

The Historic Present

by Emma Ashmere

Today's first box delivered to the reading room. Inside, a slip of blue paper. Standard issue, Melbourne Gaol. The believer to the murderess: *Salvation will smile upon your face.*

Second: *Irish girl extinguishes herself in the Yarra. Recalcitrant. Immigrant Depot. Runaway. Swimming home.*

Third: 1867. A farming woman's diary, blue sloping hand. Who is she writing to? Her husband has been gone three months. Perhaps to the child kicking beneath her unlaundered skirts.

Fourth: *Madam de Clef, palmist, formerly of. Wanted. Also under the name Miss Dorcas Bunt.*

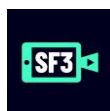
Fifth: The Clifton Hill milliner's assistant, 1908. Monday to Saturday: *Worked.*

Wednesdays, half day: *Had a yarn. Had a bath.* Sundays, *walking out.* In a stolen hat?

Sixth: *Do not leave your dead on the hospital steps. It has come to the attention of.*

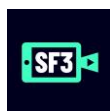
Without visible means of support. Cholera. Three females mistaken for heaps of rags.

I blink on the State Library steps - hoping - fearing – I'll find men in top hats and women in crinolines tiptoeing through the horses' dust. By the time I've reached the pedestrian lights



This text is reproduced with permission of the author for use in the SF3/Spineless Wonders Microlit Film Award 2022. Not for distribution. Copyright held by the author.

on the corner of Swanston and Lonsdale, I've already forgotten them. Why then, three
heaps of rags huddled at my feet?



*This text is reproduced with permission of the author
for use in the SF3/Spineless Wonders MicroLit Film
Award 2022. Not for distribution. Copyright held by
the author.*