. "I remember hearing it many times, and in it was a couplet which ran: "Oh Pearl Bryan, she's dead / They can't find her head". (56)

Meyers has in mind here Cohen's *Pearl Bryan V*, most famously recorded by The Phipps Family in 1965. The giveaway is its distinctive chorus, which the Phipps give to Pearl's mother:

Please tell me where's her head,

Please tell me where's her head,
Pearl Bryan is dead,
Can't find her head,
Walling and Jackson are hung. [(57)]

The rest of this version's nine stanzas are very similar to the Vernon Dalhart lyrics we've already discussed, using almost exactly the same words to canter through the warning to young girls, the month of the killing, the names of the murderers and the driver's role as witness. Where other *Pearl Bryan* ballads prefer to minimise the decapitation, however, this one delights in placing it front and centre:

The message brought back to her home,
That poor Pearl Bryan was dead,
Killed by Walling and Jackson,
And they took away her head.

It's the Phipps Family recording that inspired The Crooked Jades, a San Francisco bluegrass band, to tackle Pearl's ballad for their 2001 album *Seven Sisters: A Kentucky Portrait*. Jades frontman Jeff Kazor was already familiar with Burnett and Rutherford's 1928 recording of a *Jealous Lover* variant with Pearl's name inserted into its lyrics, but had never been particularly moved by it.

"Their singing style and lyrics didn't spark my interest," Kazor told me when I questioned him about the song earlier this year. "But when my research finally led me to the Kentucky-born Phipps Family and their 1965 Folkways recording, it blew me away! I knew right there and then this ballad could work in The Crooked Jades' repetoire.

"The Phipps Family's approach to the gruesome event made more sense, with more perspective from the victim's family. I could imagine Pearl Bryan's mother singing that heart-wrenching refrain: 'Please tell me where's her head'. It was the thought of Walling and Jackson severing her head to conceal her identity. Later, I learned that Scott Jackson was the father of Pearl Bryan's unborn child – wow.

"We played this ballad live quite often after *Seven Sisters: A Kentucky Portrait* was first released. It was well-received, and audiences were always very curious to know its background, especially to understand whether it was a true story. Today, it's resurfaced in our set, giving a face to what man is capable of."

The fact that The Phipps Family disc takes several verses almost intact from Vernon Dalhart's rendition, and then passes those verses on to the Jades, gives us an unbroken chain from the song's very first recording to its use today. If we were to draw up a family tree for the song's studio history, one branch would begin with Dalhart's 1926 version and the other with Charlie Poole's *Jealous Lover* variant a year later. The Dalhart branch sprouted its most significant outgrowth with the Phipps Family record of 1965, and that's the song Kazor's band still plays today.

If you allow for the odd floating verse or a line that's been tweaked in its wording, just about every *Pearl Bryan* record that's followed can be traced back to one of these three blueprints. My own modest collection, for example, comprises two versions drawn from the Charlie Poole model, four from Vernon Dalhart's and two from the Phipps.

A year after the Charlie Poole record came out, the *CE's* Harry Pence was still getting letters from readers asking him to remind them about the details of Pearl's case. "No month has gone by in which someone does not write in to have his or her memory refreshed," he wrote in the paper's October 15, 1928, edition. "These letters come from all parts of the country."

Pence used the column that day to tell Pearl's story all over again, just as Joe Doran would do with his 11-part series for the *CP* 18 months later. A few weeks before Doran's series began, someone had offered to sell the *CP* a letter purporting to be Scott Jackson's "last true confession". The paper dismissed it as an obvious forgery, but they were getting Pearl Bryan queries every week too, and could see just what a grip her story still had on the city's dreamtime. Doran was given all the space he needed to tell the story in feature-length daily installments, which the *CP* started running on April 26, 1930.

Told to provide some artwork to label the series, the *CP's* designer came up with a silhouette of Cincinnati's skyline, with a cut-out of Pearl's head pasted in its foreground and the single word: MISSING. Doran stressed this angle too, ending all but one of his 11 installments with a reminder the head had never been found.

He wrapped the series up with an annecdote about the case's continuing appeal. "Miss Ruth Neely, a *CP* writer, was recently riding to Fort Thomas on a streetcar," he writes. "As it passed a small byway, a woman beside her asked: 'Is that where Pearl Bryan was murdered?' Miss Neely replied in the negative. 'Well, will you please tell me where to get off so I can see it? I'm on my vacation, and I always wanted to see where her body was found. I came all the way from Cleveland to look at it'."

The first sheet music for *Pearl Bryan* I've been able to find dates from 1935, and credits its arrangement to Nick Manoloff, who also has his name on that year's *Jingle Bells* sheet.

Manoloff makes no claim to the *Pearl Bryan* sheet's lyrics, which he leaves uncredited. That's just as well, as they're very similar to the Vernon Dalhart version we've already seen. Unlike Dalhart, Manoloff tags on the two optional warning verses adressed directly to any young women who might be listening.

In this incarnation, though, the lyrics are most notable for the fact that they give no hint of Pearl having her head chopped off. Manoloff hoped to sell the sheet music to respectable families who would sing it round the piano in their front room, and any reference to decapitation would not have helped his prospects there. The warning verses, on the other hand, added a nice little moral coda which even the starchiest parents could not object to.

Folk musicians took the opposite line, seeing Pearl's decapitation as absolutely key to the song's dark heart. In 1944, Kentucky's Doc Hopkins, then a popular radio performer in the mid-west, recorded his own version of the ballad, drawing mostly on Dalhart's lyrics, but adding this splendid verse about the discovery of her corpse:

It was in the month of January,
The people for miles around said,
'We've found this poor girl's body,
But we cannot find her head.'

Hopkins gave the final warning verse a little tweak too, using it to stress just what a unique murder this had been:

Now all young girls take warning,
Before it is too late,
From the worst crime ever committed,
In our old Kentucky state.

The Cincinnati papers took every excuse they could find to rehash Pearl's story throughout the rest of the 1940s. In cases like this, the trick is to find what journalists call a "peg" from today's news to hang their old story on and present it anew. In Pearl's case, the pegs included reports that the modern soldiers at Fort Thomas were trying to scare new recruits with her tale, a convenient anniversary for one of the case's key events or the death of anybody even vaguely involved. Most ingenious of all was the *CP's* February 1946 story about Sol and Mollie Mintz, an elderly brother and sister in Hamilton County, who had maintained an unbroken subscription to the paper for the past 50 years. "Hamilton Family Subscribed During Pearl Bryan Murder," the headline read. (58)

The 50th anniversary of Pearl's body being found came in February 1946, offering what many saw as the best peg yet. Enough time had passed now for the tale's more sobering aspects to be forgotten, and the *CP's* anniversary piece took a distinctly jolly tone. "In Cincinnati, a young *roue* of a dental student made free with his light o' love and, in his befuddlement, chopped off her head," the writer began. (59)

The *CE* did a better job, not only by getting Cal Crim to write the personal memoir I've already drawn on here, but also by finding an Indiana coroner who'd just visited the murder scene for himself. "I had just graduated from medical college at the University of Chicago when the story made national headlines," Dr DeNaut told the paper. "Every student there read the accounts with intense interest because Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling had been dental students." (60)

DeNaut had been prompted to make the visit, he said, when one of his Indiana patients mentioned she'd been at school with Pearl. "In all my years as a county coroner, I never had a case like that one," he said. "Medically speaking, the killing was one of the most brutal possible, for the poor unfortunate girl was still conscious when the decapitation was begun."

The *CE's* Joseph Garretson ensured his paper didn't miss the 50th anniversary of Jackson and Walling's hanging either, making this the lead item in his March 20, 1947, column. "Every year, the old story finds its way back into type," Garretson wrote.

