

The **CROSSWORD MURDERS**

THE SECRET DETECTIVE AGENCY BOOK 5



HELENA DIXON

A totally unputdownable English cozy murder mystery

THE CROSSWORD MURDERS

A TOTALLY UNPUTDOWNABLE
ENGLISH COZY MURDER MYSTERY

THE SECRET DETECTIVE AGENCY
BOOK 5

HELENA DIXON

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With grateful thanks to the work of the curators, museums and the many people who worked to save the treasures of a nation.

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‘Hide them in caves and cellars, but not one picture shall leave this island...
None must go. We are going to beat them.’

Winston Churchill, May 1940

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CHAPTER ONE

Jane Treen smoothed the shabby edges of her tailored pre-war black dress and coat. As a funeral outfit, it had been worn for too many outings since the start of the conflict. She shivered slightly in the early spring sunshine. Arthur Cilento stood beside her, wrapped up as usual in his layers of wool with a sombre dark overcoat and hat.

There was a surprisingly large number of mourners around the edge of the grave. Many of them, she assumed, were former students of the man they were there to mourn. Jane glanced at Arthur's face, pale beneath the brim of his trilby hat. Unlike the other attendees she had never met the man being laid to rest. She was only there because Arthur had asked her to accompany him. He had received a cryptic secret message from the man in the grave before his death.

A light breeze whipped around the corner of the square tower of the small honey-coloured stone church and stirred the vicar's long black robes. A tall, angular woman with iron-grey hair and trembling lips tossed a dark red carnation into the grave on top of the coffin.

Antonella Watkins was an art historian and sister of the man being buried. Jane discreetly surveyed the other mourners, her eyes and ears primed for anything that might be significant. At the rear of the group on the gravel path closer to the church sat a small upright figure in a wheelchair. This was Lady Marietta Tolland, a friend of the deceased and a fellow member of the Crossword Compilers' Club he had belonged to. A group who created crosswords for their own amusement and who supplied them to various newspapers and magazines.

Lady Tolland's brother, Lawrence Coombs, stood beside her, watching the proceedings. A tall, soldierly man, he walked with a limp from injuries sustained in the Great War. He also belonged to the compilers' group, according to the information Arthur had provided beforehand.

The vicar finished his part of the service, and the mourners started to drift away from the grave. The arrangements were that they would walk the short distance along the high street to Antonella's home where refreshments, condolences and memories would be served.

Lady Tolland's chauffeur stepped forward to push her chair. Lawrence Coombs came to provide support to Antonella who was dabbing her eyes with a crumpled damp handkerchief as she thanked the vicar. Arthur's gaze met Jane's, and he offered her his arm. She took it without speaking and they followed the straggly trail of mourners past the rows of square moss-covered tombstones.

Daffodils provided a splash of yellow under the church wall as they walked past the yew trees standing like dark sentinels on either side of the lychgate. The church was situated in the centre of the small Wiltshire village of Westwood. A row of flowering cherry trees laden with unopened buds bordered the edge of a small green space. The rest of the village centre had handsome Georgian buildings, all built using the local creamy yellow stone.

Antonella's house was one of these buildings. The black painted front door stood open and inside a maid waited to greet the mourners. The curtains which had been drawn when the procession had left the house had now been opened. Coats were taken and sherry offered as they drifted along the hall and into the high-ceilinged reception room at the rear of the house.

Arthur quietly pointed out Antonella's solicitor who was standing with the local bank manager near the French windows. Lady Tolland had been installed near the fireplace, and a short anxious-looking man stood near to her as everyone waited for Antonella, Mr Coombs and the vicar to join them.

Jane looked curiously around the room. The furniture was old but good, a leather chesterfield sofa and chairs, a fine carved stone fireplace with a small blaze to take the spring chill from the air. Above the mantelpiece a large oil painting, a portrait of the man they were there to mourn. Professor Sanford Watkins, Arthur's old mentor and founder of the Crossword Compilers' Club.

The picture looked as if it had been completed fairly recently. Professor Watkins's keen blue gaze seemed to be surveying the room from inside the gilded gold frame almost as sharply as Jane herself. There was a quiet hum of conversation in the room as people greeted one another and swapped news. A bowl of pink hyacinths on top of a rosewood table in the bay scented the air.

The door opened and Antonella arrived accompanied by the vicar. Immediately the air in the room changed and people moved to greet her as the maid began to circulate with a silver tray of small fish paste and very thinly sliced ham sandwiches. Jane and Arthur continued to stand quietly to the side of the room observing everything.

'Arthur, I am so very glad you could come.' Antonella arrived in front of them and seized his free hand between her own.

'Of course, I had to be here. Sanford was a dear friend. I'm so sorry for your loss, Antonella. He'll be greatly missed,' Arthur said.

'And you must be Jane.' Antonella turned sharp grey eyes in her direction. 'Arthur told me he was seeing someone. It's so good of you to accompany him. We must catch up properly after everyone has gone. Do say you'll stay for dinner, both of you.' The older woman's voice was heavy with meaning.

