

TUESDAY 21st SEPTEMBER 1909

Sergeant Alfred Murphy was very drunk. He often drank seven or eight pints of weak bitter beer during the course of an evening session. His local pub was an East End drinking den where the beer was cheap. He could drink a gallon of weak beer with most of the effect being on his belly and bladder, but he was unused to drinking whisky. The stranger had kept buying him large whiskies and the strongest old ale available behind the bar. He had even tipped a few scotches in the beer when Murphy was looking the other way. Now they had left the pub. The sergeant was incapable of walking in a straight line and had to be guided by the stranger. His senses had been dulled by the alcohol to a state where he was barely more than conscious. Murphy was vaguely aware that he was not being guided home. After passing along some ill lit and unfamiliar streets they stopped by a large double door in an otherwise blank wall plastered in posters. The stranger found a large key in a jacket pocket and opened the door while Murphy was propped against the door-frame. There was just sufficient strength in Murphy's legs to prevent him sliding down to the pavement. The stranger supported Murphy around the waist and together they went into some kind of building site. Murphy had a vague memory of walking down a long flight of concrete steps. After this descent into the dark Murphy passed out,

waking sometime later to find himself in a long, narrow, brick-built store room. Other than the dull glow of some distant lamp he was in almost total darkness. There was a smell of damp and dust, and also of electric motors and hot oil. Every few minutes there was the rumble of a nearby electric train and the change of air pressure caused by the movement of the train in a tunnel.

Murphy attempted to stand but was unable to. His ankles were bound together with thin, strong cord fastened to a ring cemented into a wall. His hands were tied with a similar length of cord which was tightly wrapped in a figure of eight around his wrists and also to a chain. The chain ran up most of the height of the room and through a pulley wheel fixed to a steel beam on rollers. The room had been used to store lengths of rail and sleepers but was now empty. The movement of the beam had been arrested by a pair of wedges and the chain had been shortened so that Murphy could not move his hands down to the level of his feet. There was a smell of strong tobacco smoke from somewhere near. He turned his head as much as he could to try and discover its source. The stranger was squatting in the entrance to the store room, smoking a pipe of some aromatic foreign mixture. He was illuminated by a single candle.

‘Welcome back to the world, Sergeant,’ the stranger said quietly, in slightly accented English.

‘What the hell do you want?’ demanded the sergeant, tugging at the chain and kicking his legs uselessly.

‘Well, what the hell I want is for you to die, Sergeant. And I want you to die knowing what real suffering is,’ the stranger said in a dull but relentless tone. He puffed reflectively on his pipe.

‘Just let me out of here now, or you’ll really regret it,’ the sergeant blustered.

The stranger blew out a cloud of smoke before replying ‘oh, I don’t think so, at least not yet.’ He laughed in a soft and mirthless manner.

‘I don’t understand, what have you got against me? I mean, we’ve never even met before. Just let me go now, and we’ll say no more about it,’ Murphy said, trying to sound reasonable.

‘It’s true that we have never met before tonight, my friend. But I know that you met my mother and my sisters,’ the stranger said coldly, ‘and besides, I’ve gone to a good deal of trouble to find you and bring you here.’

‘And just where am I supposed to have met these women?’ The sergeant asked, and he rattled the chain again. He was beginning to sense the remorseless determination of the stranger.

‘Oh, it would have been nine or ten years ago when you met my mother and sisters. Now, do you remember what you were doing ten years ago?’ The stranger stood,

walked over carrying the candle and looked down at Murphy, who struggled again.

‘Well, ten years ago I was in South Africa, so I can’t have met them can I?’ The sergeant replied, breathing heavily from the futile effort.

‘Perhaps you met them in South Africa, then. What were you doing in South Africa, sergeant?’ the stranger asked, and Murphy now recognised the guttural rasp of a South African accent.

‘I was in the bloody army of course. How do you think I’d gotten to be a sergeant?’ Murphy asked in return.

‘And what part of South Africa were you posted to, Sergeant?’ the stranger demanded in a soft, slow voice.

‘God knows, some camp in the Veldt somewhere. Middle of bloody nowhere it was. Some hell-hole in a stinking swamp. What’s it got to do with you anyway?’ The sergeant demanded.

‘The British army, in their wisdom, rounded up the families of us Boers in an effort to defeat us. They put my family into a concentration camp. Your army took my mother and my two younger sisters, and locked them up in a camp in a malaria ridden swamp by the Orange River. They died there of hunger and fever. And you, sergeant, were in charge of the supplies for this camp. Only you didn’t distribute those supplies, you sold them instead, and many of the prisoners, the ones who could not afford

to pay, died of disease and hunger. And that is your army record, Sergeant. No real active service or honest fighting, just killing women and children and old men who were locked in that camp. You must feel like a real hero.’ The stranger knocked out his pipe against a wall, inspected the bowl to ensure that the tobacco was extinguished and put it in his pocket.

