

AFTER DONKIN

PART ONE

Chapter 1

i

I've a right to blow up me own business. I paid the insurance. It's my money, innit? Just takin it back from the bastards what took it from me.

That fat slobbering milkface, he's too much in my way. Thinks he's entitled to half the cut just cos he comes up with the blamed sticks. But I'm the one meetin the public, I tells him. I'm the one has to do the bloody deals with the mumblin coves. *Can't you shave a shilling off that, Mr. Donkin. I'll bring you the rest this coming Friday, s'help me I will.* Get out of my shop, says I. I'm the one crackin the whip, I'm the one siphonin pennies from the poor, I'm the one turnin what's been stole from all the others into a neat little profit for yours truly. Revolution my Aunt Sally. Years now, milkface, I says to him, you've been sittin in Kent on your fat arse, writin lies into books and livin off that rich old lady. Thousands of pounds you've lifted, bits of jewels swiped here and there. Don't think yer foolin me. No one fools Reg Donkin.

Now comes the posh bint. I seen her in Hyde Park. Passin out pamphlets to the poor. Every Friday she comes for the bag.

Like always, today she walks in complainin. *See here, my good man, you can't have all this furniture out in the street. You're creating a public nuisance,* says she. Barked her precious shin on a chair.

Izzat so, says I. All hearts and flowers for the daughter of Sir Alec. Come the revolution, she'll be handin out sugar plums. The customers like it, I says.

Well, you will need to be more careful.

That voice of hers. Wish I could bottle it. Sell it in America for two quid a pop. Let me tell you what you need, I says. What you need is a good stiff c-o-c-k. Spelled it out for her. Put you in your natural place, I says.

She jumps a foot. *How dare you speak to me like that? You vulgar measly little piece of—refuse, you.* Then enter the toff. Didn't hear my last remarks. *See here now, Donkin.* He's got a motorcar parked outside. They've come for the packet. That fat bastard's got it worked out, hasn't he, says I. Sits in the country, breathin clean air, while Knightsbridge does his dirty work in Whitechapel.

I fling the packet in their faces. Coins, paper, spillin all the way across the floor. Yer his toadies, make like toads and bend your knees. I aint pickin it up. You tell milkface Reg Donkin's quit his employ. Tell him I spit in his fat fuckin face. Tell him he won't give me sixty percent he'll have to find another fence. Takings too small for me, I says.

Upshot is they leave. Toff's concerned about his motor, doesn't want it left too long on Davy Street. Yer tyres slit by now anyway, I says to him. Course that wasn't so, but I wanted them out of my shop. Stinkin up the place, they was. Smell of the bugger-all aristocracy. Walked out both talking at each other and having a row. Money still scattered about. All mine now.

Only, after they go I see they forgot something.

Go over, pick it up. Smells like bananas. Wrapped in paper, knotted strings. I know what this is, I says to myself. I take that package and I put it very careful on a table. So the fat boy's slingin bombs now, is he? They let him go on a ticket-of-leave and turns out he's a criminal mastermind. Wonder who this was for.

Me, I don't care. I see this as a stroke of luck. Wipe my feet on the bugger. Fence his sticks somewhere else. Whole block's got insurance, Mahaffys set it up. They'll be siftin through

the ashes while R. Donkin boards the steamer. Buenos Aires. They've no law at all down there, what I hear.

I unwrap the package. Simple. Ten, fifteen seconds from match to boom. Light it and run. Good luck to you, you fools, I'm off. Light it – there – start countin. Ten – nine – bit short, this fuse – eight – seven –

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“What have we done?”

“What have *we* done? You mean what have *you* done. You brought the bomb into the shop.”

“I didn't want to leave it sitting in the motor. Think of what might have happened. Besides, he told us not to leave it anywhere.”

“But then you did. You did. Bringing it in was bad enough, I don't care what he said. But then – forgetting it? Leaving it there? For that wretched man to discover and blow himself up with?”

“Stop it, stop it, stop it. We could hang, Toodles!”

“Us? Sir Ethelred's private secretary and the daughter of Sir Alex Harbison? Not likely.”

“That kind of response is exactly why this country needs a revolution.”

“Oh, then you'd prefer to hang?”

“Toodles, stop it. Just stop.”

“No, *you* stop. You've put us in this pickle. *You* think of a way we can extricate ourselves. Without saying anything – about who sent us there. You do know I'm related to Adrian Carr? You do know we're slated to see him tonight at Lady Gwendolyn's? How, may I

ask, do we get around him? Because I know the man, you see. The quiet, brooding type. He won't miss anything."

"That grandson of a lord who's a policeman? He can't be endowed with a surplus of brains. Wasn't he sent to India for being stupid?"

"Jan, you will live to regret those words. Carr is deep. You'll never notice him. Not until you're upside down in his tiger trap."

"Nonsense. This is what solicitors are for. We will extricate ourselves, to use your charming phrase, the legal way."

Silence.

"I'll have to ask my father to recommend someone."

"That means you'll have to speak to your father, you know. Which you haven't done for – is it a month now?"

"Toodles, why must you come down so hard on the negative side? We are united, aren't we? In our cause? For the greater good?"

"Of course, of course, Jan. Please forgive me."

Blandishments.

"It was an accident."

"Of course, an accident."

"I never meant –"

"Of course you didn't."

"I didn't ask what he wanted it for."

"And we won't ask him now, will we. Not ever."

"Never."

Three days later, Adrian Carr talked with Dr. Frung. After a light lunch, they'd adjourned to the empty card room in the club.

"According to my constable, the dead man was his shipmate. Young Charlie walks Davy Street every day, normal course of his duties. Saw the sign, *Used Furniture, R. Donkin, Prop.* No love lost between them. Apparently the fellow wasn't liked aboard the *Narcissus*."

"Ah. Why not?"

"Fomenting mutiny, for one thing."

"*Ach du Lieber*. For money, or – ?"

"Donkin was a leveler. An anarchist in rags. Hoped to – organize – the sailors. No, there's no union, not yet, in the Merchant Service. Donkin was trying to remedy that. Talked all kinds of rot. Stirred them up."

Frung pursed his bearded lips. "Dangerous undertaking. And the captain? Was he abusing the men?"

"To hear Charlie tell it – and yes, I've taken at least a half shaker of salt with his story – captain was saintly. Rather a strict saint, though. Donkin tried to kill him, with a belaying pin – missed. Luckily for all, I take it. After that, the crew deserted Donkin. Wouldn't hark to his harangues." Carr with half-closed eyes stretched out his legs. The foibles of humans were his stock in trade, yet there was deep discomfiture attaching to this tale. "What I don't understand is how the fellow ever set up shop. He had nothing except form. Spent six months in jail for stealing from a Yankee ship. How does a johnny like that get to having a shop, even a miserable one?"

Frung lit another cigarette, inhaled for too long a period, and started coughing, so hard his cheeks turned a feverish red. "He has patrons, perhaps."

"God knows who. Somebody blew up the place. With him in it." Carr added, "The bomb was nitroglycerin, this time. Or so says Jorgenson."

"Adrian, my friend." Dr. Frung removed his glasses, wiped them on a napkin, replaced them atop his snub nose. "I like to hear about the criminal mentality, but at a distance, thank you. You must in your work come face to face with rotten elements. I wonder you can keep your *sang-froid*."

"I can't, always."

"Yet you speak of these dreadful things with nonchalance."

"You gave me the word for it, Doctor. What was it? Repression, I think?"

"Yes, but it is not good for you to find you cannot speak of what you see. An outlet you must have. How, may I ask, is your beautiful daughter?"

Carr covered his yawn. "Pardon me. Still not sleeping through the night."

"I can write for you a prescription. Sleeping draught. Yes?"

"For me, or for Melba? But no. I am assured on all sides this will pass. Inspector Heat has children, four of them I think including a set of twins. There are times when I value his experience."

"Are you two working then still together? He does try your patience."

"As I try his, no doubt. But we manage. Friction creates energy, does it not, Doctor?"

"To be sure. In the laboratory. In real life, well –"

Carr glanced at the clock, lit for a change by a chance ray from high sun. The curtains were drawn, but far overhead a tiny gap persisted, a gap in the shape of a large-looped V, like the

signature of the late queen. He missed her sometimes. “In my real life, I should be getting home. Annie’s having some family trouble. Oh, it’s that fop cousin of hers again. Sir Ethelred’s right hand. He’s taken up with the daughter of Sir Alec Harbison.”

“The House whip! Would that not be an excellent match?”

“It would.” Some fellow with a South Wales accent thick as caul expostulated in the hallway. *Ja-aahn! Hwhaddar you doo-in?* “It might have been— if the young lady were not a suffragette, a revolutionary, a self-styled anarchist, a woman red in soul and habit. And quite noisy as well.”

Frung rolled his eyes. “Wealthy fathers, wayward girls. All too common, in our era.” With a grunt, the alienist rose to his feet. “*Also*. Please give my best to the charming Annie, and a kiss to the baby. All of you must one day grace my poor bachelor quarters.”

“No doubt we will, but perhaps not until Melba is— I will speak plainly— not so apt to puke on the upholstery. We’ve quite the cleaner’s bills, these days.”

“Don’t forget your umbrella.” Frung pointed to it. “I believe it still rains.”

Carr, cursing his fate, grabbed the ugly black thing. In U__ Province, people carried colored parasols, light, patterned, charming. He never could quite repress India.

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In the vestibule at Lady Gwendolyn’s, Annie grabbed Carr’s hand.

This was a way she had: a sudden clutch, a whisper in the ear (her lips nuzzling his lobes, delicious), and the disclosure of some awful information, a morsel of poison that would stop him in his tracks, provoke a stare of disbelief, infuriate and frustrate him— and then she’d laugh. Carr braced himself.

“Your Inspector Heat wants to arrest Toodles and Jan.”

He pulled away. “Absurd. Who told you that?”

“See for yourself,” she chortled, and then they entered the salon. There, on the favored side of the screen, sat *his* (as if he owned the man! As if he were Carr’s mouthpiece, his familiar, his bondsman!) Inspector Heat, his jowls a healthy pink, his dirt-eating grin elevating his mustache, his hands in a complacent fold over his belly. Around him, in a ragged semicircle, sat Lady Gwendolyn, resplendent in amethyst, her jewelry aiming disconcerting flashes into Carr’s eyes; Janet Harbison in her infantine blondness resembling as Annie had noticed before Theodore “Toodles” Branch-Fulkes himself; and Peter Michaelis, the paroled apostle of positive change, the saintly, spherical, best-selling memoirist. Annie slipped into a chair next to Lady Gwendolyn, squeezed her hands, dazzled her smile at the rest.

Carr sat down next to Heat. “Inspector,” he said. “What’s all this about arrests?”

“There are witnesses, sir.”

“Yes, so I’ve heard. To what exactly?”

Heat removed a well-thumbed notebook from his pocket. Pursing his lips, he riffled pages covered edge to edge with his cramped hand. “Four witnesses confirmed they saw a Vauxhall automobile bearing plate number Leonard Kaiser Eight pulling away from the victim’s shop just before the explosion. Witnesses reported a young man with fair hair and a similar young woman as occupants of the vehicle. Registry of Motor Vehicles identified the owner.” His reading voice, a rapid monotone, took on a momentary edge of emphasis. “Further questioning revealed the owner of the car, and his companion, to be known in the vicinity, and frequent visitors to the shop where the victim sold used furniture.”

Carr had *sang-froid* to protect. He wrapped his pointed speech in diffidence, in drawls. “And you – Inspector – did not think it might behoove you to consult with me? Before coming into this house? And who are these witnesses, when they’re at home?”