It did so again just two months later, when the *CE* ran a story headlined: "Death Comes to Last Juror of Pearl Bryan Murder Case". This reported the death of George Stegner, who had indeed served on Scott Jackson's jury. In its copy, the *CE* obituary called Stegner "the last known surviving member of the jury in the famous Pearl Bryan murder case" and "a member of the Campbell County jury which, 50 years ago, condemned Scott Jackson and Alonzo Walling". (61)

This story did not please an elderly Cincinnati businessman called Michael Moran. Unlike the *CE's* reporter, Moran knew that Jackson and Walling had been tried seperately, each by a jury of his own. What's more, he'd served on Walling's jury himself, and – last time he looked – he'd still been breathing.

Nothing happened for a few days, suggesting that Moran may have complained to the *CE*, but been brushed off with the offer of a tiny correction on page 17. The *CP's* own Stegner obituary had made exactly the same mistake, so Moran was likely to get the same response there. Instead, he marched into the newsroom at Cincinnati's third title, the *Times-Star*, and told them all about the error. "It made me look dead, and I want the world to know I'm still very much alive," he declared.

Unlike the *CP*, the *Times-Star* had no embarrasment of its own to hide, so it was free to have a little fun at its rivals' expense. Headlining its May 30 story "Last Juror in Pearl Bryan Case Not Dead", it quoted the mistaken report at length. "Someone's memory slipped recently," the *Times-Star* chuckled. "And it wasn't that of Michael R. Moran, who at 85 is still a very active Cincinnati businessman." (62)

There was a sequel to this story two years later when Moran himself died, but nothing seems to have been learnt. Both the *CP* and the *Times-Star* obituaries conflated Jackson and Walling's separate procedings into "the jury" and "the trial" which both papers assumed had condemned them jointly. This did not did not stop the *Times-Star* recalling fondly how Moran had once helped them make the *CE* look silly.

John Hewling's death in December 1949 made headlines for the Cincinnati papers too, and once again all the obituaries rehashed Pearl's story in their first few paragraphs. Then we were back to the search for her missing head.

In February 1953, Workmen from Cincinnati House Wreckers began tearing down the old boarding house on West Ninth Street to create a new parking lot for Dr Joseph DeCourcy's nearby clinic. Jack Thomas, the foreman running the job, said it would take about 43 days to complete, and told his men to look out for anything that might be a severed head. "Workers Joke at Prospect of Finding Bryan Head," the *CP* reported. (63)

Six weeks later, with the building now flattened, Thomas could report no more than a false wooden floor his men had discovered and torn up, but found nothing beneath. Reporters gamely tried to keep the story alive by suggesting Jackson might have buried Pearl's head in the building's basement, in which case the wrecking crew's debris would just have added another layer to its cover. Perhaps, they hinted, the head now lay somewhere beneath DeCourcy's new parking lot.

Maybe it was the demolition's coverage that inspired Bruce Buckley, a graduate student at Indiana University, to include *Pearl Bryan* on his 1954 album *Ohio River Ballads*. Like Doc Hopkins before him, Buckley used many of the Dalhart verses, but could not resist a few macabre additions of his own. First, he imports the Penguin verse about Pearl's grip carrying her head away, and then has Jackson and Walling practically dancing around her corpse with glee. Pearl's parents could not yet have suspected their daughter's fate, he sings, but:

How sad it would have been to them,
To have heard Pearl's lonely voice,
At midnight in that lonely spot,
Where those two boys rejoiced.

Finally, he allows Pearl's sister a little dignity in the begging scene by letting her speak for herself. As Mabel delivers the final two lines of this next

verse, I always picture her climbing up from her knees, then turning away from Jackson to dismiss him with the contempt he deserves:

Scott Jackson set a stubborn jaw,
Not a word would he have said,
'I'll meet my sister in Heaven,
Where they'll find her missing head'.

The folksinger Paul Clayton included Buckley's "grip" verse on his own 1956 recording of *Pearl Bryan*, but I've heard only the fragment of Clayton's track preserved in the British Library's sound archive, so that's all I can vouch for there. By the time he put the song to disc, death had claimed a couple more of the figures in Pearl's story, including William Hamilton, one of the Cincinnati reporters who'd originally covered the case, and Dr Robert Carothers, who'd conducted Pearl's first autopsy. Both died in 1954.

Even if Hamilton had discovered a cure for cancer, I suspect the *CP* and the *CE* would have headlined their obituaries with a Pearl Bryan reference anyway. Neither paper disappointed, going for "Ex-reporter's death recalls Pearl Bryan" and "Death Takes Reporter in Bryan Murder Case" respectively. [64, 65]

My library search failed to turn up a formal obituary for Dr Carothers, but I do know he left behind a typed memoir setting out his recollections of the case. I've already quoted from this document above, which was discovered when someone went through the late doctor's effects. We don't know exactly when Carothers wrote it, but it borrows a couple of phrases verbatim from Crim's 1946 account, so he must have produced it some time in the final eight years of his life.

Carothers' memoir was published for the first time in the *CP's* May 2, 1956, editon, by which time people were ready to make lighter of Pearl's story than ever. Now she was described as "the village maiden who literally lost her head in the city". Even when they made jokes about Pearl, it seems, the papers were determined to slot her into the city-v-country dichotomy they'd always observed as part of the "murdered girl" template.

There was a steady dribble of minor Pearl Bryan stories throughout the 1960s, including John Lock's decision to sell his Dad's old farmhouse in 1962, a new recording of Pearl's ballad by Doc Hopkins' disciple Fleming Brown in the same year, and the 1966 death of a newspaper illustrator who'd once drawn her headless body. The first of these developments proved more significant that anyone could have guessed at the time, because it paved the way for John Mendell and his wife Cyndi to buy the Lock farmhouse 15 years later. If that purchase hadn't persuaded John to investigate Pearl's story for himself, the valise which once carried her head might have been lost forever.

Chapter nine

In which desperate measure are required.

Cyndi Mendell lived very near the Lock farmhouse when she was a child, and the farmhouse itself is only about 200 yards from the spot where Pearl was killed. But it wasn't the Pearl Bryan case that made Cyndi determined to buy that house for herself one day.

"I lived right down the street, and I told my mom: 'One day, I'm going to own that house'," she told me during my 2010 trip to Fort Thomas. "I was just drawn to this house. I don't know why, but I've really liked it since I was six years old." The opportunity to buy it came in the mid-to-late seventies, and she and John jumped in straight away. At that point, they knew nothing about Pearl's story, and the seller was quite content to keep it that way. "She didn't tell us anything about it till we finally signed the deal," John said. "That's when she started telling us the story of the place, and that's when I started looking into it."

We were talking round John and Cyndi's kitchen table, in the old Lock farmhouse they now own, where John had brought me after showing me the murder spot. I asked them if the seller's revelations about their new house's history had made them regret buying it. "I didn't care," Cyndi replied instantly. "I just wanted the house."

"For, me it was just an added attraction," John said. "Something we can talk about, you know? When I bought this place, one woman come by – an older lady, 75, 80 years old – and she said 'You know the story of this place?' I said: 'Yeah, I know the story'. And she says: 'Well, when those people was hung, I was there'. She said her grandfather had taken her there in a baby carriage. It was quite a circus."

John began reading everything he could find on the case, and questioned any of his neighbours he thought could help. "I checked around, and I talked to a few older people who were very atuned to the story," he said. "They told me that the county was still holding Pearl's bag and the scaffolding for the gallows in the courthouse. I said: 'Oh, you're kidding me! They still got that?'"

As recently as 1965, Campbell County had kept the valise stored in a lockbox at the court clerk's office in Newport. "The valise is occasionally taken from its storage place when student groups visit the courthouse seeking information about how courts operate," the *CE's* Charles Etsinger reported in September that year. "It is then displayed to curious eyes as a one-tine exhibit in a most celebrated murder case."