‘Look, Lots of people died. You’re not the only one to have suffered. I had mates who were killed out there, on the Spion Kop, and other who died of disease. What makes you so special?’ The sergeant tried to stand up again, but the cord tying his feet was too short. He collapsed back against the wall of the chamber.

‘What makes me special is that I’ve tracked you down. I found out about what you did in that camp. Then I came to London and found you. I learned your routines and I tracked and trapped you. And I’ve locked you in your own little concentration camp, one I made especially for you,’ the stranger said calmly. ‘I’m going to leave you now, sergeant. You’ll find some food and water on the packing case in front of you. You will be able to reach that far. The water is foul and the food not fit to eat, just as it was in the camp. Of course someone might find you in a few days, or you might just die here. So I suggest that you pray to your God for help. I don’t suppose that we will meet again.’

‘But I was only obeying orders, Sir,’ Murphy said, as though talking to an officer, trying desperately to change the tone of the conversation.

‘Don’t be ridiculous, Sergeant. You are corrupt and without proper human feelings. You really deserve this,’ the stranger said, smiling nastily.

‘I’ll tell you anything you want to know, Sir,’ Murphy said, his voice breaking with fear.

‘But you don’t know anything I want to know, Sergeant. You see, you are not the only person I want to meet. There is another man I’m looking for who had something to do with concentration camps. In fact, he helped develop the policy. I’m going to enjoy meeting him. Well, I don’t think we anything more to say to one another, so I’ll bid you goodbye, Sergeant. It wasn’t good to meet you, but it has given me some satisfaction. Now, be a good fellow and do something for me,’ said the stranger.

‘What’s that?’ Murphy asked, suddenly anxious to please.

‘Go to hell,’ the stranger said, simply.

Murphy was aware of the echoing footsteps receding into the distance as the stranger turned and walked slowly out of the chamber. He shut the crude plank door to the room, fastening it from the outside with a heavy padlock.

‘For God’s sake, come back, don’t leave me here,’ Murphy wailed. He was enveloped in a deep silence as

well as in the velvety blackness. There was no reply.

WEDNESDAY 22nd SEPTEMBER 1909

It was not quite what was generally referred to as a ‘Pea-souper’, one of those thick London smogs, where cold, heavy air descending on the city trapped the smoke from three million domestic fires of cheap, sulphurous coal. Banks of smoky autumn fog rolled lazily down the roads and between the buildings. The smoke bore the odour of the exhaust fumes of taxis, motor busses, trucks and cars. Two men were strolling in the lower end of the Inns of Court, where it butts up to the Thames embankment. The fog surrounding them muffled the bustle of the great city, almost turning it into a tranquil village setting. Elegant Georgian buildings were arranged tastefully across airy squares. The soot stains of the bricks were the only hint that their position was close to the centre of London. It was late in the afternoon.

They were tall young men, obviously members of the ruling class, and they were well wrapped against the weather. And though both wore expensive overcoats, there was something more flamboyant about the coat of the taller of the two men, with its’ collar of Persian lamb. It was not just his coat, but also his movement which marked him out. He walked lightly on the balls of his feet, like a gymnast or dancer, while the other man planted his feet firmly on the greasy York stone paving, the crunch of his boots sounding louder than the subdued tones of their conversation.

‘This is a delicate matter’ said the shorter man in a

hushed voice. ‘I trust that I can rely on your complete discretion in this’. He looked into the face of the other man with pale, watery eyes.

‘That would depend on what was involved in the matter,’ said the taller of the two with a slight sigh, ‘I don’t like to commit myself if I don’t know what I am getting into’. A fog-horn sounded distantly in the estuary.

‘That is a very reasonable comment. Let us just say that it concerns the honour of a lady, and one who is well known to you,’ the shorter man said, pausing for effect. ‘There is also the question of our national interest, but I do not expect you to be so impressed with that argument. If you accept my explanation then you must do so on the understanding that it is on the basis of information passed from one gentleman to another’.

‘Really, Scrivener, you do not have to be so melodramatic about this,’ said the taller man, testily, ‘We could easily have discussed it in your office. And I have no idea what you mean by “a lady’s honour”. Why don’t you just tell me whatever it is you have to say to in plain English. I’m happier speaking in that language’. They stopped by a nearly leafless lime tree whose top branches almost disappeared into the fog.