“Donkin’s neighbors, sir.” Heat took to his notes again. “There’s the barber – a Mr. Hirsch – there’s one John Wang, tobacconist – there’s old MacWhirr, the publican – and a German. Goes by Schomburg. News agent.”

“I’ll talk to them first thing tomorrow. Sounds like rather an intriguing group.”

“That’s your Whitechapel, sir. Bit of the worst of everything, from all over the world.”

“And that’s your bullyboy London police. Xenophobia in uniform. The police boot, on the neck of the people.” Jan fixed her eyes over Heat’s shoulder. She spoke in a child’s high-pitched voice, smiling all the while as if addressing fellow infants. “How much did you pay your so-called witnesses, Inspector?”

“Are you accusing me, Miss?”

“Wait. Let’s attempt to – defuse – this situation.” Unfortunate word. Carr would not correct it. “May I ask you, Toodles – as one who’s known you for some years, as Annie’s cousin – I don’t doubt you will tell me the truth. Were you there? On Davy Street, in Whitechapel?”

He saw Jan and Toodles exchange looks. Something was wrong in the nursery. Carr wished he could spirit them out of this plush cocoon, into a departmental interview room with no windows, no watercress sandwiches on gilt-edged tables. No wine, the very sight of which upset Carr’s stomach.

“Miss Harbison raises a good point. What sort of questioning tactics were used on these witnesses?” Michaelis spoke for the first time. His voice was a zephyr, almost inaudible.

“Strong-arm, Inspector Heat? Beatings? Was a rubber hose employed at any time?” He shook his

head, so much like a melon Carr expected to hear seeds sloshing about inside its rind. “Torture is the Metro’s speciality, as we all know, Commissioner. Are these four individuals at this time even capable of speech? How many teeth did you knock out, Inspector?”

“We’ll have no more of that, *Mister Michaelis*.”

“You’re quite right, Inspector. Mr. Michaelis, I understand your – sentiments – ”

“He was locked up for *ten years*. For no crime at all! His shot went wide, he never meant to kill that constable. It was an accident.” Jan’s full lips curled in a pout. “Peter Michaelis is a *hero*. He dared to resist power’s crushing hand. That armored car carried the blood money of the poor.”

“Inspector Heat.” Carr decided to stand up. He paced. He forced them all to follow his movements. “I’d like you to leave the room, please wait in the vestibule. I need to speak to the – young people – without your handcuffs dangling, so to speak, in the air above their heads.”

“Sir, I – ”

“And take Mr. Michaelis with you, if you don’t mind, Mr. Michaelis. I’d rather speak with just the family right now.”

“Of course, of course. I’ll go to my room.” The advocate of social revolution put down an emptied bowl of nuts. His voice was soft, but his chewing was noisy as he munched the dregs.

“Lady Gwendolyn’s permitting me to stay a while. It’s damp in Kent. My knees don’t like it.”

“Thank you. Thank you, Inspector Heat.” Carr pushed Heat’s chair, empty now, back to the wall. He watched Michaelis waddle, toes thrust out, flipper-like arms held away from his sides, down a long corridor that turned dim and then dark. “That’s much better. Well, Toodles? Out with it. Were you there?”

“Of course he was there.” Lady Gwendolyn sat up, dislodging Annie who’d been leaning on her shoulder. “You told me you were there, didn’t you, Toodles? Aren’t all troubles made worse by lying?”

“Oh, pooh! The wretched bourgeoisie and their conventions!” Jan’s voice rose an octave. She blinked, repeatedly. She had china-blue eyes, like a doll. “What is lying, anyway? Of whose truth do we speak?”

“Miss Harbison, if you’d prefer to wait in the vestibule – with the Inspector – you may, of course.”

Jan, Jeanne, Joan. The latter-day aspiring martyr, in the guise of a lovely, accomplished young girl, did not rise from her chair. Carr had seen these two before. Always Jan taking the lead, always Toodles hanging back, apologetic but adoring. Something had changed in the formula. As if a great body of feeling that made up who they were – what they were – had been snatched away, and replaced by – what? An iceberg? The tip of the Matterhorn? Carr had no name for this impression of something frozen and implacable.

Heat in his broad boots had stepped in the mud and slopped it over the investigation. He should have gone to Carr first, per every protocol written and otherwise. Heat saw himself as the stickler, the plodder who sticks to procedure, and Carr as dangerous and unpredictable, the cannon come loose and rocketing about the deck – when as anyone could see the reverse was in fact true. Carr was not eager to haul Toodles and Jan before the courts. “I have some questions I’ll need answered. Where were you coming from, before you ended up at Donkin’s?”

“I’ll have my solicitor,” Jan announced, with a giggle.

“Toodles?”

“We – we – we were at the fruiterer’s. We bought – bananas.”

“Bananas? Oh? Are there no fruiterers in Knightsbridge?”

“It, the produce, it’s – fresher there. Near the docks. The ships, you see, they come in from Honduras, South America. Bananas being very perishable, as I’m sure you know, Adrian.”

“Honduras is in Central America, not south. But never mind, you’re not working for the Foreign Office. At what time did you leave that market?”

“Mustn’t answer, Toodles. Let’s wait for Monty.”

“I, I haven’t the foggiest, actually.” Toodles, his nose twitching like a rabbit in the crosshairs. “We go there every Friday. Whitechapel, I mean. Tell him, Jan.”

“Montague Brierly, Middle Temple. Would you mind it very much if I don’t speak unless he’s present? It would be so kind of you.”

“Miss Harbison, you may contact your solicitor.”

Jan popped up, all wholesome eagerness. “Lady Gwendolyn, you have a telephone, of course you do. You must.”

“I do. Although I’ve never touched the instrument myself.” Their hostess, Iorgnette swaying on her bosom, gestured toward the hall. “Ask Pansy. In the kitchen. At the back of the kitchen. She has an affinity for the new-fangled.”

Janet whisked off, Toodles looking after her like an abandoned spaniel.

“Let’s continue. When you were there – in Donkin’s shop – right before the explosion – did you see anything that might, perhaps, have been a bomb?”

Toodles *agonistes*. His tidy hair was mussed and frowsy, glistening with sweat, hanging limp over his forehead. His confident face of a handsome child seemed on the verge of deliquescing into bawls. Carr knew what an infant about to cry looked like; his eyes met Annie’s for a moment. They shared that knowledge. “Look, I just drive Jan there and back. I don’t fancy

her going alone, you know. We pick up the pamphlets, then she hands them out, then as soon as I can pry her away we're off."

"Where do you get the pamphlets?"

"Oh, someone just leaves them on a corner, Tower Hamlets area. Jan says I shouldn't ask questions, the party knows what it's doing."

"Indeed we do." Jan reappeared, sweet smile in place. "Monty will see us both, at ten tomorrow. Of course you'll come, Toodles, Sir Ethelred can spare you for an hour."

"He *cannot* know."

Carr spoke. "He has to know. I'll tell him myself. You won't be going into the office, not during our investigation. I know Brierly, by the way." *Conceited ass*. Childhood acquaintances, never quite friends. Their grandfathers owned adjoining lands. At least in India, Carr recalled with the usual pang, he had not restricted himself to one social circle, within which a narrow selection of people too much like him rotated like tin clock figures. "You're meeting Brierly at ten. Please be at Scotland Yard – with him – no later than half past twelve tomorrow. Formal interviews to follow. Annie – if you could shake her a bit, Lady Gwendolyn – Annie dear, time to go home." He signaled to the servant for her wraps.

The next part was difficult. Approaching his hostess, avoiding her august and terrible eyes, he picked up her hand and pressed it to his lips. "Forgive me, Lady Gwendolyn. Do let's not let our differences of opinion make us anything less than the friends we have always been. You've helped me no end, as you know." He ventured to add, "You know my secrets."

"Do make sure Annie keeps warm." The reply, although cold, came with a decided pressure of the hand. Carr welcomed that.

Chapter 2

Whitechapel did its business half out of doors. The barber, a round-faced little man with heavy eyelids and sparse hair, lounged in his doorway. Next door, the tobacconist was fussing with racks of cheap pipes he'd hauled out and arranged on both sides of his entrance. Below the sign of the Crow's Nest, the industrious licensed dispenser of liquors swept up a quantity of peanut shells, disposing of them in a pail. A newsagent's trade is always passersby, and by the shack of unpainted wood that served as a sometime cover for his pricier wares, a large fair man with an imposing beard leaned with his arms crossed over his sizable chest. Carr, advancing, decided that man would come last. He took himself over to the barbershop.

“Yes, *mein* sir, what would you like today? Just a trim? Mustache wax?”

“Neither, thank you. Is your name Meyer Hirsch?”

“I prefer Maurice, but yes, I am Hirsch.”

Unbidden, the other three gathered around the striped pole. “He’s the great commissioner,” divulged the bearded man in a stage whisper. “Adrian Carr. Bombings are his speciality.”

“Excuse me, gentlemen. I’ll speak to all of you in turn. Now, Mr. Hirsch – oh for heaven’s sake put that money away. We’re not for sale in the Special Branch.”

“How should I know.” The obvious Israelite raised his eyebrows, let them fall, turned away from his cash register with a sigh, and regarded Carr – who’d assumed the chair out of habit – from the safety of the mirrored counter. The bald spot at the back of his head shone scrubbed and pink. “You want to know from Donkin, I’ll tell you. That man won’t be missed. A terrible mouth he had on him.”

“Is that so. Was he disliked?”

“Like a cholera he was. Pfui! How many times he called me dirty Jew, I couldn’t count. Never mind.” His shoulders rounded with the weight of his distinctive heritage, as if he carried centuries, millenia, of pointless hatred on his back, he who would rather be called Maurice toyed with a shaving brush, its handle ivory, its bristles retaining some traces of foam. Fitful sunlight patterned the floor, tiled black and white like a chess board. “Late he opened. Early he closed. How did he stay in business? No one knew. My son-in-law from him a lowboy bought, it looked nice, like a mahogany. When he got it home my daughter opened it up, and there was mice inside. Not one or two. A lot.”

“I see. Did he have his sticks delivered?”

“You mean his inventory? In the middle of the night, it must have been. We never saw.” Hirsch looked toward the ornate coal stove that occupied the middle of his shop. “*Der* Schomburg, he says stolen goods. He talks too much, that man. You’ll see.”

“I’m sure I will. On the morning of the bombing – I know you’ve talked to Inspector Heat, but we have to ask you again – you saw the motorcar come up the street?”

“Oh sure. Oh sure I did. Like a clock, every Friday. I thought, *nu*, who’s the swell? Then I saw the young lady. Then I understood.”

“Understood what, Mr. Hirsch?”

“What a young man does for love.” Massaging his temple with the fingers of one hand, Hirsch elevated his eyebrows again, and kept them there. “She, she’s a beauty. The poor shnook. I mean, chap. On Davy Street they looked like refugees from better parts. What were they doing here, Commissioner, do you know? A socialist she is, I understand. Him, though – I know this like I know my trade – that no-good was no party member. He liked money, Reggie Donkin.”

“He crook.” A slim and scornful-looking young Chinese man had pushed his way in.
“My name John Wang. I sell next door.”

“Tell him, Johnny. Tell him what Donkin used to do.”

“He come in my shop, he want most expensive smokes. I tell him price. He try to grab away under my nose.” Wang lit a cigarette, not the most expensive if Carr was a judge. “I say, you no steal from me. He call me nasty name, like Chinaman. Talk pidgin. Even that he don’t speak good.”