Kentucky historians were already campaigning for the valise to be given a permanent display at one of Newport's museums, but so far they'd had no luck. John decided to see if a more informal approach might work, so he picked up the phone and called the courthouse. The clerk confirmed the bag was there but, when John went to visit, he was appalled. "It was just thrown in the corner with a big pile of stuff," he told me, shaking his head at the recollection.

"I said: 'I'm giving a talk at the library here, then I'm giving a talk at the historical society. Would it be possible I could sign the bag out and give it back to you when I'm done?' I was friends with the County Clerk at the time, and he said: 'That's fine'."

John signed the bag out with a handful of other Pearl Bryan material and gave his talks. The bag was a big hit with everyone he showed it to, and when all the talks were finished, he returned everything as promised.

"Then, a short time later, I go to check it out again," he said. "And the bag was there, but some of the documentation of the trial was not there. The death warrants were not there, the appeals notice was not there. I told them: 'Gosh, you guys got to protect this stuff – this is history.' They said: 'Well, OK, OK,' and they put it back in this corner.

"I checked it out for another talk, and there was even less there. So I'm not giving it back: 'I'm not giving it back till you promise to take care of it!' And they said: 'No, no, no – you have to bring it back'. They called me four, five times and said: 'You need to bring it back'. I said: 'I'm not going to bring it back till I get a guarantee that you'll put the valise in a glass case, and it'll be preserved'."

Fearing this stand-off might last for a while, Cyndi slipped the valise carefully into a paper sack, and stored it in a drawer of her antique china cabinet outside Fort Thomas at the couple's ranch. "I think we had it for two years," she said. "At least I knew where it was."

Once in a while, John and Cyndi would smuggle the valise back to Fort Thomas and show it to their dinner guests. One evening, those guests happened to include a local doctor. "We had a meeting of the historical society here, and he was a member," John recalled. "I said: 'Doctor, come look at this'. He looked at it and said: 'Yes, those are bloodstains. Those are definite bloodstains'." Cyndi slapped the wood in front of her. "That was here, on this table," she laughed.

I couldn't resist it. "Not to be too morbid," I began gingerly, "but was the lining soaked in blood, was it just a few spots, or…." Cyndi answered before I could even complete the question. "I would say big spots," she replied. "All blood at the bottom but, where the sides would go up, it had big blotches."

"And there was hairs in it," John added. "We don't know if that was Pearl Bryan's hair or hair that accumulated over the years, but there was actually hairs in the little catches there."

John remembers the valise story slightly differently from Cyndi, guessing that they might have held on to it for about eight months instead of the two years she estimates. "Finally, they sent out the County police," he said.

Both John and Cyndi were home at the time. "We were going out somewhere," Cyndi recalled. "I was coming downstairs, the police lights were all in the dining room area, and I'm thinking: 'What's going on?' So I walked out the door, and he's still in his car. I said: 'Yes? Can I help you?' He said: 'Yeah, do you have the valise from Pearl Bryan?' I said: 'I do'. And he said: 'Well, the court kind of wants it back'. I said: 'I'll give it back if they don't lose it again'.

John took up the story from there. "That's what we both said," he confirmed. "We were both there, and I said: 'We're not giving it up till you can promise you're going to take care of it'."

"How many police actually turned up?" I asked. "Only one," John replied. "But he was big! He said: 'If you don't give it to me right now, I'm going to call down to the station and get a warrant, and I might have to take you in. You have county property, and you're considered a thief.' So, naturally, I turned it over. But, after I turned it over, I made phonecalls and phonecalls and phonecalls saying: 'Do *not* throw that in the corner, do *not* just pile it in a corner where it gets lost or destroyed.' And, apparantly, it had some effect."

Finally, in 1996, Campbell County mounted a permanent display for the valise and the remaining clippings and photographs that went with it, which they still maintain today. "But there have been a lot of papers lost," John told me. "In fact, a lot of stuff that I donated was lost. That's history – it really is – and it just irritates me."

Debbie Buckley, my guide in Fort Thomas, had introduced me to John and Cyndi and sat in as I interviewed them round the kitchen table. Debbie's work at Fort Thomas's military museum included telling local schoolchildren about the area's history, and she found the Pearl Bryan story was guaranteed to get their attention. They all thought the decapitation was the coolest thing they'd ever heard, she said, mimicing one little girl's "Ewwwww!" of shocked delight.

"I had John and Cyndi come in, and John helped to lead a class about Pearl in our junior rennaisance camp," Debbie told me as the interview wound down. "They're middle schoolers – mostly 13, 14, 15 years old – [and] they loved the news article you two provided that showed the headless body on the hillside. All the schoolchildren know about it. The teachers love teaching it, because it's so interesting to everybody."

That's a point that was brought home to me again and again during my visit to Cincinnati and Fort Thomas. I'd been in Charlotte, North Carolina, just a few days earlier to research *Tom Dooley*, but found very few people there who either knew or cared about their own local ballad. As soon as I mentioned I was researching an old murder to anyone in Cincinnati, though, they instantly knew I must be talking about Pearl, and often as not they'd start regaling me with their own version of the story. This happened again and again, in second-hand bookshops, taxis and bars.

"Jackson and Walling have become a legend of this town," the *CP's* Alfred Segal wrote in 1954. "It keeps on being told by generations unborn in the years 1896-1897. The fathers and grandfathers have handed it down to the youngsters, and they doubtless will hand it on to their offspring. […] Even to this day, the story of Pearl Bryan and Jackson and Walling is retold here." Half a century later, when I arrived in town, they were telling it still.

Before I left the old Lock farmhouse that day, John and Cyndi told me one last story, this one about their early efforts to renovate the place. "I was working on some walls here, in this house," John recalled. "And I'm chipping away at the plaster. All of a sudden, I pull out a big hunk of hair. I said: 'Cyndi, here's the head!' She went screaming down the steps!"

We all had a good laugh at that, Cyndi included, but the real explanation turned out to be rather more mundane. "The fact is, when plaster was not of better quality, they used to reinforce it with horse hair," John explained. "So there was a big clump of blonde horse hair, and I said: 'Look at that, there's the head! They buried it here!' She freaked out." Cyndi smiled at the memory. "I was gone," she admitted.

"Be honest, though, John," I pressed. "Just for one second, didn't you think yourself it might be the head?" He laughed again, then said: "Oh, I thought … Yeah. Maybe! It *was* a shock when I grabbed that hair."

Pearl's ballad has never been as widely recorded as the likes of *Stagger Lee* or *Knoxville Girl*, with only a dozen versions on disc that I've ever been able to find. She lacks the really famous "biographers" the first rank of murder ballads can

claim too, though there are rumours that Joan Baez once included the song on a long-forgotten album.

Where Pearl does score is the uniquely fascinating story of how she met her death and the ingenious investigation that followed it. Even with such a sparse musical legacy to help things along, details like the missing head, the shoes that identified her body, the constant lynching threats and Deitsch's pioneering bugged cell have kept her tale alive well into what is now its second century.

By far the daftest of its recent tellings came in Troy Taylor's 2001 book *No Rest For The Wicked*, which assures us that Jackson was "an alleged member of the occult group that met at the former slaughterhouse in Wilder". The small Kentucky town of Wilder lies just over seven miles south of Cincinnati, and the old slaughterhouse site there is now occupied by a nightclub called Bobby Mackey's Music World. Mackey has been promoting his club for years by claiming Pearl's ghost is a regular visitor there, and Taylor's book aims to tell us why.

He starts in the early 1890s, when the slaughterhouse company shut up shop, leaving the Wilder building abandoned. Like any other abatoir, it had a huge drain in the floor, which workers used to dispose of the animals' blood and any scraps of waste meat. Taylor's taste for melodrama transforns this simple, functional drain into what he calls "the well of blood".