‘Offices have walls, and they sometimes have unwanted ears’, said Scrivener lifting his cane and touching the silver top to his lower lip in a gesture suggesting secrecy. ‘This is as good a place to meet as any. Halfway between where I work and where you live. And, please remind me, just what are you working at these days?’

‘Oh, please stop! I have enough lectures on my general uselessness from my father. Just tell me what it is you want of me. After that I will refuse. Then we can part on the same terms as we met. I don’t think you can call on any friendship. We never were friends,’ the taller man said in a patient voice.

‘Yes, I seem to remember some incidents when we were at Harrow. You were a bumptious little prig then, and you don’t seem to have changed much, Mansell-Lacey minor,’ the shorter man said with barely suppressed anger.

‘Well, you were two years ahead of me. And you didn’t dare to bully me because of my big brother, who was in your form. What I distinctly remember is that you tried to bully my friend Gurney-Stewart. And if my memory is not playing me false I recall giving you a damn good thrashing because of that. Please do not insult me again. The Laceys won their honours on the battlefields, not in the banks and law courts, like some did. We have never taken insults lightly, Scrivener, so don’t forget it’. Mansell-Lacey drew breath, took a Turkish cigarette out of a silver case and lit it, and added to the density of the fog. He made no move to offer one to Scrivener. The smoke scarcely rose from the glowing tip of the cigarette.

‘I never realised that you were so keen to uphold family traditions,’ said Scrivener, with a distinct note of sarcasm. ‘Before you were asked to this meeting we did some checking up on you and your background. You were supposed to go into the cavalry as second son. And that

is one family tradition that you have singularly failed to carry out. I believe your father is refusing to pay any more of your debts until you accept a commission. Personally, I regard you as completely useless. You dabble at painting pictures and hang around with a bunch of useless artists and bohemian types. But someone has looked at your university record. It seems that your record at rugger and rowing counts for more than my opinion. Tell me, do you still play any rugby or row?’

‘If you were checking up on me you will know that I no longer play rugby, but I still do some sculling. All this sounds like you’ve been spying on me. But then, you always were a sneak. Now will you please just tell me what it is that you want,’ Mansell-Lacey said with a tone of strained patience.

‘It seems to me that family connections are more important than talent, these days,’ Scrivener sniffed, ‘It really is beyond my comprehension that you are allowing your life to go to waste in this way’.

‘You had better have a damn good reason for spying on me. Because I have never had any respect for you or your opinions, and I think that you have wasted enough of my time,’ Mansell-Lacey said with a snort, ‘Now, if you please, just tell me what it is that you want, and let me get on my way. If I wanted to get insulted, I know of many people who can do it with considerably more wit than you could ever have. So don’t strain what little brain you have trying to think up witticisms, Scrivener’. The ash from his cigarette now formed a long grey trunk, and it was a

tribute to the steadiness of his hand that it did not fall.

‘Alright then, I shall tell you,’ said Scrivener with a twisted little smile, ‘It concerns your friend Gurney-Stewart, or rather it concerns his wife’.

‘What about Em?’ asked Mansell-Lacey, at last flicking the ash away.

‘It seems that Lady Emily has been holding company with a man who has connections with a.... well let us say a foreign embassy’. Scrivener paused for effect, but achieved very little. He continued, ‘And with Sir Charles being a junior minister in the Ministry of War, and party to the great decisions of state, we are concerned that his wife might be involved with a foreign agent. And this agent may be working for our enemies. Even if there is no direct danger, we cannot be too relaxed in matters that might influence the very security of our nation. So, you see, we are concerned that certain information may be passed to those who do not wish us well. We want to know what the relationship between Lady Emily and this man really is, and if we need to be concerned about this entanglement’.

‘I don’t see what this has to do with me,’ said Mansell-Lacey, frowning slightly. ‘And I can’t believe that Emily is involved in anything that might damage her marriage to Charles. They are, I believe, the only truly happy married couple that I know. And who the hell are “We”, in any case?’

‘Well, let us just say that I represent a department concerned with keeping an eye on people who wish England no good,’ Scrivener explained, ‘As to your

friends' marriage, I can't comment. The reason that you have been approached is because you are a childhood friend of Lady Emily and were close to Sir Charles at school. As you may guess, it is not easy for us to discretely question either an MP or his wife about such matters. There is more at stake here than mere social etiquette. There is also the question of Parliamentary privilege, not to mention the damage that might be done to the government. You can, as a friend, ask questions that would not be possible for us to ask. Discrete questions that require an answer'. Two clerks wandered by holding an animated conversation. There were several seconds silence before they passed out of earshot.