“Terrible person.” Hirsch shook his head. “Rude. Manners he didn’t have.”

“I see them, the lady, the gentleman. They fight.”

“With Donkin?”

“Don’t know. No see. They fight themselves.” Wang coughed, bending double, then straightened up like a snake peering over a fence. “She angry. She boss him, not usual way.”

“Indeed. So you felt she was – not acting as a lady should, perhaps?”

“You right.” Wang stubbed his cigarette out on the stove. “She rude too.”

“Did you ever see anyone else go in the store? Besides customers. Anyone else who – as you say, Mr. Hirsch – looked out of place in the neighborhood?”

Hirsch whistled, one low wheezy note, and busied himself with the stove, snatching a towel to wipe off the black mark Wang had left.

“Mr. Wang?”

“Not my business.”

These were honest men, Carr thought, taking his leave. At any rate they were not skilled at dissembling.

On the street, he approached the tavern keeper. “Mr. MacWhirr?”

“Captain. Retired.”

“Making sure the shore crowd won’t go thirsty? May we go inside?”

Schomburg, the hirsute news agent, was nudging too close. His breath furred Carr’s neck. MacWhirr shot him a baleful glance as he ushered Carr through the door, before slamming it shut.

Pitchy interior, like most pubs. The Crow’s Nest’s ceiling was coated with decades of smoke. Its floors were slippery, just cleaned, the smell of ammonia strong in the air.

“We’re closed now,” said the proprietor.

“Yes, I can see that.” Carr noted the various doors, the bar for the general public, the snugs and the private rooms. “Business good?”

“Good enough.” MacWhirr, who had hung on to his broom, addressed the floor. He swept from side to side, although there was no dust to sweep. “Try to keep the place clean.”

“And it is very clean, Captain. I see you take a great pride in your work.”

He was middle-sized, middle-aged, possessed of no outstanding features, hesitant in his speech as if each word cost a great sum. “Hope so.”

“Did you know Reg Donkin?”

“Passed time of day. Sometimes.”

“And what was your opinion of him?”

“He wasn’t liked. D’you have to ask so many questions?”

Carr had asked exactly two. Reticence by itself was not a bad characteristic, but in witnesses it had no use. “It’s a condition of my employment. What about Donkin?”

MacWhirr swept, reached for a dustpan, filled it and emptied it into a bucket before deigning to reply. “Rotter,” he said.

“Did you see the young people? Before the explosion?”

“Can’t say I didn’t.”

“How did they seem to you? Happy? Anxious? Quiet? Angry?”

The former master mariner looked at the broom in his hand, as if not sure what to do with it. With measured steps he went to the bar and left the broom leaning there, a casual domestic note amid the general darkness. There was something dogged and joyless here, a reflection of the owner’s personality. “They were young. Posh. Didn’t belong here.”

“Yes, I’ve heard that.”

“Her voice was loud.”

Carr waited. The man had as much life as an automaton. Had something happened at sea, he wondered, or was the poor cove born this way? He felt pity for his erstwhile crew.

“Kept talking about Gillis. Or McGillis.”

“Gillis? Or McGillis? Do you know who that was?”

“No.” As if he’d understood the purpose of this conversation for the first time, MacWhirr shook an index in Carr’s face. “I’m not one for telling tales. Keep to my own way and let others keep to theirs. Never heard of any Gillis. Or McGillis. You planning on wasting the rest of my day?”

“Ah – Captain MacWhirr, I’m with the police. A man was murdered – by a bomb – two doors from here. I should think you’d have something to say about that.”

“Not me.”

“Very well. So they talked about McGillis? What did they say?”

“Don’t know.” He poured a waxy liquid on the bar, which already shone, and began to polish it, pushing a rag with circular motions. “Talk to Schomburg. He likes talking.” MacWhirr

grimaced, exposing tawny teeth. “He’s the one for talking. What do these people find to talk about? I say nothing, and I think less.”

“Indeed.”

“Stay blank as possible,” advised MacWhirr. “That’s what I do.”

On exiting the tavern, which to Carr felt like a return from Erebus, he found Schomburg agog, vibrating or so it seemed, on the pavement.

“So! You get anything from him? I knew you wouldn’t. That Scotsman’s like a clam. God only knows how he got to be captain. Let me tell you, Commissioner – just Mr. Carr? Very well, Mr. Carr – never trust a Scotsman. They will cheat you every time! And look who else we have here – a Jew and a Chinaman! Many times to my wife I say, Therese, I say, we lived among savages in the East, we come here and find what? More savages! It’s difficult – difficult – to tell, I meant sell, the news in this city. So many papers, magazines, journals – who has time to read them all? But I do. At least I try. One must keep up. It’s important in this world. In this new century. What do you want to know about Donkin? I know everything.”

In the end, as it happened, Adrian Carr determined Schomburg knew very little about Donkin, although he had observed Toodles and Jan very thoroughly. Toodles he denounced as “unmanly” – Schomburg was proud of his beard and affected a soldierish posture and stance – but Jan, as Carr expected, drew copious praise, almost to the point of raving. “Such a beauty! And wasted, wasted, on that fatheaded government lackey – just because he has a motor!”

“I don’t think that’s why –”

“Don’t tell me. Oh, I see through their little charade. If she could once in her life meet a *real* man – not a, a, a haberdasher’s dummy – I could show her a thing or two! And she’d enjoy it, let me tell you.”

“You did mention your wife.” Carr, sitting on the one unoccupied square foot of space in that knocked-together, drafty hut – it was on a bench, next to two bundles of magazines tied with string – pondered as he so often did the incalculable depth of human folly. The man before him, on the nether side of fifty if he had to guess, possessed a sagging belly the best posture could not hide. A growth like a raisin with hair graced the newsmonger’s right ear. “Is she living?”

“What? Oh, Therese. Yes, I leave her at home these days. Too ugly for my stand, I told her. And she listened too! So ugly she’d scare off the custom. She comes in only when I must be out.” Schomburg, whose expanse of chest apparently contained an exceptional pair of lungs, paused, not to breathe, but to slice off a piece of an unwholesome-looking sausage and pop it into his moving mouth. “I am no monster.”

“Then she was not here when the bomb went off.”

“Therese? Let me think. She was probably home – does her marketing on Wednesday, this was Friday – where else should she be? She’s of no use to me here.” Schomburg’s laugh was a harsh bark. “But allow me to repeat. Donkin was liked by no one. And I know he had insurance on that shop. We all do, Mahaffy & Sons made arrangements for the entire block. I also know he had no next of kin. Who would claim him for a relative?” The Prussian’s voice took on an insinuating, intimacy-seeking tone. “Tell me, Mr. Carr, in a case like that, when there are no heirs, if the insurance pays – who gets the payment?”

Carr shook his head, not in doubt but to clear it of a sudden sharp distaste. “Ah, our evidence-gathering team reports there was nothing of value. He had a kettle and a stove. He had an old bed in the back. The furniture he sold – it was used, you know.”

“We are poor people down here, Mr. Carr. Once, in Bangkok – oh yes. But never mind.”

Schomburg’s sigh betrayed a story. Carr did not want to hear it. “At any rate it all went

up in flames, in the bombing. My Evidence chief believes it wasn't costly to begin with. So you see, Mr. Schomburg, your question might be moot."

"Did you find a safe?" Schomburg not surprisingly spoke with a sizzling *s*. The flames seemed to have spread to his face.

"We did not."

"A-ha! That doesn't mean it wasn't there. Your lot miss things all the time. I know. I read the papers. I have all day to read papers."

"Have you ever heard of anyone named Gillis? Or McGillis? From Donkin, from the two young people, from – someplace else perhaps?"

The lower lip bulged, the bristling head moved from side to side. "I know no one by that name. Why? Who is that? Should I have?"

"Thank you, Mr. Schomburg."

"I thank you for your custom. And would you care, perhaps, for some light reading? Or perhaps not so light? I have the latest *Blackwoods*, yes, here at my stand in Whitechapel. All sorts come down here sooner or later. I tell you, I have seen it all. *Blackwoods* it is, then? So. Your change, Mr. Carr. And come again."

When Carr at some length returned to 4 Whitehall and sank into his welcoming chair, the whole world was at lunch and he embraced his solitude. Rolling his chair to face the window (the thick curtains were drawn), he yanked a wastepaper basket out of its dim obscurity beneath the desk and rested his ankles on it. The four small shopkeepers, hoods over heads, mounted a scaffold whose crossbeam was missing. *They can't hang anyone that way*. He approached the raw structure, attempted to shout, identify himself, stop these proceedings because, you see, they

can't proceed – but no one heard. It was a tragedy. He screamed, he shrieked, he made no sound – and then his dream-self realized, *we cannot hang these men. What if they're innocent?*

He awoke. The shopkeepers lived. He'd slept a quarter of an hour. The clock read nearly one o'clock. Voices filled the hallways, echoed from the stairs. The lift resumed its squeaking, chunking rise and fall.

Carr stood, adjusted his tie which had slumped to one side, indulged in a series of stretches from his competitive swimming days (he had never been first, but he never came in worse than fourth), and recalled his shockingly progressive school with a smudge of affection. Bedrooms were clean and well-lit, holding no more than four boys at a time. Bullying, hazing, the calling of names, disparagement of one's parents or background or faith, led to expulsion at the second offense. Of course the usual sins and vulgarities went on as they always have, but at far muted levels and with much less frequency. Adrian Carr knew he was fortunate. His friends at Trinity, having survived five or six years of traditional torture themselves, had been aghast, and somewhat envious. The school had been Carr's grandfather's idea.

He sat down again, to scribble some notes on his morning's interviews. Shoving these under his blotter, with his slim build and heavy step he set off for the interview room. He took the stairs, two flights down, two at a time.

iii

Montague Brierly, a dreadful bore, sat basking in his glory in the windowless room. His squarish face was tanned, his light brown hair was thick and wavy, his dark brown eyes deep-set on either side of a patrician nose. Dressed in quiet but expensive clothes, he fiddled with an eyedropper pen, removing and replacing its black cap. For some years he'd been a captain of the

Blue Star line, setting records for speed and safety. Beside him, Jan in a high-necked dress sat like a bored schoolgirl, her hands clasped in her lap.

“Carr.”

“Brierly.” No first-name salutations here. “You’re representing both defendants?”

“Their families have retained me.” He placed the pen before him on the table, forming a horizontal axis, adjusting it until it was perfectly straight. “I must say, Carr, I never pictured you in the police.”

“Oh? Yet you left off seafaring, exchanged it for the law. Why?”

In western America, Carr had read, there lived a toadlike lizard capable of squirting poison from its eyes. Brierly was far too large and ruddy for a lizard, but he had something of the squatting amphibian to him. Certainly those eyes were murderous. “Hardly your concern, Carr, I should think.”

He made one feel slapped, dishonored, by the sheer weight of indifference attaching to his presence and his words. As a youth Carr had itched to assault him, given any pretext or none at all. “Your clients have familiarized you with the facts of this case, I assume. I’ve interviewed the witnesses. They all confirm seeing Miss Harbison and – Mr. Branch-Fulkes, leaving the premises of the deceased just before the fatal explosion.”

Batrachian Brierly flicked his tongue over his lips. “These – ordinary – citizens, you know, Carr, they all too easily can make mistakes. And denizens of Whitechapel – well, they’re not known for kindness toward – our sort.”

Our sort be hanged. “Ah, Toodles – we have had to impound your vehicle. My Evidence team reviewed it this morning. They discovered a strong aroma of – bananas.”