"Apparantly, a small satanic group of local residents gathered at the empty building, managing to practice their rituals in secret," he confides. "Pearl's head was never found, and legend has it that it was used during a satanic ritual at the slaughterhouse. It was then dumped into the well of blood and was lost. […] The stories spread that Jackson and Walling were afraid of suffering 'Satan's wrath' if they revealed the location of Pearl's head. The slaughterhouse was then a closely-guarded secret and other cultists would have been exposed if the two men had talked." (66)

The tall tales arising from all this insist Pearl's ghost has walked the corridors of Mackey's club ever since, looking for the head Jackson dropped down the old slaughterhouse drain. Doug Hensley has written a similar book called *Hell's Gate*, discussing not only Pearl's ghost, but other supposed paranormal events at the club too, and it's also featured on several TV ghost-hunting shows. A film adaption of Hensley's book was promised for October 2009, starring someone called Melissa Fox as Pearl, but there's no trace of it on any internet movie database, so I can only assume the release was delayed.

A nursing home in Newport claims its residents sometimes spot Pearl's ghost there too, but at least the owners have never tried to make a cottage industry out of it. My favourite response to all such nonsense came in a 1999 Mudcat thread about the Bobby Mackey story. "She still walks the floor of this building looking for her head," a poster called Bob R confidently announced.

"I know this is a silly question," Steve Parkes replied 16 minutes later, "but how does she search for her head? She obviously can't literally look for it. Likewise, the head can't lie there shouting 'Over here', because the body wouldn't be able to hear it." Bob R had no answer for that one, and I doubt Taylor or Hensley would care to tackle it either.

There's a couple of towns in Indiana which have reported their own sightings of Pearl's ghost, presumably in a bid to boost the tourist trade, but Pearlmania there often takes other forms. DePauw University in Greencastle, Will Wood's old alma mater, staged a play telling Pearl's story in around 2007, which

one reader of the town's *Banner-Graphic* newspaper described as "excellent". At around the same time, a local character called Scott Brown (aka "The Pizza Guy") began sneaking into Greencastle Cemetery after dark and spending the night asleep on Pearl's grave. "He would sleep on the grave and put pennies on her headstone," badboy46120 wrote in the *Banner-Graphic's* comments section in February 2008. "It wasn't Scott who put the pennies on Pearl's tombstone, it was us," Jeff Lancaster corrected him two days later. "It was Scott who flipped them 'heads down' to let us know he had been there." (67)

Camille Evans, another visitor to the cemetery, set up a virtual memorial for Pearl on findagrave.com in October 2008, where people can place a picture of some flowers and their own brief comments about her death. "Her headstone is completely gone, and just the base remains," Camille told me when I reached her in May 2009. "I contacted the historical society about getting her a new one, but that organisation is defunct now." When I last checked Camille's page on June 30, 2011, there were 25 virtual bouquets there for Pearl, with comments including: "Rest in sweet, perfect peace"; "I'm so very sorry what you went through" and; " I won't forget you". (68)

All this ancillary activity is interesting enough, but the real custodians of Pearl's memory now are Jeff Kazor and his band The Crooked Jades. *Pearl Bryan* has been a constant presence in the Jades' live set ever since they recorded it on their 2001 album *Seven Sisters: A Kentucky Portrait*. I've looked hard for recent versions of the song on any other commercially-available release, but as far as I can see, the Jades are the only people to have recorded in nearly 50 years. Without them, you'd have to go back to The Phipps Family's 1965 version for its most recent waxing. (69)

Since adopting the song, even the Jades have cut it back fairly ruthlessly, discarding everything but the familiar tune and the Phipps' distinctive chorus:

Please tell me where's her head,
Please tell me where's her head,
Pearl Bryan's dead,
Can't find her head,
Walling and Jackson are hung."

"I felt that leaving the detailed story out and just singing the chorus would be more powerful," Jeff told me earlier this year. "We're letting the audience fill in the rest. This song has also inspired the Kate Weare Dance Company to create an entire modern dance production with The Crooked Jades called *Bright Land* – a shocking choreographed dance recreating the brutal murder of Pearl Bryan."

Bright Land makes Pearl's ballad the climax of a series of dances, set to traditional and new string-band tunes played live on stage by the Jades. Its chosen themes are the old bluegrass staples of kinship, belief, suffering, tragedy and trancendence. The show premiered in New York in the Summer of 2010 before a San Francisco run this Spring, but I haven't yet had a chance to see it for myself. Kate Weare was kind enough to answer a few of my questions by e-mail, though.

First, I wanted to know if she'd been a bluegrass fan before this particular project came along. "I was raised with California folk music and Chicago blues as well as very traditional English songs from that side of my family," she replied. "When I heard some of the Jades' music, I really made the connection for the first

time between the British songs I'd known as a child and the American ones that descend from that lineage.

"All of these songs have a rawness, an earthy humanity, a harshness, a lack of hiding, an intelligence and a beauty that just can't be argued with. They're not everyone's cup of tea, and that's fine, but the power and directness of this music served a cathartic purpose for the communities that created it, and that's the highest power of art in my mind."

Jeff had made a similar point in our own correspondence. "One important piece of the murder ballad is the act of singing in itself," he told me. "Whether it's in the church or on the porch, singing about death and tragedy is a way of getting closer to God, healing, acknowledging shock and pain and suffering. Those were some mighty hard times: the Depression, the Great War, dust bowl migration, major floods, mass poverty. Kind of like today!"

It was precisely these eternal concerns of the music which Kate hoped to translate into dance with *Bright Land*. But how, I asked, had she approached choreographing Pearl's segment of the show?

"I first heard *Pearl Bryan* through the Jades," she replied. "In the studio, I began working with it as a purely musical interlude that contained no lyrics. That was on one of the musical takes Jeff gave me to play with. It wasn't until I had already made choreography with this musical interlude that I learned of the story behind the original song, or even heard their version of the original song."

When Jeff and Kate were able to see this piece of choreography in place with the Jades' chorus restored to the music, they were both stunned to see how chillingly appropriate the moves she'd selected were for a story she hadn't then known. "The section itself contains the most brutal and shocking imagery of the whole work," Kate explained. "Strangely enough, the choreography I'd made contained a death. Jeff and I were both kind of amazed at this confluence, I recall."

As this section of the show begins, the Jades are visible on stage, softly playing *Pearl Bryan* with nothing but the repeated chorus as its lyrics. "They're very still – concentrated and quiet," Kate said of the band. "Only a male and female dancer are left on stage, in the upper left corner of the space, dancing mostly on the ground with very sharp movements that depict desperation and attachment and sexuality. In the end, the woman ends up astride the man, and hammers him square into the ground with these intensely decisive head butts into his chest.

"It's a very sad, shocking and strange moment. The audience usually has a strong reaction to it, sometimes even crying out. It's very hard for some people to take in. Also, this section ends the whole work – summing it up, in a sense."

Dance critics often single this moment out as *Bright Land's* single most compelling image. "Leslie Kraus rammed her head into Douglas Gillespie's chest, knocking him flat on his back," Rita Felciano wrote in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*. "It's a moment one is unlikely to forget." *The Financial Times'* Apollinaire Scherr agreed. "By the dance's end, Kraus is butting her head into Gillespie's chest, flattening him to the ground like the lid on a coffin," she wrote. "All the while The Crooked Jades sing odes to what they're witnessing." (70, 71)

Like Jeff himself, Kate believes the decision to pare Pearl's ballad down to its chorus alone has made the song stronger than ever. "The Jades' take on *Pearl Bryan* as we use it in the dance is deeply fascinating to me, because the story is

never revealed in full," she told me. "It's abstracted into a kind of disorientated lament, where they sing only: 'Pearl Bryan is dead / Can't find her head'.

"What the audience sees during the *Pearl Bryan* section bears almost no relationship to the specific story in the song, except for a deep experience of sadness, inexorable violence and the finality of death. In fact, in our version, it's a man who is killed by a woman, and sometimes it seems like a fantasy of revenge to me."