'You still haven't told me who you are working for,' said Mansell-Lacey, testily, 'Last that I heard is that you were due to join the Navy after getting a second in Law. I don't see any sign of a ship around here, or of a naval uniform, for that matter'.

'Suffice it say that I am attached to the Admiralty, and hold the rank of commander. And it is not necessary to sail the seven seas in order to serve your country. There are many other tasks that must be performed,' Scrivener said, puffing out his chest in pride.

'So, you really are a spy. Well, they got it a bit wrong, sending you to see me. Didn't they know that we can't stand each other's company? What is more, I think the reason you dislike me quite so much is that I was better at games than you were,' Mansell-Lacey said with a grim smile.

‘The powers that be knew we were at school together, and at Oxford, though not the same college or the same year. I presume they thought that there was some kind of connection between us. And, anyway, I’ve found a game I can play better than you’. Scrivener trailed off into silence.

‘What on earth leads you to believe that I would be willing to spy on my friends for you? I mean, that is not the way that a gentleman behaves, is it?’ Mansell-Lacey said in a slightly louder voice.

‘You misunderstand. We don’t wish to find guilt, only innocence. It would be much more convenient for all the parties involved if there were no awkward consequences, and much easier for us. But we need to know, we need to have the proof to find them innocent. It’s not like the law courts. In politics and diplomacy you are always guilty until proven innocent. And the wife of a man in government must, like Caesar’s wife, be above suspicion’.

‘You always did talk in clichés, and legalistic gobbledygook. No wonder that you trained in the law, you have a natural bent for it, probably inherited. And you still haven’t said anything to make me want to work for you’. Mansell-Lacey turned away and walked a few paces before turning back. Scrivener pursued him and raised his voice above a whisper. Two riverboats hooted a conversation or warning.

‘Well, there’s no use in appealing to your patriotism, as you claim to be a socialist, despite being the second son of a Duke, nor, I think, of appealing to your religion, as we

have reports that you claim to be an atheist, despite still attending church. I am just appealing to your better nature, or what there is of it, and a duty of friendship to help clear this lady's name. Oh, yes,' here a pause and a sneer, 'and we are willing to pay some reasonable expenses. With the size of your tailor's bill, you could use the money, right now,' Scrivener snorted in triumph.

'Didn't you know that it is very vulgar talking about money like that? And anyway, I have funds I can use and friends I can turn to. Just because I believe in social justice doesn't mean that I don't love my country. I am not that stupid that I don't know that we have enemies', Mansell-Lacey said, thoughtfully. He dropped his cigarette butt onto the damp flagstones where it fizzled briefly before being extinguished. 'It's the Germans, I suppose. I have no illusions as to their ambitions, knowing that country as I do. I mean, my dear mother is German. I'm sure you know that. Mind you, I haven't spoken to her for five years. She has the most ghastly, rapacious Junkers family, you know. Every time I visited Germany I realised just how much I loved England. So if it is the Germans, please tell me.'

'I can't tell you that,' Scrivener said flatly. Mansell-Lacey considered his next words.

'If it is someone other than the Germans, just nod your head'. Scrivener's head remained steady.

'Very well then,' said Mansell-Lacey, 'I agree, in principle, to do your dirty work. But I must be told a little more before I accept formally. Just where is this alleged

assignation supposed to have taken place?’

Scrivener turned and walked slowly towards the embankment while considering his answer. Mansell-Lacey followed. ‘In the strictest confidence, and to go no further than ourselves,’ Scrivener glanced questioningly at Mansell-Lacey, who gave a brief nod in return. ‘It took place at the Palatine Hotel, last Tuesday, room 247, at eleven thirty in the morning. You see, we are watching the man involved’.

‘Well,’ considered Mansell-Lacey, ‘The Palatine is certainly a place where I have met ladies, so it seems a likely enough venue. In fact I have arranged a meeting there for tomorrow afternoon. But I can’t believe that anyone would have an assignation at such a time. Early morning, lunch-time, mid afternoon or evening are all common, but not the middle of the morning. It just doesn’t sound right. And who is this fellow Lady Emily is supposed to have met, anyway?’

‘You don’t need to know that, so I shall not tell you. All I will say is that he is a foreigner who has diplomatic status. As for meeting ladies at hotels for assignations, you are, I believe, an expert in these matters,’ said Scrivener, with scorn in his voice, ‘Your dalliances are well enough known to us, legion though they may be,’ Scrivener said, the note of sarcasm reappearing in his voice.

‘A man has to have a hobby,’ said Mansell-Lacey, trying to sound wittier than he was, ‘Though I have never thought that Lady Emily would indulge in such activities, and I have known her since we were very small children.