“I told you. We’d been at the fruiterer’s.”

“Nitroglycerin, the substance employed in the Donkin bomb, carries that fruit’s distinctive scent.” He allowed that information, a lead weight of sorts, to sink in. “I’m told as well mud was found on your tyres – rather thick mud, studded with rocks, implying you’d driven recently over a rough road – and a quantity of sand and dirt within. Also, bits of plant materials suggesting leaves torn from trees.” Carr referred to his notes. “Willows, apparently. Have you been in the country recently?”

“What? I? No. *No*. Of course not.”

“You don’t have to answer every question, you know.” Brierly stifled a yawn. “If you don’t know, you may say you don’t know.”

“But I do know. I haven’t left London in weeks. Sir Ethelred does not believe in weekends.” Toodles, resentment corroding his wholesome features, looked up at Carr. “Nor do you, apparently. It is Saturday, you know.”

There was a noise at his back, a door opening and closing, familiar footsteps coming in. Carr greeted the newcomer. “Inspector Heat, I’m glad you’re here. My apologies for disturbing your Saturday.”

“It’s duty, sir.” Heat made a great show of pulling out a chair and depositing himself in it. “Goes with the job then, doesn’t it.” He regarded Brierly with a glance that matched the lawyer’s for contempt.

Carr for a moment entertained an image of two burly pugilists in the ring. He’d bet on Heat. He suspected Brierly of having a glass jaw. “Very true, Inspector. I’d like you to seat Miss Harbison back in the waiting room, if you could. You’ll make sure of course she does not leave, or – disturb – anyone.”

“Naturally, sir. Come, Miss.”

“He can’t do this, can he?” She appealed to her solicitor. “I mean, can he? Order me about like that?”

Brierly managed a half-smile. It did not flatter him. “Miss Harbison, when your father sent for me he advised me that you might not fully comprehend police procedures. Commissioner Carr is within his rights. You will cooperate with him.”

“Absurd.” She rose, unconscious grace mitigating her false outrage. “But I will go quietly, isn’t that what you prefer? And I don’t require a minder, thank you very much.”

“That’s how we do things here. This way, Miss.”

When they had gone, Brierly gave a small sigh. “I took this on as a favor to Sir Alec. If she were my daughter, I’d – well, what’s the use. As your man just said, it’s duty.”

Toodles sat up as if electrified. “I’ll thank you to be civil, Brierly. Janet is innocent, as am I.”

“I don’t recall suggesting otherwise.”

Carr gazed at the discomfited duo with a twinge like satisfaction. Brierly’s notable lack of enthusiasm could not be other than helpful to him. “Let’s continue. So you deny having driven in the country, lately.”

“Absolutely.”

“May I assume no one else has been operating the Vauxhall? You don’t employ a driver, then?”

“Absolutely not.” The young man did his best to look offended. “I not only drive the motorcar, I’m not above working on it if I have to. The pleasure’s in maneuvering the thing, getting from here to there in less time and advancing the future. Fifteen years from now horses will be rarities on London streets.”

“A revolting prospect,” Brierly muttered. “I’ll take a nice sensible gelding every time. Do try to keep still, Mr. Branch-Fulkes.”

“Everybody calls me Toodles.”

“But I shan’t. The law demands a certain dignity. You’d be wise to consider that, should this matter go to trial.”

“I say, are you representing me or are you with – him?” Toodles, his knee in constant motion, flipped a palm at Carr. “His wife’s my first cousin, by the way. Pater assumed the hyphen when he married into the Fulkses. They wouldn’t have had him otherwise, being that George is the younger son.”

“I’m not following you.”

“Let me explain, Mr. Brierly. Toodles’ father, George Branch, did not inherit per the laws of primogeniture. His brother, Geoffrey, is the baronet.”

“And Annie’s father,” interjected helpful Toodles.

“And my wife’s father. But Lady Gwendolyn is your great-aunt, Toodles, is she not?”

“By marriage. Her last husband, you’ll recall, Adrian, was the artist Alvan Hervey. Rather an eccentric. Left his first wife on a whim – or perhaps there was a scandal, I don’t know – took himself off to Italy and learned to paint. Styled himself Albano Ervietto. Did quite well daubing portraits, of the best expats of course. Well, you see, Hervey’s half-sister was a Fulkes. My mother’s mother.” Confident of his subject, Toodles’ color abated and his ragged breathing slowed. The knee still bounced, but not as high and at a slower pace. “It’s a very ancient family. Not as old as Sir Ethelred’s, but dating back to the Conquest.”

“You’re wandering. Baffled. At the mercy of light airs.”

“Beg your pardon?”

Brierly took up his pen, glanced at it as if it puzzled him, and replaced it in his pocket. “Getting away from the subject at hand. Look, Mr. Carr, Mr. – this young man here – denies being in the country. Have you any further questions or should we proceed to Miss Harbison now?”

Slouching in his chair –elbow on the armrest, dark cheek resting on a turned-up palm – Carr as he often did made a great show of sleepiness. After some time he asked, “Ever hear of someone Gillis? Or McGillis. Do you know someone by that name?”

Had he thrown a sinking Toodles a life ring, Sir Ethelred’s private secretary (unpaid) could not have looked more like a man plucked to safety at the point of certain death. “Why, yes. Yes. Yes, I do. Wharton Gillis. Old Harrovian. My year. I say, what’s Warty Gillis to do with all this?”

“Wharton Gillis. Does he reside here, in London?”

“Erm – no – he does not. He lives in Yorkshire. In the country.”

“In the country?”

“And I haven’t seen him in five years. Good heavens, Adrian.”

“Hm?”

“They say you’re a brilliant policeman. But this line of inquiry makes no sense.”

“Mr. Brierly, I’d appreciate it if – your client – refrained from passing judgment on the way I do my job.”

“He’s right, Branch-Fulkes. Let me perform that task. What’s Mr. Gillis’ connection here?”

“There may be none. At what time did you leave home, yesterday?”

“I couldn’t tell you. Before eight at any rate.”

“And did you proceed to pick up Miss Harbison?”

“No. No, Jan comes to me. At Lady Gwendolyn’s. My parents live on the Continent, you know. It’s cheap and far more jolly than people say.”

“And other than the stop at Tower Hamlets, did you go anywhere else before Whitechapel?”

“I – I – I certainly don’t think so. No. We did not.”

Like the shopkeepers of Whitechapel, Toodles was a poor prevaricator. Carr swept his papers into a heap. “That will be all for now, then. Shall we bring in Miss Harbison? Toodles, you may not leave town. We’ll put a man on you, make sure you don’t attempt to flee.”

“What? Am I under arrest? I say, that’s impugning my integrity.”

“Standard procedure. Ah, Brierly – ”

The brawny solicitor held out his hand. “Good seeing you again, Carr. I’m sorry about your grandfather’s death, that was a heinous crime to be sure. Do you remember how we played at war, in the barn? I was the Duke of Wellington.”

“And I, Napoleon. Now that you mention it, I do remember. You attempted to cut off my head with a wooden sword.”

Brierly chortled. “So I did. What fun we had!”

Carr did not smile. He had not liked being the enemy.

PART II

Chapter 3

i

Money and fame turn weak heads: that's a given. What happened to Peter Michaelis, after the publication of his memoir and his installation as Lady Gwendolyn's pet, was a rotation of cyclonic proportions. When the man speaking impeccable English approached him on a country lane, in Kent, he fell at once under the spell of the other's flawless logic and impressive pragmatism. Enthusiastic amateurs are sometimes the best salesmen.

"Of course you have money now, and you deserve it," said the man of middling height. His whiskers glistened in the mist. "But what will you do with it? Foment further revolutions? For fifteen years you suffered for a crime which, after all, was not a crime. It was an accident. Your shot went wide. Now what? Verloc – the swine – is dead. Ossipon drowned himself in the Thames. Karl Yundt is senile. Peter Ivanovich, not a part of your original circle but a kindred spirit to be sure, was murdered by a vile reactionary. His Egeria is dead. Sophia Antonovna is in prison."

"All this is common knowledge," said Michaelis, in his mildest voice.

"They've locked up the Professor for life. He's lucky he escaped the noose. I befriended him, you know." From the pocket of what was once a fine broadcloth coat he drew out a packet of letters, secured by a red string. "You're welcome to these. I visited him, several times. His health is poor but his brain is as clever as ever." An unnatural smile spread across the round face, lifted the neat, dimpled chin. "I am his disciple. I have always had a scientific streak, you know. It's the Grand Panjandrum of our time. He taught me everything there is to know about his trade."

Michaelis looked at the dirt. He kicked pebbles, never scattering them very far. “Go on. Mr. – ?”

“Trevelyan. Walter Trevelyan. I’m a Cornishman now. No matter. Wouldn’t you like to see what can be done – to the institutions that, I gather from your book, you still despise?” He had marvelous, even, white teeth, a source of resentment to Michaelis since his own were no good. “When I last lived in London, before the Verloc *contretemps*, I spent many evenings amusing the guests at Lady Gwendolyn’s. At the Explorers’ Club as well, I was quite welcome. Parasites, are they not? Parasites all! Tell me, Mr. Michaelis – confess! Why not? – aren’t there times when these capitalists make you ill? So much private property, a specious concept to begin with as you point out in your book – clutched at by so very few! Consider. What if the whole edifice, blue screen and all, were blown to smithereens one Thursday night?”

“You’re talking about Lady Gwendolyn’s house.”

“With her in it. And all the rest of that fatuous crowd. You’d still have your money, of course.”

“I would.” Michaelis scuffed the ground some more, and added, “She has told me I’m in her will.”

“You see! In the face of such a tragedy, the world would weep. You’d be smothered in sympathy. Better yet, once again you’d become a sensation – Peter Ivanovich did take some wind out of your sails, didn’t he. You, a man of peace and talk, not violence! Yes, you, deprived in one fell swoop of your favor, your position in society – oh, the *poor chap*, they would say. The *poor chap*! You’d be bathing in the fat.”

“Excuse me?”

Trevelyan's look of a demented Cheshire cat fell blank and flat for just a moment. Then he brightened. "Never mind. An obscure idiom of my childhood. And – did you think? I hope not! – not a comment on your appearance. That's all one to me. What I meant to say was, with her gone, and her connections including that odious policeman lying in pieces in the morgue, you would be gifted with powers and prominence, free forever of the taint of aristocracy."

"Mm. Perhaps. I do get ruddy sick of her sometimes, I'll tell you that. But then what?"

"Then, we have an empire, you and I. The common run of criminals would give it up, they'd stand no chance. We would be –" Trevelyan in seeming triumph held up his left hand, thumb and forefinger bunching together, and pronounced his next words with great care.

"*Criminal masterminds*. I believe that is the term?" Smelling of soap and pomade and fruit, the fast-talking tempter brought his sleek face close to Michaelis' puffy and poorly shaved cheeks.

"You are unapproachable. Gentle Michaelis. Kindly Michaelis. Why, after this even Adrian Carr, if he lives, won't be able to touch you. You're drawn to my argument, are you not? You do see it?"

"Carr dislikes me." Michaelis, refusing a cigarette, produced an apple from his pocket and began to munch it, taking the smallest of possible bites. "Ouch. Rotten teeth. Lady Gwendolyn's dentist offered to fix me up, free of charge. I could arrange to be away – in surgery perhaps – whenever you decide to, ah, practice your trade."