With two such talented custodians as Jeff Kazor and Kate Weare to shepherd her story onwards, Pearl looks set to retain her grip on popular culture for a good while yet. A century after her death, *Bright Land* has given the girl from Greencastle her head back at last – and this time she's using it as a weapon.

Appendix one

String of Pearls: the headless girl on record

***Pearl Bryan,* by Jep Fuller (1926).** Fuller was one of many recording aliases used by the country singer Vernon Dalhart. This, the first version of Pearl's song put to disc, has his guitar strumming quietly in the background behind a slightly rushed vocal. Dalhart breaks off singing here and there to add a few Dylanesque harmonica breaks. *Available on: YouTube.*

***Pearl Bryant,* by Charlie Poole & The North Carolina Ramblers (1927).** The first *Jealous Lover* version on disc. Swings along nicely enough with its fiddle and guitar backing, but there's an oddly emotionless sing-song quality to the vocals. Put some heart in it, lads! *Available on: The Essential Charlie Poole (Properbox, 2009).*

***Pearl Bryan,* by Burnett & Rutherford (1928).** Dick Burnett and Leonard Rutherford made some very good records in their day, but this cover of Charlie Poole's *Pearl* isn't one of them. The tinny twang in Rutherford's voice makes him sound uncomfortably like Popeye at times, and the kazoo solo doesn't help either. *Available on: Burnett & Rutherford 1926-1930 (Document, 2005).*

Pearl Bryant, by Lois Judd (1940). This *Jealous Lover* variant was recorded by song collectors at one of California's migrant work camps in the final years of the Great Depression. Judd, a refugee from Kentucky, sings it *a cappella*, in a sweet, tender voice. It's marred somewhat by loud background noise as she starts, but notable for the fact that it includes the forgiveness verse normally excised when Scott Jackson's name appears. *Available via "Pearl Bryant" search on Library of Congress website: www.loc.gov/index.html.*

***Pearl Bryant,* by Doc Hopkins (1944).** We're back to the real ballad with Hopkins' disc, and it's all the better for its lack of frills. He sings with great sympathy for Pearl's fate, backing himself with just enough acoustic guitar to keep the tune ambling along. His careful pauses add a serious, confiding tone to lines like: "Their sorrow no tongue can tell". *Available on: America's Favourite Folk Singer (Global Village, 2009).*

***Pearl Bryan,* by Bruce Buckley (1954).** Buckley pushes the music even further into the background for this high-voiced, crooning version. He lingers a little too much over the show-off notes, as if he's inviting us to admire his voice, but it's undeniably pretty. *Available on: Ohio Valley Ballads (Folkways, 2009).*

***Pearl Bryant,* by Oscar 'Doc' Parks (1962).** This unaccompanied version was taped by the song collector Pat Dunford in Alton, Indiana. Stamping out the rhythm with his foot, the 71-year-old Parks brings great feeling to the song. His voice cracks and wheezes through the performance, producing a recording that's raw as hell, but utterly captivating. Dunford includes a brief audio interview with Parks too, which is well worth hearing in its own right. *Available on: The Art of Field Recording Vol II (Dust to Digital, 2008).*

***Pearl Bryan,* by Fleming Brown (1962).** Brown backs himself on banjo for this short cover of Doc Hopkins' version. His voice has a melancholy, intimate tinge that suits the story well. *Available on: Appalachian Banjo Songs & Ballads (Folk-Legacy, 2010).*

***Pearl Bryan,* by AL Phipps & The Phipps Family (1965).** Arthur Leeroy Phipps and his family were a country gospel quartet, somewhat in the Carter Family mold. They do

full justice to Pearl's tale here, delivering the kind of close harmony singing only blood relatives can manage. Arthur's guitar keeps the music simple, with an arrangement balancing ghastly content against a Godly tone. *Available on: Faith, Love & Tragedy (Folkways, 2009).*

***Pearl Bryan (Intro),* by The Crooked Jades (2001).** The Jades include two versions of the song on their *Seven Sisters* album, and this first one is a bluesy instrumental. Lisa Berman's Hawaiian slide guitar picks the tune out with deep, echoey, ominous tones. *Available on: Seven Sisters: A Kentucky Portrait (Jade Note Music, 2001).*

***Pearl Bryan (Outro),* by The Crooked Jades (2001).** The first version's ominous atmosphere is replaced with melacholy here. The Jades' Jeff Kazor joins with guest singer Martha Hawthorne to lead us unhurredly through all but two of the Phipps' original eight verses. Lisa Berman's Hawiian slide brings the darkness again, and there's a natty little mandolin solo from Bill Foss. The band would later pare this version down to its chorus alone, as I've explained in the main piece. *Available on: Seven Sisters: A Kentucky Portrait (Jade Note Music, 2001).*

Appendix two

'Proven false': The case against George Jackson

Barclay & Co rushed its paperback account of the case on to the market as soon as Scott Jackson was found guilty. This haste inevitably meant some mistakes crept through in the text, the worst of which was claiming George Jackson's testimony about taking Pearl across the river had been "proven absolutely false".

George "concocted the story with the expectation of securing the reward, or of gaining notoriety," Barclay says.

At first, I assumed Barclay's cut-and-paste operation had simply confused George with William Trusty (another cabbie) who lied in court about the same journey. Now I think the error's more likely to spring from Barclay's careless reporting of the accusations Leonard Crawford, Scott's attorney, levelled against George at his client's trial.

We know from other press reports that Crawford did his utmost to discredit George, accusing him precisely of the motives Barclay cites.

"[Crawford] bent every energy to the overthrow of the testimony by endeavouring to show Jackson was a sensationalist and given to imagining things that, being made public, brought him notoriety," the *CE* reports. "One of the incidents brought against the coachman was his charge against a man in Springfield of highway robbery; a charge which, it was stated, was based on imagination alone."

I think Barclay must have carelessly reported these accusations as if they were proven fact, and that all the subsequent confusion on this issue has its roots in his original mistake.

It's true that this same March 4, 1897, *CE* story says George was arrested for his Springfield accusations as soon as Scott Jackson's trial was completed, but being arrested is not the same as being proved guilty.

Any conviction against such a key witness in Cincinnati's trial of the century would surely have been well-reported, but my extensive search of the Ohio press archives turned up no such story. I kept looking all the way up to the present day, but the charges against him are never mentioned again.

All this matters only because Crawford was hoping to imply that George's testimony in the Pearl Bryan case couldn't be trusted. But the jury found that a very unconvincing argument, and you can see why.

William Trusty's account of that crucial trip across the river collapsed the moment it was challenged, but George's stood up to every test the police and the courts could throw at it. If he was lying, then answer me this:

* Why was he willing to take the chance? A black man levelling such serious accusations against two whites in 1896 Cincinnati took his life in his hands, as the casual threats to lynch George on the reconstructed trip show. You'd want an awfully big cash reward to outweigh that risk.

* How did George know the carriage would have a broken headlight before the police had even found it? How did he identify the right horse at the Walnut Hills stable?

* On the reconstructed trip, how did George know to follow a Kentucky track which even Sheriff Plummer had not known existed? How did he lead police so unerringly to the murder scene by this unsuspected route if he'd never made the trip before?

* How come his account tallied so closely with all the police's independent physical evidence? It defies belief to think George read all the press reports and meticulously

fabricated his story from the details those contained, and yet – if he wasn't telling the truth – what other explanation is there?

* If – as Scott Jackson himself claimed - the police told George to lie, then why didn't the watching reporters notice anything fishy about the reconstructed trip or his visit to Walnut Hills? Any hint of police falsifying evidence at that point would have been a huge story, and it would have needed an Oscar-winning actor to pull off George's role without creating suspicion.

For all these reasons, I'm content to dismiss any conspiracy theories insisting George was simply a liar. It is just possible that he might have been honestly mistaken about Walling's identification, though.