Our fathers share their politics, what they have of it, being Tories. And they share a common passion for hunting. Their houses are only a few miles apart. There is hardly a beast or bird or fish in all the country around that is safe from them’.

‘Well, as you were speaking of Lady Emily’s father, it is a good point to tell you of the arrangements which have been made. Lord Randall will be holding a house party at the end of next week, and Sir Charles and Lady Emily will be present. I have made sure that you will receive an invitation, and I suggest that you accept in the most enthusiastic terms. It would be a good place to ask those questions’ Scrivener said, meaningfully.

‘Well, I suppose I could get some amusement from a house party,’ said Mansell-Lacey. ‘So who else will be there? I ride to hounds but I don’t think there is any hunting planned. And I don’t shoot, at least not pheasant, so other diversions would be welcome’.

‘There is a meeting of some eminent people discussing some matters before the weekend proper. They might stay on. The writer, Doyle will be there,’ said Scrivener,

‘Conan Doyle?’ asked Walter.

‘Yes, do you know him?’ Scrivener asked.

‘You probably already know that we aren’t acquainted,’ said Mansell-Lacey, ‘we move in rather different social circles, but I should like to meet him.’

‘And I believe that Mr Baden-Powell will be present, and a Mr Buchan,’ continued Scrivener, ‘and Lady Caroline and her husband have just returned from the

United States and will be there. I hear that you were once very friendly with Lady Caroline. And there will be other guests, including at least one gentleman of my acquaintance who, for some reason, wishes to meet you. So, you see, there should be more than enough going on to keep you amused’.

‘Yes,’ I shall look forward to seeing Caroline again. I haven’t seen her for over a year. The social scene in New York may be fine, but, money apart, it surely can’t compare with our season’.

‘It’s autumn already,’ Scrivener pointed out, ‘The season has finished. There is only the hunting, shooting and fishing until next spring. You might as well enjoy it. Either that, or head for warmer climes. And, talking of warmer climes, that reminds me, how is Mehmet?’

‘Well, I’m surprised that you don’t know that,’ Mansell-Lacey said testily, ‘or were you just making conversation? Anyway, Mehmet’s off to South Africa, or some other god-forsaken outpost of empire, with the MCC. The fellow is a positive martyr to the cause of cricket. You’d think with all the money his father has he could find more amusing ways to spend his time’.

‘How about you? I’m surprised you never considered the colonial service. There are some choice postings if you have the right connections, and the climate and workload need not be too onerous’ Scrivener suggested.

‘Never, said Mansell-Lacey with a note of finality, ‘I rather object to the principle of the Empire. And as for meting out justice to some savage race, well, no thank

you!’

‘I see it as our duty to spread a bit of civilisation,’ Scrivener said haughtily, ‘and we make a much better fist or it than anyone else. What we do only benefits the lesser races of the empire’.

‘Children of a lesser God, eh? I’ll let Mehmet know that when he gets back, it will amuse him so much’ Mansell-Lacey said with a slight laugh.

‘Well Mehmet’s the exception to the rule. He is more British than we are, despite having a brown face. Why else would he play for the MCC?’ Scrivener said.

‘Because he’s the best number five bat in the country, of course. And being the son of a mogul prince, he can be classed as a gentleman, which is always an advantage. I’ll send him your regards anyway, when I see him,’ Mansell-Lacey said with a touch of sarcasm.

‘Before you go, I just want to remind you of how important it is to act with discretion in this matter. The very last thing we want is for the press, especially the foreign press, to be involved, or even any untoward gossip. There must not be the slightest whiff of scandal. I hope I make myself clear,’ said Scrivener, looking intently into Mansell-Lacey’s face.

‘Perfectly,’ replied Mansell-Lacey, ‘And how, precisely, do I go about claiming these expenses you were talking about?’

‘See my clerk. Admiralty Office G346. And please make an appointment before turning up’. Scrivener turned up his collar and walked away.

‘Goodbye, Scrivener major,’ Mansell-Lacey called into the fog.

*

Walter Mansell-Lacey shared a first floor flat in Belgravia with his schoolboy friend, Mehmet, who was away for the winter. It was a large, expensively-furnished apartment in a block owned by the Duke of Westminster which opened onto one of those London squares that surround a little park that is there for the sole enjoyment of the residents. Those without the key to the gates cannot enjoy the gardens, nor can they afford the exorbitant rents that are charged for such properties. Outside the flat a Leyland truck was parked. Walter slipped slightly on a patch of oil which was dripping from its’ sump.