Michaelis had recognized him, straight off. He'd considered Trevelyan in his prior incarnation a braggart, a fool, a loathsome toady of an autocracy he, Michaelis, was bound by duty to destroy, by any means and so on. From witty and popular diplomat to a maker of bombs? Why was he not killed, in his home country? Michaelis, famous for his patience, held his

questions. The letters in his hand bore the Professor's distinctive backwards scrawl. "Are you stopping in Kent?"

"Yes. I've an oast house. Hops season ended two months ago. It's an excellent laboratory. Outbuildings, workshops. Kilns, no less."

"I'll come see you. Alone. What's the address?"

"Frittenden Road. You'll know it." Trevelyan, leaning on a post, turned away, addressing his last words to the expanse of fields to the east, where the mist was beginning to shred. "It's the only one with electricity."

A locomotive hooted in the downlands near the river. Michaelis put a thoughtful finger to his lip.

ii

There was a subaqueous feel to Sir Ethelred's office. Green curtains, green glasses, dim light: as if that man as solid as Gibraltar sat in a room made of liquid. Carr, still shocked by the crowds outside, planted his feet wide apart on the rug. He felt a need to stay anchored. "Sir Ethelred. There are people out there. Demonstrating."

"I couldn't give a rat's last turd. This office is a shambles."

"Yes sir, I understand your routine has been disturbed with Toodles gone. However – "

"However be damned. Look at my desk. Have you ever seen such disarray?" The Home Secretary, radiating fury, gestured with his enormous hands, tokens of his farming ancestors. A half-eaten pear sat atop unopened envelopes. Red boxes formed a teetering pile. The blotter was shredded, broken nibs rolled here and there, and both inkwells were empty. "Without Toodles, I'm trapped in the whirlwind. Administration of an office such as this one is an exercise in detail. I cannot consider details. There isn't time."

“The crowd is mostly women, I think. Suffragettes. They’re outraged because – ”

“Because they were born without prick and balls! Blast their outrage! This won’t do, Adrian, this won’t do at all. Pray inform me what exactly I must do to have Toodles restored to me.”

He was an anchor, yet anchors are sometimes dragged. Carr resisted. “The witnesses placed Jan and Toodles at the scene. The condition of his motorcar raised questions, and his answers were not always – coherent. He himself admitted being at the scene, just prior to the explosion.”

“Tosh. It’s all that beastly girl’s fault, isn’t it?”

“Miss Harbison? He is rather attached.”

“Unduly attached, you mean. Sir Alec needs to put her on the fishing fleet, for India. She’d get a husband soon enough, the men are languishing there by the dozens.” Sir Ethelred with considerable force hurled the pear into his brimming wastebasket. Handfuls of paper drifted to the floor. “Look at this. I can’t be bothered. What about her testimony? You did question her as well, did you not?”

“Of course, Sir Ethelred. Miss Harbison was – evasive. She refused to answer a number of questions, despite the urgings of her solicitor. I had no choice, in the end.”

“You had no choice but to do what?”

Carr dug his feet into the sand, in this case the thick pile rug. “Hold – both of them – for further questioning. In custody. That is why there are, ah, demonstrations outside. We’ve only had them a few hours but their followers have managed to come up with the signs. And of course the press, sir.”

“The press? Throw out those bounders!”

“Can’t do that in our era, I’m afraid. Sir Ethelred, had I released those two – suspects – they might have been in France by nightfall. I don’t doubt Toodles’ loyalty, but Miss Harbison declares herself above the law.”

“She does, does she? The minx!”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred. I’ve sent Inspector Heat to help restrain the demonstrators. He’s much experienced in these things.”

“Women screaming in the streets. And when they get the vote, what then? How is your infant daughter, by the way?”

Before Carr could reply, there came the crash of shattering glass, and something heavy dropped to the floor behind the viridescent curtains. Then he was on his feet, yanking them open. Shocking amounts of smoke-colored sky showed through the hole in the window, and the light turned to gray all the green in the room. Sir Ethelred sat open-mouthed, his chins sagging, as if fixed by a spell at the moment of impact.

Carr drew on his gloves. On the floor, surrounded by attendant shards and splinters, a concrete tile resembling vaguely the map of Australia lay as if relieved after an effort. “I’d like to know where they hurled this from. It’s two floors up from the street. Come, Sir Ethelred, let’s take you to safety.”

“I am perfectly safe. They’re not likely to lob another one, are they? Unhand me, please.”

People were flooding into the room, fussing over Sir Ethelred. Carr, stepping aside, glanced through the new-made opening. When the Fenians bombed Scotland Yard (along with the basement of the Carleton Club and the home of a Tory MP), Carr was twenty, mourning his grandfather, bored with study and becoming fascinated with police work. Even then he dreamed of covert tactics, of deceptions and disguises, an invisible man of sorts slipping through darkness

foiling mad plots and protecting the mighty. Now he was staring through a hole made in a window in the very seat of government, under his nose in fact since he'd been sitting just a few feet from that window. Two floors below on the Horse Guards Parade, a ragged band of demonstrators, mostly women judging by their hats, wavered back and forth before a solid line of uniforms. Cheers, hoots, the occasional bellow or screech, floated up to him, the sound of an empire cracking. He stepped over to Sir Ethelred, standing now but still protesting his removal.

“Excuse me. *Excuse me*. Scotland Yard. I must ask you to leave – all of you. Hang on, Maddox.” He took aside one young chap, a Toodles in training, and, murmuring into his ear, passed the lad a slip of paper. “We’ve arrangements for this sort of thing. Ah, Inspector Heat. Timely entrance.”

The crowd fell away for Heat. They knew him from the newspapers. Carr and Heat supported the Home Secretary – “yes, of course, Sir Ethelred, we know you can walk, but you’ve had a sizable shock, haven’t you” – and avoided each other’s eyes. Heat’s hat was askew, his collar partially detached. His heavy breathing disclosed the fact that he’d come running from the scene outside, and climbed three flights of stairs.

“This way,” said Carr. He ripped up a CLOSED sign, undid a chain, and took them down a hall in limbo, a corridor slated for modernization not yet begun. It was dim in there, and chilly. The lumbering trio passed door after door, names of their former occupants inscribed in gilt upon the glass. How fleeting life, position, fame, the marble edifice of self. Carr closed his mind to irrelevant musings and sought a particular stairway, one opening from the far side of a broom closet. “Through here. I have a floorplan, it’s part of my work, I’ve studied it in odd hours of – ” He almost said *boredom*, but shut his mouth in time. “Heat, have you your torch? Ah, that’s better. There, Sir Ethelred, you can see to walk down the steps now. Don’t rush. Use the railing,

please.” He bolted past the solemn dignitary and stony-faced Heat to reach a door, a cobwebbed door with rusted hinges and a scuffed, scratched lock. He had imagined this scene, many times, in his many idle moments, but enacting the play in real life – Sir Ethelred might have been killed.

Sir Ethelred might have been killed. Sir Ethelred might have been killed.

What had they called him? The Quiet Cove. Hatchet Face. Carr of the Native Bazaar. In those days he was the coolest head in U__ Province, because he was not bothered by the heat and because he could not be appealed to on the basis of emotion. All that seemed so distant now, child’s play, something he might have dreamed up with Brierly. Now he had weightier problems, in every sense. There is only one Home Secretary.

Carr produced a key. “I have a set. Protocol. There.” The door opened on a dogleg alley, barely the width of the smallest brougham, and at that moment just such a contrivance came clattering up, shining black trimmed with gilt and boasting a Home Office insignia. A black horse of impressive size and strength neighed in its traces. “I sent for your livery. Good man, that fellow Maddox. Get in, sir, please. They’ll take you home. Not by your usual route, I’m afraid, this may take a little longer.”

After Sir Ethelred, still objecting, was packed away, Carr turned to Heat. “Your arrival was quite prompt. You were out there, I take it? I say, Inspector, are you unwell?”

The Inspector’s usual brick-colored face had gone chalk. Heat sagged, clutched his back, emitted a sonorous groan, and clutched a lamppost. “Silly thing. Bi – young lady kicked me. Heavily booted, to be sure. Got me in the small of the back.”

Ten minutes later, Carr was assisting Heat up the short flight of steps to his house. “You’ll come in. Annie’s doctor is here, I know his barouche, brought it over all the way from

South America. Gaudy thing, isn't it? No, no, you're not imposing, it's for the good of the department, after all. You need to be seen to."

Heat moved at half-speed, stood off-kilter, and walked as if his right leg had been turned to wood. "Small of the back," he said through clenched teeth. "Silly thing. Nothing at all."

Dr. Monygham, curious crabbed smile in place, brushed off Heat's objections. "Yes, I am a woman's doctor, mostly, but I'm not such a fool not to know a back sprain when I see one." He wrote in a minute hand on a prescription pad. "This is for pain. Take it only when you need it, it's been known to be addictive. I prescribe light duty for four to six weeks."

Heat and Carr exclaimed, not in unison but in unconscious echo of each other, "Four to six *weeks*?"

"I say, I'm all for erring on the side of caution but Dr. Monygham, I need this man. Inspector Heat bears great responsibilities."

"I'm no invalid, doctor. Got a wife and four kids to support. Oh, they won't suffer, not right away, but if I'm forced to stay home – for six days, never mind six weeks – we'll all be miserable. Can't you do anything?"

The meager physician, standing with bag in one hand and hat in the other, looked down on the two pleading faces. He gave the appearance of savoring the moment. "My responsibility is to your health, Inspector. Disobey me, and you might have to – well, never mind."

"What? Go about in a bath chair? On crutches? What?"

"Retire prematurely. On a pension."

Annie was not in the room, and Heat, after checking to make sure this was so, swore a blackguard oath, sending Mongyham's eyebrows skyward and even evoking a startle from Carr.

"You're Irish, doctor, ain't you? Aren't you."

"Yes. Why?"

"My wife is Irish. Mary Margaret O'Rourke Heat. You know, then, I take it, what misery a native of your country can inflict upon a man. Upon a husband, I should say."

Monygham turned toward the door. "Not my affair."

"I'll be smothered in meat pies. Doused with soup. Fed that indigestible soda bread five times a day." Heat, who was not being humorous despite the effect his words had on Carr, tried to stand but could not. "Oughh! Assault on an officer. Completely unprovoked. Two bootsoles, hard, right at the base of my spine. Crippled for life."

"You are nothing of the sort. It might be only four weeks, isn't that right, doctor? You'll have yourself a decent rest, and mend, and we'll go on as we always do."

When Heat and the doctor were gone, Annie emerged from her dressing room. Carr heard Melba cooing at the nurse. "Well," he said. "There are thou happy. Heat annoys you. Now you'll have yourself a holiday from him."

"This is your fault, Adrian." Annie, in a violet dressing gown, came into the parlor sideways, both hands tightening her belt. "You arrested Jan and Toodles. Don't you know how important she is, to the movement? Did you not stop to think what might happen?"

"What might happen? You mean, some young fool or another tossing a tile at the Home Secretary? How did he *get* that close, I wonder."

“Ugh! You’re always looking into corners and not seeing the whole room. There is a movement, Adrian. A movement, of women, in London and around the world. You can’t turn your back on it forever.”

“Law – is law – is law – is law.” His jaw hurt. He had been grinding his teeth. “Without it, we’re animals. You’ve read Darwin – well, at least you know more or less what he said. We need society, and in society we have to have the law. Annie, remember the stories I told you, all the reckless adventures I had in U__ Province? You do remember, don’t you?”

“I married a policeman. Yes, I know it. No need to keep harping on the sad fact.”

“You told me you – loved my stories.”