George's testimony is the only account we have that puts Walling at the murder scene. Walling's own account was that he'd delivered Pearl to Scott Jackson on the Cincinnati side of the river, and then never seen her again.

He had every reason to lie about that, of course, but I'm struck by his counsel's very confident assertion at the
requisition hearing that he had proof Walling never left the Ohio side on the evening Pearl was killed. If he'd been prepared to frankly confess his own role as Jackson's accomplice, perhaps Walling really could have proved that. He'd still have gone to jail for quite a few years, but at least he wouldn't have been hanged.

"It is now the mature opinion of many who gave the case careful study that the defendants lied themselves to the gallows by their persistence in maintaining an attitude of entire innocence," the *CE's* Harry Pence wrote in 1928.

"Had they confessed they were, indeed, responsible for the death of Pearl Bryan, and based their defence on the contention that they had not, at any time, sought to end her life […] they could doubtless have escaped the extreme penalty." (52)

I don't buy that as far as Jackson is concerned, because how do you finesse cutting a live girl's head off into a mere manslaughter charge? It might well have worked for Walling, though. Instead, he chose to go along with Jackson's increasingly ludicrous stories about mystery doctors, psychic landladies and lying coachmen. It was a decision that may have cost him his life.

Appendix three
Collateral damage

It's bad enough that Pearl's murderer robbed an innocent young woman of her life, but his actions brought other casualties too. Among the collateral damage was:

*** The druggist at Koeble's,** who later identified Jackson as the man who'd bought cocaine from him.

This luckless fellow waseventually driven mad by the unwanted celebrity his testimony brought. "[He] was questioned by so many people who had nothing to do with the case that he imagined himself part of the crime," Carothers writes.

"He broke down, and it was many months before he regained his health. In the meantime, his business dwindled down to almost nothing, and his store was finally closed forever."

*** Thomas Hawkins,** a wealthy young farmer living near the Kentucky town of Independence, hanged himself there on February 20, 1896. "He went crazy from reading the accounts of the Pearl Bryan murder case." Maysville's *Public Ledger* explained two days later.

*** Mabel Stanley,** Pearl's sister. Greencastle folklore relates that Mabel eventually committed suicide because of her sister's killing. I've no idea if this has any basis in fact, however.

Appendix four

Journal entries from the author's research trip.

Wednesday, September 1, 2010. New York City: My laptop dinged into action this morning with a note from Debbie Buckley, who runs the Military and Community Museum at Fort Thomas, Kentucky. I'd written to the council there before leaving London, asking them to recommend a local historian I could interview while I was in town.

"As you might guess, we have lots of interest in the Pearl Bryan murder case," Debbie wrote. "I will be glad to show you around, let you meet the Mendell family who live in the Lock house where the body was found, take you to the Newport Courthouse where the gallows are still stored, and the Campbell County Museum where the bag which may have contained Pearl's head is kept."

I realise that a chance to see "the bag which may have contained Pearl's head" is not everyone's idea of a pleasant holiday trip, but I couldn't wait. My journey to Fort Thomas was still two weeks away at that point, but it already looked like becoming a highlight of the trip.

Friday, September 3. New York*:* If I'm going to be prepared for my Fort Thomas tour, I thought I'd better do a spot more research, so I spent this morning at the New York Public Library trawling through the *New York Times'* microfilm records for its first reports of Pearl's killing. It's a magnificent building – all stone and polished marble – but almost empty of people. I think there were just three other researchers working in the huge reading room when I visited, plus about the same number of staff.

I dug out the specific references I wanted from the NYT print indexes lining one wall, found the matching reels of film and eventually worked out how to load them into the readers. The 1896 microfilm was so degraded that it proved impossible to read, but the 1897 film was clear as a day, and yielded up first-hand accounts of both the murderers' trials and their joint execution. It's striking how closely the execution day routine matches the protocol in England at about the same time.

Saturday, September 11. Newport and Fort Thomas: My hotel in Cincinnati was right on Fountain Square, which happened to be hosting a big beer festival the weekend I was there. Debbie arrived, as promised, dead on 2:30pm, but the festival got her jammed up in traffic, so she called and asked me to meet her outside by the Westin's side entrance. I wolfed down the last mouthful of my coffee shop bagel, then headed downstairs to find the blue Hyundai she'd said she was driving.

I had to go round the back of the car to check the badge before I could be sure it was her, and she confessed she'd instantly forgotten whether I'd said I was wearing a blue shirt or a white one. This mutual admission gave us something to laugh at straight away and broke the ice nicely. Debbie shared my fascination with the Pearl Bryan story, and was quite unfazed by even my most morbid questions about it.

Our first stop was going to be Newport Courthouse, and Debbie told me a little about the town as we crossed Cincinnati's Central Bridge into Kentucky. Newport, she said, had once been what Americans called a "wide-open town" - that is to say, a prime destination for illegal gambling, prostitution, gangsterism, illicit hooch and all-round sleaze.

This had begun with prohibition, crested as Las Vegas was beginning to rise in the 1950s, and ended only in about 1986, when sporadic attempts to clean the place up finally won through. Even as recently as 20 years ago, Debbie said, she'd have thought twice about coming here, let alone allowing a visitor to step out of the car.

The two Pearl Bryan sites I wanted to visit on this side of the river were in Newport and Fort Thomas respectively, and Debbie summed up the historic difference

between the two communities by saying that the gangsters of the 1920s and 1930s made all their money in sleazy old Newport but were careful to house their own families in refined Fort Thomas.

It was drizzling with rain and the sky was grey as we pulled up in front of Newport's courthouse and I nipped out to take a few photographs. Debbie pointed out a man in black trousers, black shirt, black fedora and shades who was showing a party of about a dozen tourists around. She explained that a group of local teachers had recently hit on a lucrative sideline by running weekly Newport Gangster Tours taking visitors round the town's once-notorious spots and telling them all its best stories.

As I climbed back into the car I asked Debbie if we could drive round the back of the courthouse, as I understood that was where the gallows had been erected. She said sure, but added that it might not prove all that useful because…

There was no need to finish the sentence. As she spoke, we rounded the corner, revealing that he whole area behind the courthouse was now a building site, dominated by a huge rust-coloured scaffolding of girders. Debbie had checked with the stockroom in the courthouse basement, she told me, only to discover that they no longer had the planks from Jackson and Walling's gallows there, and suspected they had finally been burned.

We headed on to the Campbell County museum instead. This was not Debbie's own museum, but another Kentucky institution, which she told me guards its Pearl Bryan exhibits pretty closely. Debbie had arranged for us to meet John Mendell there, a local expert on the case who now lives in Col. John Lock's old house, just a few hundred yards from where the body was found.

John was very friendly and keen to talk about Pearl. We waited outside for a few minutes, then a lady from the County Museum who Debbie had called earlier arrived to let us in and guided us through to the Pearl Bryan exhibit.

This was housed in what I took to be a cluttered storeroom, but which the County Museum lady assured me was part of the museum's main exhibition space. There were a few framed newspaper pages on the wall, and a glass case containing the valise and a set of handcuffs worn by either Jackson or Walling as they mounted the scaffold.

I asked the County Museum lady if she could open the case, saying innocently that I wanted to be sure my camera's flash didn't reflect in the glass. In fact, I was hoping to touch the valise for a second or – if she turned her back – stick my head inside and take a hefty lungful of its blood-musted air.

Guessing wisely that I was not to be trusted, our guide lifted the padlock to make sure I'd seen it and explained she'd been unable to find the key.

John took this as his opportunity to run through the details of just how careless the County people had been with Pearl's valise until he'd stepped in to ensure it got a proper display. Ostensibly, this was for my benefit, but I think he quite enjoyed forcing the County Museum lady to sit through it all again too. She endured the implied rebuke with a patient, if slightly frozen, smile.

I took a quick snap of the museum's exterior while Debbie and John conferred on where we'd meet next. They decided on a lay-by near the spot where Pearl was killed. This was right next to what is now a fairly major road, but would then have been little more than a dark, deserted track.