The stairway leading to the apartment was blocked by a pair of men struggling to carry a large and very heavy trunk to one of the flats. Walter wondered whether someone new might be moving in upstairs, and who it might be. He waited patiently for the stairway to be cleared before making his way up. It was with some surprise that he found the trunk resting outside his door. One of the men was standing by the trunk, whilst the other was inside the flat. He was being given instructions by a lady with a commanding voice. It was a voice that Walter recognised, belonging, as it did, to his friend, Miss Godiva Williams. The man by the trunk removed his cap as Walter passed by, and Walter made a curt nod of acknowledgement as he entered his apartment.

‘Oh, hello Walter,’ said Godiva, before he had time to

speaking, 'I wasn't expecting you back quite yet'.

Walter was left speechless for a few seconds. 'How did you get in?' he asked.

'Oh, the usual way. With a key,' Godiva replied, 'The one you gave me'.

'But I never gave you a key,' Walter managed to blurt out.

'Well maybe Mehmet did. Anyone, I've got one, so I let myself in'.

'But what are you doing here, with that trunk and everything?' Walter asked, even more puzzled than before.

'Oh, I've left home. I had a massive row with my father, so I've come to stay with you for a while. Just until I get a place of my own. I hope you don't mind'.

'But you can't stay here. It's not proper. I mean, what would your father say?' Walter protested.

'Oh, he won't mind,' replied Godiva reassuringly, 'In fact he'll be relieved that I have a friend I can stay with. And it's not too far away, so I can still do some work for him. Anyway, if he suddenly gets overprotective and demands satisfaction of you, which he wouldn't do, I'll just have to remind him of all his talk of open sexual relationships that he goes on about. He's not a complete hypocrite, you know. And you needn't worry about your privacy, I shall stay in Mehmet's room, just while he's away. I won't bother you at all. You'll hardly know that I'm here. If you want to bring a lady back here I will completely disappear'.

'My bringing ladies back here has nothing to do with

it. I don't do that anyway. It's just not done, an unmarried girl moving in with a bachelor. I mean, what about your reputation?' asked Walter, getting irritated.

'My reputation is already fast and loose, coming from the family that I do. And I hardly think that it will damage your reputation. In fact it might improve it. Also, if you knew anything about the working classes you would realise that cohabitation is a most common condition'. The delivery man coughed in a sort of disgusted way at this moment, attempting to gain some attention. 'Oh, yes, could you pay this delightful gentleman who was kind enough to help me, I am a little short of ready cash at the moment'.

Walter fished in his pockets and found a ten shilling note. He placed it in the outstretched hand of the man, and when the hand was not withdrawn he added a half crown, which seemed sufficient to close the transaction. 'Look, I'm not exactly flush myself at the moment. In fact I am having to take on some work myself'.

'Poor Walter, fancy you having to work for a living. How the mighty are fallen. Has your father cut off your allowance again?' said Godiva, with only the faintest trace of sarcasm in her voice. 'Seems like we are both having problems with our fathers. You shall have to live on what I earn while I'm staying. It may not be much, but it will be an honest wage'.

'I still insist that you can't live here,' said Walter.

'Where else am I supposed to go, Walter? I thought you were supposed to help a friend in need, and I am in

need right at this moment. And you needn't think you can crawl into my bed or expect me to get into bed with you. The one thing that has kept our friendship going is that we have always resisted that particular temptation. Frankly, it is one temptation that I find very easy to resist. So you need have no worries on that score. I am no blushing virgin, and your virtue is perfectly safe with me. Now be an absolute darling, and help me get this trunk into Mehmet's room'.

Godiva was of more than average height, well-shaped, red haired, bespectacled when reading or typing, with a fondness for bright, showy clothes quite at odds with her Suffragette sympathies and was a one woman tornado in all her interests. Her father was a well known socialist with advanced views on freedom in sexual relationships. There was no possibility of Walter's father ever approving of Godiva as a suitable marriage partner.

'So what was the cause of this argument you had with your father?' Walter asked.

'Oh, much the usual,' Godiva said, 'He wants me to put aside my feelings about women's suffrage until the other goals he sees as more important have been achieved. You know, for such a convinced socialist he has a very limited idea as to what social justice actually is.'

'Do you mean to tell me that he is against women's suffrage?' Walter asked in surprise.

'Oh, no, not really. He's in favour of it. Well, in principle at least. But I don't think he really appreciates women that much. He likes to use them and to talk about

freedom, but when it comes to treating them equally, he really doesn't like the idea much. You know, he expects me to do all his secretarial work and most of his research for him, at virtually no pay, just because I am a woman. He may preach equality, but when it comes to the realities for most of us, he doesn't believe in what he preaches. I'm not saying that he's entirely a humbug, but I don't think he really understands his own prejudices.'