“Changing the subject, that’s one of your cardinal points, isn’t it, Adrian. When you arrested Jan – and Toodles, but they’re not demonstrating on his account – you were igniting a fire that one day will torch Whitehall.”

“Where did you read that? Michaelis? Or Peter Ivanovitch?”

“It’s my own impression. From all of those things. Jan Harbison is a natural leader. Women are drawn to her. Next to Emmeline, she’s the best we’ve got today.”

“We?”

“If there’s one thing you know about me, Adrian Carr, it is that I am a woman.”

He conceded that, with pleasure. The rest of the business, less so.

“Hunger strike?”

“Apparently Miss Harbison’s plan is to refuse all food and water until she is released and all charges dropped.”

“She can’t do that! Why, she could die!”

Carr regarded Toodles – frowsy, frantic, unaccustomed bags beneath his eyes – with professional aplomb. He could not disavow a sneaking sympathy for the overgrown child, who had walked with a full heart and no concept of the consequences into a pool of sewage. Next to him Brierly sat like a lump, an ombre portrait of disdain. “We haven’t had a case of this in England to this point. Opinions are divided on how best to proceed. According to the doctors there is such a thing as force-feeding, but it’s in the experimental stage so far.”

“Good God. Jan. May I not speak to her?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“What did she say about me?”

This was the question Carr had feared. Mentally he’d batted about a few answers, but all of them were flawed: euphemisms, sugar-coating, evasive, less than honest. He was honest, in the end. “She didn’t mention you.”

“What? Not at all?”

“I’m afraid not.”

“But – Brierly, you were there. Is he speaking the truth?”

The lawyer, jolted from his solipsism, tapped his fingers on the closed folder before him. “I informed Miss Harbison she was acting against advice of counsel. She did not, ah, acknowledge my presence by her side.”

Toodles bent his head and wept. Carr motioned to Brierly, *leave him alone*, but the ex-captain folded his arms and blew out air with an exasperated “Hem! This won’t do, Branch-Fulkes. Show some manliness. You’re not the first to be let down by some chit of a girl. I suggest you ponder your own situation, and concentrate on doing yourself some good.”

“How could she,” moaned Toodles. “How *could* she. I told her every day I was risking my position. I was ready to lie, cheat, and steal, for her cause. I was – ”

“Lying, Toodles? Cheating? Stealing? If you could furnish me with the particulars – ”

“Rhetorical statements, Carr, I don’t doubt my client has not stepped even an inch outside the law.”

Toodles surfaced. He drew a handkerchief – Carr’s, as it happened – across his face, then dropped it on the table. The disarming smiles, the irreverent chuckles, always seeming just barely in check, had vanished from his features like ripples in the sand. “I am proud to say that in the service of Sir Ethelred, and earlier, I have never knowingly uttered an untruth.”

“Yes,” said Carr, “not to Sir Ethelred, perhaps.” Brierly, his lazy bulk, his insistent tapping, his unchanging look of scorn, was beginning to annoy him. “Your client, Mr. Brierly, has to this point not suffered from an excess of personal insight. Things are becoming more clear to you now, aren’t they, Toodles? You may adore Miss Harbison, that’s as may be, but there’s no denying her feelings for you are somewhat – lesser – in degree. She’s used you as a convenience, you do realize that now, don’t you?”

“See here, Carr, on what basis do you make these accusations?”

“It’s *Commissioner* Carr, if you don’t mind, Mr. Brierly. As far as convenience goes, let’s talk about the motorcar. Handy thing, isn’t it, to have a beau who can ferry you about, in privacy, no nosy hacks or drivers who might, well, choose to testify.” Two nested V-shaped lines appeared between Brierly’s brows. Carr went on. “You left Belgravia at eight a.m. You were observed leaving the late Donkin’s shop around half past two. That’s a rather long time, isn’t it, just to go pick up some pamphlets in, where was it, Tower Hamlets? Where were you, the both of you, during those six hours?”

“You don’t have to answer.” Brierly’s anodyne admonition. “You don’t have to answer anything. Miss Harbison didn’t.”

“Why was there mud on your tyres, Toodles? It’s been dry of late, a minor miracle. Where did you go? You were clearly in the country. Where did you go? Whom did you see?”

“Don’t answer,” said Brierly.

“But I will,” protested the *naif*. “I went to see my friend. Wharton MacGillis.”

“Who lives in Yorkshire. Or so you said. You also said you haven’t seen him in five years.”

“I, ah, I misspoke.” Toodles patted his knees. “He was down here visiting a friend. Another friend. Whom I don’t know. He was staying at, staying at – let me see – somewhere in Frittenden. Kent. We went there.”

“Is McGillis of a mind with Jan? Politically.”

“By Jove, I should say not. Hidebound Tory. Not like me.” Sir Ethelred’s private secretary (unpaid) pulled at his collar, favoring Carr with a grin that suggested unwholesomeness. “It’s, it’s a bit of a sticky wicket, actually. Concerns his reputation. Didn’t want to embarrass the chap, you know.”

Carr crooked his elbow on the armrest and propped up his cheek with his fist. “Do go on.”

“You didn’t tell me this, Branch-Fulkes,” Brierly muttered, quite surly.

“Erm, a young – a young person was involved.”

“Who needed paying off?”

“Her, her, the woman’s, brother. He was the one who showed up. To, erm, collect.”

“And what is his name?”

“Oh.” Toodles lost the grin. “Oh, I say, I’ve rather forgotten it. The bomb excitement later that day. Knocked everything else out of my head.”

Which was never that capacious in the first place. Carr pigeonholed that thought. “So. Allow me to recap. Your friend, Wharton McGillis – Warty, I believe you called him? – lives in Yorkshire. But at the time of the bomb incident he was in Kent, a fact you’ve remembered somewhat – belatedly. Visiting a friend or an acquaintance, perhaps even a family member, whom you don’t know and cannot name. A young woman, her virtue no doubt compromised – ”

“I didn’t say that.”

“But you implied it, didn’t you? You for some reason were summoned to witness your friend making a payment to the woman’s brother – whose name has also slipped your mind, pity – to keep McGillis from humiliation in the press.” Carr for once regretted Heat’s absence. Here he was missing one of his pet sights: a *mucky-muck*, in Heat’s own term, brought low. “Well, we’ll need to speak to McGillis at least. Where may we find him today?”

“Oh dear. I’m afraid you can’t.”

“Beg pardon?”

“McGillis sailed for Bangalore the day after I saw him. He’s at sea right now.”

The words “at sea” evoked a shudder and a twisted mouth from Brierly. Carr noted this, vowed he’d ferret out the secret, not now but soon. “How very convenient, Toodles. Here you are entangled with a radical Red suffragette – the two of you are not engaged, are you? – whose detention sparked a riot on the Horse Guards Parade, culminating in a stone, actually a concrete tile, being heaved through Sir Ethelred’s window, and Inspector Heat being kicked in the spine, which is why he isn’t present now, by the way.”

“My client reads the newspaper.” From Brierly.

“Yes, and he shouldn’t like to be in it, would you now, Toodles? Why, the mere threat of such an event was enough for your friend, Mr. McGillis – peripatetic sort, isn’t he – to have you drive out in your motorcar, just to witness a cheque being handed to, well, to an innocent party I daresay. At the very least let me have that address in Kent.”

Toodles turned to Brierly, but that man’s face was slammed shut. Carr wondered how someone so bored with life, as the lawyer and ex-captain seemed to be, managed not to leave it, if only for a change of scene. Eyes down, Toodles motioned for a pen. For a few minutes he sat as if in meditation, a new pose for him. He scribbled, and shoved the scrap across the table.

“There.”

Carr read aloud. “‘The Maples, Bracken Road, Frittenden.’ Sizable pile, I assume?” He stood, pulling down his coatsleeves, showing a not unfriendly smile to Brierly, who had not budged. “Counselor, please remain here with your client, I’ll be back in just a moment.”

He strolled, unhurried, back to his office and lit a cheroot. A plan was forming in his mind, a rather enjoyable plan to be sure as it would involve what he’d learned from his grandfather. He looked at his calendar, took up a pen, dipped it, and wrote on the page.

A short while later, he returned to the interview room. “You’ll spend another night with us, Toodles. Perhaps it will be the last.”

“What? What about Jan?”

Carr shrugged. “Regrettably, since she is not cooperating she will also remain here. Scotland Yard frowns at the threat of a hunger strike.”

Being a tall man, Toodles had a prominent Adam’s apple. It soared and collapsed more than once before the whole of his face cleared, and the confident, privileged-child look returned. “Jan won’t fast. She can’t. She’s addicted to crumpets.”

“You’re a fool, Branch-Fulkes.” Brierly stood, stretched in a leonine way, picked up his folder and turned to the door. “You’ll receive my invoice shortly. Good day. Good day, Carr.”

“Be seeing you, Brierly.” As the door closed, Carr urged Toodles to his feet. “We’ll look up your old friend McGillis. Cables span the waters, you know. I trust he’ll reply.”

“Go down to Kent.” Toodles balled up Carr’s handkerchief in his fist.

“Why?”

“For my aunt’s sake,” said the young man. “For Lady Gwendolyn.”

He spent the afternoon pushing papers in his office, disposing of a small hill of routine work he’d been ignoring for some time. Signing, stamping, speaking into those horrible nacreous tubes, Adrian Carr remembered the initial thrill of venturing out, at night, in a disguise.

He had Verloc to thank for that. Sir Ethelred’s *carte blanche*, issued with Olympian hauteur some eighteen months ago, allowed him to prowl the streets unaccompanied, a privilege that riled Inspector Heat, who preferred more traditional methods. All Carr had really accomplished back then was the removal of a noxious diplomat, one Mr. Vladimir, who’d been sent back to his native land to face, one could fairly assume, prompt execution.

He’d also kept Peter Michaelis, then new to the scene and his ticket-of-leave, out of jail. Inspector Heat was outraged. Prisons were his business, and he hated losing customers.

Lighting his second cheroot, Carr sniffed with pleasure at the scent of sulphur. At one point he’d considered growing a beard, a Van Dyke, but Annie said no. *You’d look even more Mephistophelian.*

A telegram sprawled to one side of his inkwell. ASST COMMR ADRIAN CARR
METRO POLICE STOP MR T BRANCH-FULKES AND GUEST PRESENT WITH ME
FRITTENDEN KENT ON JUNE -- 1905 STOP THEY ARRIVED 8:45 AM DEPARTED 1:38

PM STOP PRESENTLY ON BOARD P&O EGYPT CONTINUING BANGALORE STOP
RETURNING ENGLAND 14 JANUARY 1906 STOP HON WHARTON MCGILLIS ESQ.

The cable came from Aden, a traditional mail stop for India-bound vessels. McGillis existed, Carr had never doubted that. But anyone can send a telegram.

He commenced rummaging his desk, pulling out drawers, examining slots, until with a muttered “Ha!” he pulled out a fistful of train schedules. Stapleton, Staplewick, Staplehurst. He circled the stop with a flourish of ink. His plan was risky, and might not succeed, but at the very least he’d learn something.

He opened his notes from the interviews on Davy Street. They might be prodded. There were blank spots on the record. Blanks all of them shared.

Chapter 4

At 7:05 he departed St. Pancras, a tall dark farmer in patched clothes and muddy shoes, stumbling as if new to trains into a third-class carriage. He rented the bicycle at Staplehurst and went pedalling down the paved road. When the track turned to dirt, he was thankful these were drought times. Mud would have hindered his plan.

Oast houses dotted the Frittenden road, square brick kilns faced with two or three conical towers. Hops season was long past, two months at least. The smell and the air both seemed yellowish. Toodles were trying to send him a message. No school pal of his ever frequented this road.