'That would be lovely, if it's no trouble to you,' Jane responded in an even tone. They had agreed beforehand that she was to pretend to be Arthur's girlfriend. It provided a simple, socially acceptable reason for her presence at the professor's funeral. It also made Arthur uncomfortable.

'That's wonderful. Now I must introduce you to my colleagues, Betsy Peters and Dickie Flint.' Antonella turned slightly towards a couple standing nearby. 'We work together, curating and coordinating the museum pieces. Betsy, Dickie, this is Arthur and Jane. Although I think, Betsy, you and Arthur know one another from the crossword club.'

'Yes, that's right, although we have never met in person. Only via correspondence.' Arthur extended his hand to greet the petite dark-haired woman in front of him. He then shook hands with Dickie Flint, a short slightly rotund man in his late forties.

'Yes, I know your name, and your puzzles, of course.' Betsy smiled, revealing white even teeth before turning to Jane. 'Are you a crossword fan too?'

‘Alas no, I leave all that to Arthur. He is much more skilled at that kind of thing.’ Jane smiled back and shook hands politely with both Betsy and Dickie.

Antonella had wandered off to speak to Lady Tolland and her brother, leaving Jane and Arthur with their newfound companions.

‘Poor Antonella, she will miss Sanford terribly. They were so close,’ Betsy said, her gaze resting on Antonella’s tall, slim figure.

‘Yes, Sanford’s death was so sudden too, from what she told me,’ Arthur agreed.

Jane sipped her sherry and tried to maintain a neutral expression. Arthur had contacted her at her office in Whitehall when he had received a strange and cryptic new puzzle from Sanford just a day before he had unexpectedly passed away.

This first warning had swiftly been followed by an invitation to accompany him to Professor Watkins’s funeral. After a brief consultation with her employer, Brigadier Remmington-Blythe, she had been granted permission to investigate.

She had arrived at Arthur’s home the day before the funeral. Her beloved one-eyed cat Marmaduke accompanied her as usual. To his credit Arthur, for once, had refrained from sighing and rolling his eyes when he saw the wicker cat basket. Benson, his long-serving manservant, had borne Marmaduke away to the kitchens to be pacified with pilchards.

There had been little time for Arthur to show her what he had received from the professor before they had taken the train early the next morning to attend the funeral.

‘Sanford always seemed so fit. I didn’t know he had heart problems.’ Dickie Flint gave a slight, sorrowful shake of his head.

‘It was a heart attack then?’ Jane asked.

‘Oh yes, it happened in the, erm, storage facility too. There was no one around at the time. By the time Antonella found him it was too late. He’d been assisting her and Lawrence, you see, with the collections and some other things.’ Betsy Peters’s voice trailed away. She was clearly unsure if she had said too much. Jane knew that Antonella was involved in some kind of confidential work involving antiquities and objects of national interest.

‘Antonella told me it was sudden. She telephoned me after it happened,’ Arthur said.

‘She telephoned all of us I think, all those of you in the crossword club or who were working with him on the storage.’ Dickie shuffled his feet on the carpet while Jane waved away the maid bearing the tray of sandwiches.

‘Were there many of you in this club?’ Jane asked.

‘Me, Arthur, Sanford obviously, he founded it. Um, Lady Tolland and Lawrence Coombs, her brother, oh and Antonella. I think there were some overseas members too but obviously at the moment they aren’t involved,’ Betsy said.

Jane noticed that Lawrence Coombs was holding Antonella’s hands as if comforting her. Lady Tolland didn’t appear to be very happy when she noticed but her expression quickly changed to become blank when she realised Jane was looking in their direction.

‘When did you last receive a puzzle from Sanford?’ Arthur looked at Betsy.

‘About three weeks ago, I think. He had a new grid he was trying. He mentioned something about a trial for one of the Scottish newspapers. What about you?’ Betsy asked.

Jane knew the crossword Arthur had received had not been one of the usual kind his mentor normally sent.

‘It must have been around the same time. I thought it was interesting to add another dimension to the puzzles,’ Arthur agreed. Jane was aware he was lying.

Antonella said something to Lawrence and inclined her head towards Arthur and the others. Lady Tolland’s gaze sharpened, and she began to propel her wheelchair across the room. Her brother released Antonella’s hand and followed his sister.

‘Arthur Cilento, isn’t it? I think we’ve met once before some years ago. I didn’t recognise you at first.’ Lady Tolland’s tone was as sharp as her eyes.

‘Yes, it has been quite a while now since we met in person. Obviously, I receive your puzzles. That last one you shared was very impressive,’ Arthur said. ‘May I introduce my, um, girlfriend, Jane Treen.’

Jane held out her hand. ‘I’m delighted to meet you, although it would have been nice if the circumstances were not so sad.’

Lady Tolland shook hands with her briefly.

‘That’s very true. Such a sad occasion to make new friends. I’m Lawrence Coombs, another one of the puzzlers and Marietta’s brother.’

Lawrence extended his hand to Jane and glanced briefly at his sister before shaking hands with Arthur.

‘Betsy was just telling us about what happened to Sanford. It was quite a shock when Antonella telephoned me,’ Arthur said.

‘It was awful, poor Antonella. Sanford always seemed so fit and active.’ Lawrence shook his head.