'And I suppose that you told him your opinions in a strong but reasonably argued way,' Walter said, with a trace of irony appearing in his voice. Godiva did not appear to notice.

'I made my position on women's suffrage abundantly clear to him, and I told him several other home truths. I was really annoyed by him,' she said.

'So, is he likely to come round here sometime, or are you going to visit him?' Walter asked.

'Oh, I never gave him this address, nor told him who I was going to be staying with. He'll presume it's one of my suffragist friends, and he'll never guess that I'm here. But I suppose I'll go over in a few day's time, if only to see mother and to collect my post,' Godiva replied.

The trunk was largely full of books and proved to be almost immovable. Most of the contents had to be emptied before it could be manoeuvred into the bedroom. The piles of books and notebooks were stacked in tottering piles in the living room. It took Godiva only a few minutes to put away the few changes of clothes she had brought with her. Walter reflected that this might mean only a short stay. He

liked Godiva a great deal, and found her attractive, but had little wish to be in such proximity to her for an extended period. This was typical of Godiva, assuming so much, and stretching the duties of friendship to breaking point. As one of the first women to gain a university degree, and in a science subject at that, she would have been regarded as one of the most notable examples of a blue-stocking in the country had she not been a vivacious and popular young woman with a stream of bright young things as suitors. But it seemed that she was only interested in their minds. In that respect, they usually fell well short of the required mark. She had only small regard for Walter's mental capacity, but thought him well favoured with a good nature and capable of improvement. Walter liked her because she had never fallen at his feet, as most women seemed to do, and she could safely be regarded as a friend, so this platonic relationship suited them both very well. However, meeting her socially was very different to sharing a flat with her, and he was most concerned that this new intimacy would ruin what was a beautiful friendship. They had met through mutual friends at some meetings of radicals in Bloomsbury, and though their backgrounds could hardly be more different, and their fathers would surely be the fiercest of class enemies they found that they had a good deal in common. It was a relationship in which the differences more than the similarities were the attractions. Walter knew from his school days that the sort of people you can live comfortably with are rarely your closest friends, and that visitors, like fish, begin to stink

after a few days. He was too gentlemanly, or too weak, to refuse Godiva's request, and her moving in became a *fait accomplis* within a very few minutes.

'Now tell me all about this job of yours', said Godiva. She had made them a cup of tea, and they were now standing in the lounge, by a sulky fire that refused to draw properly, despite a great height of chimney.

'I'm afraid that I can't. It's all very hush-hush you know,' said Walter, trying not to sound too devious, but Godiva's attention had been well and truly grabbed by this revelation.

'Oh, you mean intelligence stuff', she said, enthusiastically, 'They approached me at Birmingham, thought I might help them out with something to do with a chemical plant on the Rhine, but I told them I wasn't interested in going out to Germany. I'm surprised that they asked you!'

'Thank you for that vote of confidence,' said Walter, a little sheepishly, 'It wasn't a career I had ever considered, but this is a personal matter, and it must remain a secret'.

'I'll get it out of you one way or another, you know I will,' said Godiva.

'Please don't try,' said Walter, 'It's not something I'm proud of, or something that I want to talk about'.

'Well, we shall see,' said Godiva, with the air of an inquisitor.

Dorkins, the manservant who nominally attended to Mehmet, but worked for Walter when his master was away, served them a modest dinner, made more modest

as it only been prepared for one. His manner was a little unfortunate, in that he always seemed sarcastic, but what was more unusual, in a flat of two very active heterosexuals, was that Dorkins was an effeminate homosexual with a startling line in innuendo, the complete master of the single entendre.

While he was in the kitchen Godiva questioned Walter about Dorkins.

‘Why do you keep him on? He’s a dreadful cook and far from being the best housekeeper. He doesn’t seem to keep time and he won’t stop gossiping,’ she hissed.

‘Well, I suppose it amuses Mehmet to keep him on. He refers to Dorkins as his eunuch,’ Walter replied, ‘and besides, he is very good with all my clothes and gives an absolutely excellent shave.’ Dorkins poked his head around the kitchen door and called Walter into the kitchen to speak to him. Walter sighed and walked towards the kitchen.

‘What is it, Dorkins?’ Walter asked.

‘It’s about the young lady, Sir. Is she intending to stay?’ Dorkins enquired.

‘She seems to have invited herself. She has had some kind of argument with her father and has moved out. Please don’t think that there is any other motivation to her stay.’ Walter had a good idea about what Dorkins was getting around to asking.