Some yards away, Carr saw a horsedrawn lorry emerge from a wide, spacious property. An oast house and outbuildings, newly renovated it would seem, sported wires from the eaves. As the lorry turned onto the lane, a wagon driven by one man pulled up behind, blocking the entrance.

Leaning on his bicycle, Carr saw a name and the word "Electrician" painted on the lorry's side. He followed it.

"Course I'm a young man. It's a young man's profession, it is. Me own dad don't understand what I'm doin."

"Of course not. He wouldn't."

"Like you say." The electrician, Jimmy Jukes, sipped his pint. "Kind of you takin me to the pub. Total stranger like. You say you're lookin for property here?"

“That’s right. I’ve got some pigs, some sheep. Oxford Sandys and Wensleydales. Land’s too dear in Oxfordshire, so here I am.” Carr resisted the urge to wipe breadcrumbs from his sleeve. “Best with buildings on it, ‘course. People buying up oast houses, then? I saw you comin away from one.”

“*Some* people. Harvestin hops is still goin on. In season. Some forward-thinkin types, they’re bettin big on mechanization.”

“Farmer own that place then? The one I saw you leavin.”

“Him? Bugger me if I know what he’s doin here.” Jukes lavished salt on his cheese sandwich. “Cost him plenty, you can be sure. Scrubbed the place clean, painted white, put in benches and things. Says he’s a scientific type.”

“Is that so? Know what he’s working on?”

“Haven’t a clue.” Jukes, who had floppy brown hair and a wide gap-toothed smile, spoke between bites. “Needs the power. So he says. Up to somethin with the kilns, wouldn’t let me see that part. Secretive like.”

“Hm.”

“Queerest chap too. Talks posh. Had money once, I reckon.” Draining his pint, Jukes set the empty tankard on the bar, making it clang. “Funny-lookin fella. Looks like a catfish.”

“A – a what?”

“Or is it dogfish? I’m not one for finny things. Round face, see? Black whiskers. Comin out of his face like this.” Jukes spread his hands, palm inwards, away from his freckled cheeks. “Like somethin swimmin at the bottom of the pond.”

“Mm. And he’s an Englishman, you said?”

“Sounds it. Except once – forget it. Never mind.”

Carr took his chance. "Except once what? Because me, I can't stand foreigners. Stay in Oxford before I'll mix myself up with that lot."

"Didn't say he was a foreigner. But chap – Trevelyan's his name, Walter Trevelyan – he's got himself this dog, see. Retriever. Black. Fine animal. I was out there last week, first time I went. I heard him talking foreign to this dog."

"Trevelyan? Maybe Cornish?"

Jukes with an air of authority shook his head. "Me girl's from Penrhyn. Come here when she was a tyke, she still speaks it with her gran. Wasn't Cornish I heard. Bet my lorry on it."

"I see. And you wouldn't want to lose your lorry, would you?"

"Straight? Put me out of business, wouldn't it? No." Frowning, as if repossession of his van were a real threat, Jukes traced his glass' outline, the wet ring on the wood. "Funny name for a dog, though. You'd think Rover, right? Fidelis? Blackie, maybe? Uh-uh. Ever heard of a dog named Sobaka?"

Carr, as if he had all the time in the world, laid down his half-eaten sandwich. "Not me. Reckon it was Spanish, maybe?"

"Cove didn't look Spanish. White as you or me."

On the way back to the station, a thorn tore a hole in his bicycle tire. Carr swore, and pushed. He had a train to catch. Racketing back to London, this time in second class, in his momentary triumph he felt another rub, another protruding irregular matter: as if someone he knew were in front of him, walking away, in a fog, too obscure to recognize but familiar nonetheless. Like a kernel stuck between his teeth, the vagueness incensed Carr.

“So, you are back, Mr. Carr?” The barber, Hirsch, comb in one hand and towel in the other, surveyed Carr from the space between two chairs. Brass polish and pomade, an uneasy blend of smells. “A shave today? No? Trim? How can I help you, Commissioner?”

“Good afternoon, Mr. Hirsch. When I was last here, I asked you if you’d seen anyone else enter Reg Donkin’s shop, other than customers and the – young pair with the motorcar. You declined to answer.”

“I did? Oh come in, come in, Mr. Liguri. Your usual? By all means.” The customer, a fierce-eyed man whose hair brushed his collar, took one of the chairs. Hirsch stropped his razor. “You can see, Mr. Carr, I am busy. Maybe later?”

“How much later? In an hour, perhaps?”

“What day is it? Wednesday? Oh no, Wednesdays are my busy days. I won’t have any time to talk to you.”

“Tomorrow then?”

“Thursday, also it’s a busy day.”

The barber went to work, and Heat proceeded to John Wang’s shop. After some pleasantries, Wang shook his head. “I say last time, not my business. I not pay attention, other people’s business. You! You put hands back in pockets or I throw you out!” Wang glared at a grubby small boy who’d nudged too close to the sweets. “You see. If I don’t watch, they steal. Always have to look, be careful. No time to see who goes in other shops. No time. I sorry.”

The surly publican, MacWhirr, was supervising a delivery – or preventing one, perhaps. “They’ve put some shoddy bracings on these kegs, I must say.” A row of barrels stood like excluded guests outside his back door, MacWhirr looking at them from all angles. “All bowed

out like they're going to split, split wide open. Flood my establishment. And then who'll have to pay for the damages? Wilkerson," he called out to the driver, "take this lot back, I won't have it. The little straws, Wilkerson. The little straws. You?" He glanced at Carr, up and down, as if he were just one more barrel of beer. "Nothing to tell you. Quit interfering with my trade."

At the newsmonger's, silence suggested the formidable Schomburg was out. After repeated calls, Carr was just about to leave when a scraggly head topped with curls appeared behind a pile of the *Illustrated News*. It was a woman's head, in shadow except for a frightened-looking grin in which a blue tooth figured prominently.

"Mrs. Schomburg?"

"Ja?" Thin piping reed of a voice.

"Husband not here?"

She crept out, still in shadow. Her cheap garish dress made a mockery of her late middle age. "No. Wilhelm, he is not here now. You are a friend of his? Associate?"

"Policeman." Carr showed her his badge.

Before the rough-cut window, stacks of *Tatler's* came to approximate chair height. The cover depicted a romping dark-haired girl in white muslin, sitting in all insouciance really on the apparently sturdy knee of a mustached gentleman with graying temples. She had flung one arm around his neck in an affectionate clasp. Mrs. Schomburg advanced, surveyed the illustration, muttered something in German and sat down on the stack. She addressed Carr, but did not look at him. "In England we are three years now. We a respectable business run. No police. "

Carr asked her his question. He was still a little out of breath, a little rough around the edges. He'd had to sprint from the train, suited and booted, his farmer's clothes left behind. "No one's accusing you, Mrs. Schomburg. Not you, and not your husband. Think. Have you ever –

when you've been here – seen a stranger, or some strangers, in that – corner shop? The one that blew up. Anyone who, well, stood out in your mind?”

Sudden sun flooded the window. She gasped, and showed him her profile. The curl of dyed hair on her forehead wobbled. Her blue eye, protuberant, stared straight ahead. Only her faded lips moved. “You must not tell Wilhelm.”

“Whatever you tell me is confidential.”

“Because he – he – ” She drew a finger like a knife across her throat. The nails were bitten to the quick.

“We don't let husbands bully wives in England. If you'd like me to arrest him – ”

“No!”

Carr moved to view her other side. “Is this his handiwork?”

Her right socket, unseen till now, lay at the center of a yellow sea. Bruises across the red-violet spectrum spread like cooled lava across her nose, down to her chin.

“Wilhelm is not so bad. He is a man. He likes his way to have, sometimes.” The rumble of wheels in the street arrested her. She placed a trembling index to her lips. The rumble died away.

“I'll ask you again. Did you see anyone – at Donkin's place, talking to Donkin? Anyone who looked, well, out of place in the neighborhood?”

She rose from her seat on the *Tatler's*, tiptoed to the shack's flimsy door, and closed it. Her walk was graceless, her arms at odd angles, her head always craning this way and that. She resembled an unloved, neglected doll. She put up stiff hands, as if to keep him off although he hadn't moved. She had aching joints, perhaps – she was not young – but something in her

stooped and drooping carriage made Carr think no, this wasn't sickness, this was long-established habit. Based on fear.

"A man come." She addressed the floor. "He the furniture brings. At night, on a wagon." With sudden, unexpected force she raised her head and looked Carr in the eyes. Behind the particolored bruises, her pale eyes with colorless lashes showed him a glimmering, wispy defiance. "I don't sleep sometimes. From our window you can see." She added, "On the third floor is our flat, on Old Fork Lane. You look down, you can Davy Street see."

"So you saw – furniture – delivered. Did you see who drove the wagon?"

She shook her head. Her earrings made a tinny clashing sound. "Not him. I saw the other man last time. He argue. With the Donkin man. Make so much noise."

"Did you see the other man, then?"

"Yes." With her hands, she made a balloon in the air. "Fat. Like an *apfel*." With a great exhalation, she added, "*Der* Donkin call him – milkface."

Milkface. McGillis. Carr wanted to smite himself in the head. "I – believe we may know who – he is. Mrs. Schomburg, you may also, and I think you should, bring charges of assault and battery against your husband." This skirl of tragedy, this trill of a minor motif, made Adrian Carr deaf for a moment to the thundering dominant theme. "Say the word, and we'll arrest him. If you like."

"No! I told you, no, please no!"

He had no choice. He left her there, sobbing. His handkerchiefs were disappearing almost daily, going off on charitable errands. Toodles, tearful in the interview room, was a figure of farce. This woman would never provoke guffaws.

When he and Charlie, and several others, arrived at the oast house on Frittenden Road, the horse and wagon still blocked the drive. “That’s all right. There’s a dirt track. I saw it from my bicycle. We’ll go in there.”

False dawn lit the sky. In the oast house, electric lights were blazing and a weird, eerie keening, the sound of some grinding or shaping machine, came caterwauling through the open windows.

“Quiet. Quiet. Crouch down. There.”

Think with your feet, Adrian. Know where you’re stepping, but don’t make a sound. The smell of hops was a yellow haze, dizzying him, mixed up with sawdust and sulphur and – was it? Bananas. His grandfather’s voice, light, enticing, encouraging, sang in his ears. *Your dad never cared for this sort of play. Skips a generation. Quiet!*

Class hatred killed his grandfather. He was murdered for being a Lord. All he did in his life, his kindnesses, his generosity, his open-mindedness, went by the boards because a madman saw him as a symbol embodying an abstract concept. For the same reason, someone threw a tile through Sir Ethelred’s window. *I hate all rebels*, the great man had said. Carr did not, he could not, he himself had rebelled against Cambridge conformity, but he did despise those who took dislike of the existing systems as license to throw stones, shoot policemen, set off bombs.

Flies buzzed, locusts sang. He heard the two voices, but none of their words. He advanced to a half-open window, looked in, and hung on to the sill for dear life.

The black retriever, indeed a noble beast, slept on a rug. He dreamed of chases. His legs scabbled in a phantom run. On the benches, painted white, that lined the walls, lay wires and clock faces, hunks of iron and rolls of brown paper. In the center of the room, what had been a brick kiln looked now like a primitive forge. One man, perched on a stool, consulted drawings;

he seemed to be trying to follow some sort of diagram. The other leaned his weight against the bricks.