I crawled a few yards into the undergrowth at the spot John indicated, and communed for a moment with the tangle of leaves around me. "Did you *feel* it?" Debbie grinned as I stumbled back on to the road.

We drove round the corner to John's house – his road backed onto the same spot from another direction – and John's wife Cyndi greeted us there. They didn't live in the house any more, preferring their horse farm in the country, but used it as premises for Cyndi's art school. The big kitchen table, where we all sat for coffee was surrounded by kids' drawings from her younger pupils, and the room next door stacked high with paintings from the school's recent exhibition.

When Debbie mentioned the soldiers stationed at Fort Thomas back in 1896, and the prostitutes who gathered round there to service them, I innocently asked if the town still had a red light district today, and everyone at the table fell about laughing. I hadn't seen the genteel streets of modern Fort Thomas for myself at that point, but as soon as Debbie drove me round, I could see that a red light district there would be about as likely as a brothel in the middle of Cheltenham. No wonder they laughed.

We continued our chat over coffee, then I produced my microphone and mini-disc recorder for a slightly more formal three-way interview. I tried to remember all the best bits of what everyone had told me so far and prompt them to tell those stories again, which worked pretty well.

John and Cyndi had some ghost stories to share about the house as well – Pearl's ghost playfully placing their young children in a toy chest, strange apparitions in the attic, that kind of thing – but even John seemed to take these with a pinch of salt. Cyndi was the real believer, and thought Pearl's ghost may have been active while their children were little because she missed her own unborn child so much.

John and Cyndi were off to the Pete Rose tribute game across the river that evening, and I had a ticket for the Cincinnati Shakespeare Company's downtown production of *Much Ado*. We just had time for Cyndi to show me some of her paintings before we left, though, including a wonderful portrait of Willie Nelson which she'd been allowed to present to the great man himself.

Debbie gave me a lift back across the river, *Much Ado* proved thoroughly enjoyable, and I had time for a couple of pints at the beer festival before going to bed. I've had worse days.

[Many thanks to Debbie, Cyndi and John for all their help and hospitality during my visit to Kentucky. I couldn't have told Pearl's story properly without them.]

Tuesday, September 14. Indianapolis, Indiana: I arrived at my hotel in Indianapolis early in the evening, unpacked my stuff and then went straight downstairs to consult the concierge about getting out to Greencastle. I knew it was about 50 miles away by road and assumed that, as usual in the land of the free, there would be no public transport option.

The concierge listened politely to my little spiel about not being able to drive. We quickly ruled out the hotel's limo service when he mentioned the price, and that made him think of someone else he could try. This turned out to be Walt, an Indianapolis taxi driver who seemed to be a friend of the guy I was talking to. Walt's quote for the same trip was $100 cheaper than the limo, so I booked him on the spot and arranged a pick-up at 10:00am next day.

Wednesday, September 15. Indianapolis: I walked out next morning to find Walt already waiting on the sidewalk, chatting to the concierge who'd booked him for me. We introduced ourselves, shook hands and Walt ushered me in through the cab's rear door.

I fished my print-out of Pearl Bryan's findagrave.com page from my bag and passed the Forest Hills Cemetery address to Walt. It lacked a zip code but, where my *Tom Dooley* driver in Charlotte would have protested this omission or given me an uncomprehending squint, Walt was determined to help.

He painstakingly entered the address character-by-character into his SatNav, which promptly blinked into life. Its calming female voice was already reading out her first instruction as Walt clipped the box back on to the windscreen. We were on our way.

After a few minutes of small talk, we got on to the question of why I wanted to go out to Greencastle, and I launched into the whole Pearl Bryan story, stressing all the gory details with the relish I always try to give them. This normally gets a good reaction, often prompting a spate of follow-up questions and incredulous laughter.

Walt was different. He obviously didn't want to be rude, but he declined to join in my enthusiasm for the tale, saying only how sad it was that people would want to watch a hanging for entertainment, or scrabble for souvenirs of a murdered girl's pain.

My own attitude suddenly felt rather silly and shallow in comparison, and I couldn't help feeling slightly ashamed of myself.

It was too late to stop now, however, so I pressed on with some tales of the British hangings I've also written about here. But that just made me think of the truly disgusting sadism I'd seen described at lynchings in the black newspapers of the 1920s. Walt was a black guy about my age, and the thought that his grandfather might have faced that treatment less than a century ago made me regret speaking of hangings so lightly in his presence.

Moving on to other topics, we discovered we were both massive fans of David Simon's cop series *The Wire*, and this got us on to the whole subject of city crime in America and the crack epidemic that seems to cause so much of its violence.

For me, this was mostly the gospel according to David Simon, but Walt was able to address the subject from his own experience of living in various American cities, and everything he told me just confirmed again how precisely Simon and *The Wire* had hit their marks.

This sprawling discussion took us all the way to Greencastle's Forest Hills Cemetery, where Walt stopped at the open gate and nipped into the office there to make sure we were OK to drive the cab inside. He came out a couple of minutes later with two groundsmen, one of whom leant in through the cab's rear door and asked me which grave I was after.

He recognised the name Pearl Bryan instantly, and asked us to wait for a second, then follow them up to the plot. They appeared again a second later, this time in a golf buggy which Walt followed in a winding progress up the hill through dozens of well-kept graves.

We stopped at the top of the hill, where I got out and the two keepers showed me a line of four monuments, all belonging to the Bryan family. Pearl's was the closest to the path we'd driven up, but had been reduced to just its foundation stone. The older of the two Forest Hills guys explained that the headstone itself had been chipped away at so regularly by souvenir hunters that the family had eventually had it removed.

It takes a special kind of asshole to vandalise someone's grave, whether it's Tom Dula's, Pearl Bryan's or anyone else's, and I don't think I would have felt right clawing even a fingernail of grit off the stone. Walt later told me that the most famous grave in Indianapolis' own cemeteries is that of John Dillinger, which gets bits chipped off it in just the same way.

I did pluck a couple of blades of grass from Pearl's grave and drop them in a spare film container, but that's as far as my own desecration went.

Of all the 17,000 plots at Forest Hills, Pearl's is by far the most visited. The stone was bare of coins when I arrived, but the keepers said they often found pennies there. I asked if it was true, as I'd read on-line, that the pennies all went to Forest Hills' employee coffee fund, but they both just laughed without answering.

Squatting down, I could see a few brown stains on the stone, each about the size and shape of an American penny, which confirmed coins had been placed there at one time and left a mark next time it rained.

I asked the older groundsman why all the folklore about Pearl's grave specified that it was Lincoln's head pennies which people left there. Lincoln had been assassinated a full 30 years before Pearl's murder, and I couldn't for the life of me see any reason to associate her death with America's 16th President.

I suppose I'd been hoping for some folkloric twist which would add yet another element to Pearl's tale, but the keeper had a more mundane explanation. It was not Lincoln himself which prompted this choice, but rather the low denomination of the coin he happened to decorate. "People are cheap," he said.

They left me to it after that and I fished out another film canister from my bag, this one full of the US pennies I'd been saving for the day. I arranged a handful of these coins on the empty stone, and then asked Walt to step out of the car for a moment to take my photo posing next to it.

I'd told him the story behind the pennies ritual on the way out here, and Walt gave the stone a rueful glance as I packed up my stuff and we prepared to leave. "She sure is going to have a lot of heads come Judgment Day," he said. I smiled at this, imagining a Hydra-headed Pearl rising from the grave in Ray Harryhausen's jerky stop-motion.

Back at my hotel that evening, I got an e-mail from a friend in the UK, asking if I'd been out to Pearl's grave yet and, if so, whether I'd thought to leave a British coin on the stone too. The Queen's head, he pointed out, would not only leave the UK represented there, but also give Pearl a female head to supplement all the bearded male ones she was used to. I wish I'd thought of that at the time, but sadly I didn't.