‘That is as maybe, Sir, but I hope you are not expecting me to perform any additional duties. If I might remind you, it is Prince Mehmet who employs me, not you,’ said

Dorkins. Walter sighed.

‘How much extra do you require to perform all these onerous new duties?’ Walter asked.

‘It’s not the money, Sir, it is just the presumption that I will fit in with all these changes. And the young lady is a very untidy person. She has scattered clothes and books all over the room. I have never seen anything like it. I have many other duties in my life, other than cleaning up after her,’ Dorkins said in a whining tone.

‘How much?’ Walter continued.

‘Fifteen shillings more a week should cover it,’ Dorkins said, smiling.

‘Ten shillings is my final offer,’ said Walter

‘Agreed,’ Dorkins confirmed. They returned to the living room.

Dorkins lost little time in insinuating a sexual motive to Godiva’s stay, if only in a way that could be interpreted as nothing else to anyone with an ear for speech. But Godiva refused to rise to the bait, and she began to make sly, coquettish sideways glances at Dorkins instead. One time when he was passing her chair she caressed his buttock as he passed and blew a kiss as he looked round in surprise. These actions seemed to unsettle him a good deal.

Dorkins did not reside at the flat, having digs in a shabby house near Drury Lane with a moveable feast of theatrical chums. After noisily clearing the dishes and making a token attempt to put things away in the correct place he returned to his home, a little after nine at night.

He was due to return again at nine o'clock the following morning, and could be counted on to arrive by ten most days.

Walter, still hungry after the frugal meal, went to his club and dined again there. When he returned at eleven o'clock, Godiva had already gone to bed. Whilst at the club, Walter had determined to make inquiries next day at the Palatine Hotel, and try to confirm that it had indeed been Lady Emily Gurney-Stewart who had been to that establishment on an assignation.

Walter knew the manager of the Palatine hotel reasonably well, and was not hopeful of gaining any information from him. However, he found a photograph that included a good likeness of Emily, and stowed it in his overcoat pocket for use tomorrow.

*

The young man hurried down the darkened street, almost running. He could hear his footsteps loud on the greasy cobbled surface, echoing off the soot-stained brick of the closed warehouses and yards. Behind him, or perhaps in front of him, were his pursuers, and he hoped that they were as lost and confused as he was, among these anonymous streets. He was sweating with the effort and shivering with fear. Out in the open he felt vulnerable, even his breathing sounding loud in his ears. He ducked down a passageway leading to a yard half filled with stacked, empty barrels that smelling of stale beer. On the other side of the yard was another stack, this one of steel drums which reeked of oil. He hid behind the barrels,

trying to stand as still as possible. He peeked through a small gap to view the entrance to the yard.

For some minutes there was no noise. Next came the soft pattering of rubber soled shoes. Those wearing these soft shoes were barely hurrying. Then there was the sound of a low growl from a large dog. Four men, one of them with a hound on a leash, came down the passageway, not talking. The near silence was menacing. He could hear the urgent breathing of the dog, straining at the leash, and he tried to find another hiding place, within the stack. His foot met with an unseen strip of iron which lay on the cobbled yard. The iron strip struck a barrel with a dull thud and rebounded onto the ground with a ringing noise. Within a few moments he was surrounded, with no escape to hand.

Three of the men were in jackets with mufflers to guard against the cold and cloth caps; the fourth was dressed in a long, dark overcoat, with the collar turned up and an elegant grey homburg on his head. One of the men was patting the head of the dog, who sat quiet and content, tongue lolling to the right of his mouth. Two men held him fast by his shoulders and arms. The man in the homburg approached within a few feet, reached in a pocket and pulled out a cigar case. He extracted a cigar and found a cutter to remove the wrapped tip before lighting it with a match. He let the flame grow along half the length of the match before holding the wide flame to the tip of the cigar. The match illuminated the man's face with a sinister light. He was smoothly shaved with thick curly hair onto

which oil of Macassar had been heavily applied. A silver rimmed monocle was screwed into his left eye. There was nothing unpleasant about his expression or features, or, rather, there was almost no expression or individual features. He exhaled the smoke, in a steady stream, and spoke in a smooth, well modulated baritone voice.

‘I am disappointed in you, Tommy. I thought that we had come to an arrangement,’ He drew on his cigar again. ‘I am a very busy man, Tommy, and I don’t want you interfering in my business deals any more. You should have taken that boat when you could. In a very short time you are going to feel some pain. But this will be nothing compared to what I shall do to you if I find you still in this country tomorrow. And if you attempt to make contact with him again, you know who I mean, I shall kill you. Nod if you understand’.

Tommy nodded dumbly. Then the beating started. The smooth man stood back and watched with considerable and indecent pleasure.