Michaelis, bursting from a gray suit, spoke. “Trevelyan, I paid you. You owe me another.”

“Because that young lady made a mistake?” The man on the stool did not raise his head. “Because she was a fool and brought the bomb into the shop? How, may I ask, does that entitle you to a replacement free of charge?”

“Because I’m asking you. That’s how. All this was your idea.”

“As I recall, Michaelis, when I was last in London, you were not yet universally beloved. You were a suspect in the matter of Verloc, thanks to that ass Inspector Heat. Ridiculous chance – a twist of fate – deprived me of my position, my immunity, my entire life in my home country. They tortured me – my own people – they were convinced I had bungled the thing, when it was not me, not me, but that cipher Verloc and his wretched laziness.”

“I’m familiar with your history, Trevelyan.”

“Perhaps, but do you understand how I am here? Why, you know. But how?”

“You’re going to tell me, I take it. I’d rather you were building bombs.”

“All in good time. I escaped. I had funds. I might have gone anywhere, New York, Sydney, Johannesburg.” The working man giggled, his little society laugh. Just as Carr remembered it. “But inside I burned, let me tell you, I burned and still burn with the anger of the wronged. I was a member, you understand, a member of the Explorers Club. Your own patroness, Lady Gwendolyn, welcomed me in her salon. Parasites! Yes, parasites all! They deserve to be toppled, blown up, extinguished. And you, Michaelis, it’s your fault for trusting that imbecile girl and her lover, the mooncalf. Why didn’t you have them killed? *We* would

have.” In an entirely different voice, a voice suggesting wolves and snow and onion domes, he blurted, “At home.”

The dog awoke. He looked at the window. He howled, just once, not very loud.

“Quiet, Sobaka.”

Carr raised the window sash. At the same moment the front door dropped from its hinges and crashed on the new-painted floors. A flood of constables surged through it.

“Good evening, Mr. Vladimir,” said Carr. He pushed himself up and slid over the windowsill. “Last time we met was on the steps of the Explorers Club. Hello, Michaelis. We have firearms pointed at you, so don’t move. I must say, I’m rather disappointed in the both of you.”

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“Michaelis?”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred. Apparently he’s quite the criminal mastermind.”

They were sitting in the bone ward of the finest private hospital. Inspector Heat, bandaged from neck to waist, reclined on the bed, his eyes reddened but open and alert. Toodles perched on the neighboring bed, while Sir Ethelred filled to overflowing a cushioned white wicker chair. Carr stood, and spoke.

“He had a, a pair of bawdy houses, begging your pardon, in Eastcheap. He had runners at the racetrack, acolytes among the grooms, so swung a race or two, or three, his way from time to time. He was collecting from the witnesses, Donkin’s neighbors in the shops, under the guise of insurance. Set up a dummy company, they all bought into it. The furniture, in Donkin’s shop, came from illegal searches, seized from debtors and the like. As for the party – Ms. Harbison’s cause – well, you and she collected money, Toodles, but that isn’t where it went. All of this we

have confirmed, Sir Ethelred, after raiding his, or rather Lady Gwendolyn's, cottage in Kent and his room at her London address. At the oast house, by the way, along with the bombmaking setup we picked up some pieces of jewelry, Lady Gwendolyn's as well. I'm afraid she hadn't noticed they were missing."

"What of the profits from his book? Where did those go?"

"Into the – business. Or businesses."

"How absolutely foul. The cheat!"

"Yes, Sir Ethelred. When Vladimir, now known as Walter Trevelyan, returned to England, befriended the Professor in his cell and took up bombmaking, he – with the Professor's help – sought out Michaelis. He was not in Kent by accident. They made a pact."

"I don't get Vladimir." Sir Ethelred spoke as if confessing a great sin. "The Embassy recalled him, and of course I was sure they'd put him to death at once. Yet he escaped?"

"If there's one thing we learned from the late Peter Ivanovich – not to mention his killer, Razumov – it's that Russian authorities, from prison guards on up, are too easily bribed."

"We put him on a pedestal." Toodles rubbed his eyes. "Michaelis, that is. We considered him – inspired. The soul of gentleness, a man of peace. What rubbish."

Carr peered through a window. Silver hatpins of rain cascaded down the smeared and smutted glass. "That was very heroic of you, Toodles. Sending me off to the oasthouses, after that outrageous lie you told about your friend McGillis. You knew what I'd find there. Or should I say who."

"The business had gone far enough. Besides, it wasn't me. Mrs. Schomburg – was that her name? – twigged Michaelis."

Sir Ethelred, craning his tree-trunk neck, looked up at Carr. “About that. We can’t have foreigners over here beating their wives. Please have the man deported at your earliest convenience.”

“Yes, Sir Ethelred.” Carr turned to Heat. “And I’ll say this now, in front of witnesses. You wanted Michaelis arrested, last year. I thought him harmless. I was wrong. You were right.”

“Oh, wait till Annie hears that,” chuckled Toodles. “You’ll never hear the end of it, you know.”

In the bed, Heat smiled. His mustache rose up to tickle his nostrils. He had the look of a man at last exonerated after years of persecution. He closed his eyes. “Victory,” he said.

EPILOGUE

The whist players – Dr. Frung, the Swiss alienist; the snickering editor, Alfred Bellamy Latham; Assistant Commissioner Adrian Carr; and the newest member of the foursome, John Herndon Marvell – sat before the baize-covered table. Their hands moved, often; their mouths, infrequently.

Marvell, the former chief railway engineer whom Carr had known slightly in India, became part of the quartet after Cribbs, the elderly, nervous colonel, was one day removed by his daughter to her Sussex estate, where, it was said, he sat all day in a peacock chair with a parrot on his shoulder, and professed not to know the names of his relatives. An enthusiastic cyclist and outdoorsman, Marvell spoke fluent Spanish and was married to a droopy thin blonde named Giselle, a native of some beleaguered republic where he'd spent several years moving mountains for the benefit of locomotives. "How's that dog of yours, Carr? You took him over from some Russian you arrested, isn't that right?"

"Yes. We call him Bowser. Very protective of the child. Annie adores him."

"Black retriever, isn't he?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Reminded me. On the ship, coming home, I heard quite an odd story."

"Deal."

He did so. "Didn't you tell me, Carr, you'd had some dealing with that lawyer, Brierly? Fancies himself overmuch, I think you said?"

"Yes. I have had. And he does."

“Same bloke then. We were rounding Carupano when the liner went bump in the night. Great Scott, what’s this, I thought, and I rushed to the deck. There I found we’d scraped the sides of a ragged old scow, a glorified barge of sorts, what it was doing in those waters I can’t fathom. Neither could its captain, apparently. Rather sad old chap named Jones. He had a dog just like yours.”

“Oh?”

“Older, though. Jones – loquacious fellow – told me quite a yarn. All about that lawyer Brierly. I hadn’t known he was once a sea captain. Jones did, though. Jones was his first mate. Somewhere like – Singapore? Bangkok? Aboard the *Pelion*.”

“Deal.”

“What Jones told me – and I filed it away, upstairs don’t you know, and forgot it until just this moment – is that then-Captain Brierly had been despondent. Something to do with a court case. Not his own, he’d just been called as an assessor. Maritime matter. One night during the dawn watch he chucked himself into the sea. Hung his watch on a hook and dived in.”

“What? Brierly is alive and well.” Carr, shaking his head over his cards, added, “Hard to believe. No one’s ever topped his self-regard. Did he mean to – ?”

“Commit the rash act? So Jones swears. Jones saw it happen. Heard the dog yelp. Knowing no better, of course, Jones went in after his captain. Pulled him to safety, not without a bad scare, of course.”

“Brierly – attempted suicide?”

“That was the gist of it. Once he was back on deck, wrapped in blankets, his watch restored and all that – Jones of course asked him why. Well, Captain Brierly, as he was then, shut himself up like a box. Wouldn’t answer. Wouldn’t speak for the rest of the voyage. When they

came to port, Brierly packed up his kit and went ashore, without a word. Resigned from the service that very day.” Marvell held out a card, took it back, put it down in the end. “Hearts is trump. Anyway – the man went to some family house or another, he came from money, the lucky sod. Straight from there to the Inns of Court. Never tasted salt water again. Jones – fairly obsessed with the matter, he was – got this latter part from hearsay. The dog was the worst part of it, so he said.”

“The dog?”

“Yes. Brierly wouldn’t take him, afterwards. Left him locked up with Jones – and of course the dog was by way of being a marvellous creature. Jones said the dog whined for weeks. Wouldn’t eat. Jones had to spoon-feed, to keep it alive. When I saw it, two months ago, the beast was healthy, more or less, but a sadder dog you’ve never seen.” Marvell threw down his cards. “What prompts a man to do that, Frung, do you know? Walked away from his ship – from his profession, the owners loved him, he’d done quite well by them – from his first mate – but from his *dog*? That animal loved him. Did he not care for Jones rescuing him? Had he really determined to die – and then felt like a fool, don’t you see, for being hauled up, dripping? What was your impression of him, Carr?”

“Ah. I knew him – somewhat – in childhood.” *I’ll cut off your head, Bonaparte, you froggy frog! No you won’t!* A splinter had buried itself in Carr’s palm. Three decades later, and more, it was still there. “Sounds like the Brierly I knew. He must have found rescue – embarrassing.”

Several hands later – he and Marvell had been thoroughly drubbed – Carr said into the silence, “He wanted to die. To go out at the height of his glory. He hated Jones for saving him, wanted to slam the door on the whole of that life, which had grown intolerable, God knows

why.”

“I don’t respect him, anyway,” said Marvell. “Being cruel to an animal – there’s no excuse.”

Carr opened a fresh pack of cards. “If I’d been Jones – I’d have stuck to the ship.” He fanned the deck. A clock, the dark eminence in the corner, rang the hour in a series of loud bongs. “Jones didn’t think, though. That was his salvation.”

“And Brierly’s too, no?” inquired Dr. Frung.

Carr chose not to reply.

APPENDIX

From the London Picture News:

“Senior Parliamentarian’s Daughter Arrested, Will be Tried for Sedition.

“... KC’s position is that Miss Janet Harbison, 23, knowingly transported an explosive device from Kent to Whitechapel, where it exploded on November __, killing shopkeeper Reginald Donkin and destroying his establishment.

“Miss Harbison is also charged with inciting the recent riot at the Horse Guards Parade, in which Home Secretary Sir Ethelred Straith just missed grievous injury when a rock came through his window. The perpetrator of that offense has been identified as Simon Lafille, a Frenchman, who used a slingshot to propel his missile into Sir Ethelred’s third-floor office.

“Also injured on that occasion was Metro Police Inspector W.H. Heat, of the Special Branch, when an unknown female assailant savagely kicked him from behind. The Inspector, now in hospital, is scheduled to soon return to his usual and customary duties.

“Additionally, the Crown has in custody the so-called ‘Kent Conspirators,’ Peter Michaelis the well-known memoirist, and Vladimir Kuznetz, aka Walter Trevelyan, a Russian national. According to the documents on file, Kuznetz/Trevelyan built the device at Michaelis’ request, with the express purpose of destroying the Belgravia manse of Lady Gwendolyn Hillingdon, a champion of revolution responsible for publicizing Michaelis’ ticket-of-leave appeal and supporting him while he wrote his book. The ingrate Michaelis reportedly said he hoped to murder Lady Hillingdon and her prominent guests in the planned explosion.

“Sir Ethelred’s private secretary, Theodore Branch-Fulkes, 26, Miss Harbison’s former beau, will testify against his erstwhile paramour in exchange for immunity.”

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