Many thanks to Debbie, Cyndi and John for all their help and hospitality during my visit to Kentucky. Thanks also to Walt.

Appendix five

Sources & Footnotes

1) *Cincinnati Post*, April 28, 1930.
2) Cincinnati Enquirer, February 2, 1896.
3) Pieces of the Past, by Jim Reis (*Kentucky Post*, 1888).
4) www.cincinnativiews.net/taverns.htm.
5) Fifty years later, this neighbourhood was still wild enough for the local blues singer Walter Coleman to immortalise it on his 1936 disc *I'm Going To Cincinnati*. "When you come to Cincinnati, stop on Sixth and Main," he advises. "That's where the good-hustlin' women get the good cocaine."
6) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 3, 1946.
7) The Mysterious Murder of Pearl Bryan, author unknown (Barclay & Co, 1896). I was lucky enough to see an original copy of this booklet in Cincinnati's central library. It's about A5 in size, staped at the spine like a magazine, and 126 pages long. There's plenty of lurid engravings showing the key scenes from the story, plus a very delicate portrait of Pearl as its frontispiece. The paper's yellow and brittle now, but holding the thing itself in my hand was quite something.
8) Personal memoir by Dr Robert Carothers (unpublished typescript).
9) Judge NL Bennett, who'd visted the murder scene for himself on the morning the body was found, later testified that "two or three quarts" of blood had drained from the girl's body into the surrounding dirt.
10) Northern Kentucky Views (www.nkyviews.com).
11) *Cincinnati Post*, April 26, 1930.
12) *Cincinnati Post*, April 30, 1930.
13) *Banner Graphic*, February 2, 2009.
14) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, August 12, 1908.
15) Jackson and Walling's classmates at the dental college believed they'd disposed of Pearl's head in the building's furnace too. Lewis Ross and Sam Phister, two young men about to graduate there, confirmed this was the prevailing theory among all the students when questioned by reporters.
16) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 7,1896.
17) *Cincinnati Post*, May 1, 1930.
18) Albin surfaced in the case again when he told police Jackson had turned up at his barber's shop on the Saturday morning after Pearl's death. Jackson had a second valise of Pearl's with him, but refused to discuss its contents. He left it in Albin's care, and Albin later handed it in to police. This second valise seems to have held only Pearl's clothes, and should not be confused with the leather one discussed above.
19) There are at least three different cities called Lafayette in the US, but Jackson presumably means the one in Indiana, which lies about 60 miles north west of Indianapolis itself.
20) The Pearl Bryan Murder Story, by Anthony W, Kuhnheim (Campbell County Historical and Genealogical Society, date unknown). Kuhnheim produced this account while an undergraduate at Northern Kentucky University. His great, great uncle was John Hewling, the man who found Pearl's body.
21) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, September 11, 1949.
22) One of the nagging questions remaining in this saga is why Jackson and Walling thought they needed a hired driver at all. Either man was perfectly capable of driving the carriage for himself, and recruiting an outsider at this point seems only to create an unneccessary witness. It's sometimes suggested that George was needed because neither Jackson nor Walling knew the route they'd have to follow on the other side of the river, but that hardly squares with George's account of Walling giving *him* directions. Perhaps they thought hiring a driver was worth the risk because it would allow them both to stay in the back of the carriage for most of the trip, and hence control Pearl more easily.
23) *Cincinnati Post*, May 3, 1930.
24) Poor Pearl, Poor Girl, by Anne B. Cohen (University of Texas Press, 1973).
25) Murder In All Ages, by Matthew Pinkerton (AE Pinkerton & Co, 1898).

26) *Cincinnati Post*, May 5, 1930.
27) Pearl Bryan Murder, by Albert Stegman Jr (Stegman Volumes, Campbell County Historical Society, date unknown).
28) Murder is My Business, by William Foster Hopkins (The World, 1970).
29) As I typed up this section of Debbie's interview, I couldn't help but picture the dozens of busy souvenir stands I saw lining the streets around New York's Ground Zero in the aftermath of 9/11. More than 3,000 people had died there just a few months earlier, but that didn't stop me and the thousands of other visitors buying photographs of the planes' impact or key-rings they assured us had been cast from the melted girders. Human nature doesn't change much, and I suspect we're really just as ghoulish today as we've always been.
30) "Scarcely noticable". Really?
31) *Cincinnati Post*, May 2, 1930.
32) Sleevenotes from The Art of Field Recording Vol II, compiled by Art Rosenbaum (various artists, Dust-to-Digital, 2008). Parks' account of the murder in his recorded interview here gets one or two of the details wrong, but it's worth quoting anyway just for the colourful way he phrased it. "Scott Jackson got that woman Pearl Bryant fixed up, y'know, and they took her over to Cincinnatah to get an abortion made on her," he told Dunsford. "You know what that means, I suppose? And when they got her there, she died. […] They were getting in muddy water there, y'know, and rode her down there somewhere and dumped her out down the Ohio River. […] They dumped her out there , and they cut her head off. Thought nobody wouldn't know her, you know, then."
33) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 7, 1896.
34) *New York Times*, March 8, 1896.
35) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 8, 1896.
36) This recalls the old joke about sharks refusing to attack lawyers because of "professional courtesy". Perhaps the rats in Jackson's cell felt the same way about him.
37) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 9, 1896.
38) *Cincinnati Post*, May 6, 1930.
39) *New York Times*, May 15, 1896. The *NYT* and Barclay both give extracts of this speech, which I've used to assemble the composite version here.
40) *New York Times*, May 17, 1896. Jackson was big news throughout the US now, and news of his death sentence made page one of the *NYT*.
41) *New York Times*, June 20, 1896.
42) *Cincinnati Post*, May 7, 1930.
43) *New York Times*, February 28, 1897.
44) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, March 4, 1897.
45) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 5, 1946.
46) *New York Times*, March 20, 1897.
47) Images of America: Newport, ed. Judy L Neff & Peggy Wiedemann Harris (Arcadia, 2004)
48) *Kentucky Post*, date unknown.
49) *New York Times*, March 21, 1897.
50) *Cincinnati Post*, May 8, 1930.
51) A Dictionary of Superstitions, ed Iona Opie & Maria Tatem (Oxford University Press, 1989).
52) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, October 15, 1928.
53) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, June 21, 1905.
54) *Cincinnati Post*, July 10, 1954.
55) Northern Kentucky Views (www.nkyviews.com)
56) Folk Songs of the South, by John Harrington Cox (Portfolio Press, 2001).
57) I'm always struck by the fact that this line puts Walling's name before Jackson's – an order of priority which now looks as odd as "Robin and Batman" or "Watson and Holmes". This may mean the chorus updates an earlier version composed very soon after the arrests, when it wasn't yet clear which man would emerge as the lead villain.
58) *Cincinnati Post*, February 27, 1946.
59) *Cincinnati Post*, February 2, 1946.
60) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, February 2, 1946.
61) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, May 8, 1947.
62) *Cincinnati Times-Star*, May 30, 1947.

63) *Cincinnati Post*, February 3, 1953.
64) *Cincinnati Post*, April 28, 1954.
65) *Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 28, 1954.
66) No Rest for the Wicked, by Troy Taylor (Whitechapel Productions, 2001).
67) *Banner-Graphic* website (www.bannergraphic.com).
68) Pearl's Find A Grave page (www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=30686832).
69) If I'm wrong about this, please let me know. I'd love to find some more recorded versions of Pearl's ballad – in any of its forms – and tell people about them here.
70) *San Francisco Bay Guardian* website, May 3, 2011 (www.sfbg.com).
71) *Financial Times* website, August 12, 2010 (www.ft.com).

Special thanks to the research staff at Cincinnati Public Library, who were tireless in helping me find all the many, many old newspaper stories I requested there.