



# Never Seen the Moon: THE TRIALS OF EDITH MAXWELL

*Sharon Hatfield*

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Free-spirited young teacher Edith Maxwell returned late one July night in 1935 to her Wise County, Virginia, home and to her conservative and domineering father. Hearing a scuffle, a neighbor arrived to find Trigg Maxwell lying unconscious on the kitchen floor. Within fifteen minutes Maxwell was dead, and the next day Edith and her mother were indicted for his murder. Edith claimed her father had tried to whip her for staying out late. It was said that she retaliated by striking back with a high-heeled shoe, thus earning herself the sobriquet "slipper slayer." "Never Seen the Moon" carefully yet lucidly recreates a young woman's wild ride through the American legal system. Immediately granted celebrity status by the powerful Hearst press, Maxwell was also championed as a martyr by advocates of women's causes. "The Washington Post", "Time", "Newsweek", the "New Yorker", and even detective magazines picked up her story. Ernie Pyle, James Thurber, and Walter Winchell wrote about the case. Warner Brothers created a screen version, and Eleanor Roosevelt helped secure her early release from prison. Sharon Hatfield's brilliant telling of this true-crime story transforms a dusty piece of history into a vibrant thriller. Her discussions of yellow journalism, the inequities of the jury system, class and gender tensions in a developing region, and a woman's right to defend herself from family violence all combine to illuminate the era's social history, and remain chillingly relevant to debates today. A native of Appalachian Virginia, Sharon Hatfield was an award-winning newspaper reporter in Wise County, Virginia, covering the justice system in the same courtroom where Edith Maxwell was tried for murder. She currently teaches writing at Hocking College in Ohio, and is working on a book of Appalachian literary criticism.

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