‘Had he seen a doctor recently?’ Arthur asked.

‘Not that I know of. He certainly didn’t say anything to me when he was reviewing the logistics plans for the storage facility.’ Betsy looked at Dickie.

‘No, he certainly didn’t mention anything to me either. Not that I saw him as often as you and Lady Tolland.’ Dickie inclined his head deferentially in Lady Tolland’s direction.

‘Arthur was telling me about the crossword club you all belong to.’ Jane paused and took a sip of sherry. ‘Professor Watkins seemed to be very involved in it.’

‘Gosh, yes. He would try out new things all the time and it was interesting to see if clues were too easy or too hard. I got the last one from him a few weeks ago. A new grid,’ Lawrence said.

‘Yes, I received the same thing. I shall miss the mental challenge his puzzles always provided. One has fewer outlets when one is less able physically,’ Lady Tolland agreed.

‘His help with the logistics and the technology in the storage facility was invaluable too.’ Betsy placed her empty sherry glass down on a nearby side table.

‘So awful that was where he died. It will be so hard for Antonella,’ Lawrence murmured, his gaze travelling towards where she was back talking to the bank manager.

People had begun to drift away now, having completed their social obligations. The solicitor and the bank manager departed together. The vicar and his wife followed shortly afterwards.

‘We should go. We have to get back to work, and check on the facility.’ Betsy nudged Dickie who promptly swallowed the last of his sherry in a hurry.

‘Of course, it was nice to meet you,’ Jane said.

‘I expect we may see you both again at some point? Hopefully under happier circumstances.’ Betsy looked at Arthur.

‘I think so,’ Arthur agreed politely as the two curators moved away to say goodbye to Antonella.

Lady Marietta Tolland and her brother were the last of the mourners to leave.

‘Are you certain there is nothing else we can do to assist you, Antonella?’ Lawrence asked, glancing towards Jane and Arthur who were standing politely a short distance away near the fireplace.

‘There’s nothing for now. Thank you, Lawrence. I’m just going to have dinner with Arthur and his friend before they leave and then I suppose I shall need to sort out Sanford’s affairs.’ Antonella gave a small, sad smile.

‘Come along, Lawrence. We should go. Antonella, dear, I’ll telephone you tomorrow. Let me know when you feel ready to resume work.’ Lady Marietta’s voice was sharp, and her tone seemed to jog her brother back into the present.

Antonella accompanied her guests into the hall and saw them out of the house before returning to the sitting room.

‘Thank heavens that’s over.’ Antonella sank down onto one of the armchairs, a weary expression on her face.

‘We don’t have to stay for dinner if you are too tired. We can always call another time when you have had a chance to recover. This has all been quite a shock I think.’ Arthur perched on the end of the sofa.

Jane was tempted to get her cigarettes from her bag. The faint frown on Arthur’s face, however, seemed to indicate he knew what she was thinking so she refrained for the time being.

‘That’s kind of you, Arthur, but I really want to talk to you. I have arranged for an early meal as I know you have a train to catch.’ Antonella hesitated for a moment and looked directly at Jane. ‘I assume that you are in the same line of work as Arthur?’

The question was phrased delicately but Jane instantly understood the other woman’s meaning. ‘Yes, we work together. Whatever you wish to talk to Arthur about, you can be assured that it will remain confidential.’

Antonella nodded. ‘Very well, then I’ll be frank. I believe that my brother was murdered.’ She looked at Arthur and then at Jane as if testing to see if they were shocked or surprised by her announcement.

‘I see. Why do you think that?’ Arthur asked, his tone unsurprised.

‘Sanford never had heart trouble in his life. He was fit and healthy. Fitter than me. He would go hill walking, cycling, even rock climbing. This

business of a sudden heart attack in the caves, I don't believe it. They didn't find any evidence of heart disease in the post-mortem. Just a catastrophic cardiac arrest.' Antonella blinked rapidly and fished her handkerchief from her pocket.

'An arrhythmia then, perhaps? These things do happen,' Jane suggested.

Antonella sniffed and blew her nose. 'No. He had some tablets in his pocket. I'd never seen them before, and he would have told me if he had seen a doctor. Our doctor hadn't prescribed them. The bottle had a Harley Street label, but it was torn so I don't know exactly who had prescribed them. A Doctor Ver something. The coroner said they were for angina. He didn't have angina. It doesn't make sense. His blood results showed digitalis. I always thought that was something extracted from foxglove poisoning, so at first I thought he must have ingested something. Those pills, they could have stopped his heart, but who gave them to him and why? He was a clever man, he wouldn't just have swallowed them. There was also nothing in the contents of his stomach.'

Jane looked at Arthur. 'That's very odd. But maybe he hadn't wanted to worry you.'

Antonella shook her head and leapt to her feet. She crossed to a small bureau on the far side of the room and, taking a brass key from her pocket, she unlocked the drawer. 'I found this. Afterwards, in the tunnels, hidden not far from where... from where he died. I think this is what killed him. The tablets were merely a prop to make the heart attack story plausible.'

She took out a small package, bundled up in a pale-blue silk scarf. Antonella unwrapped it carefully to reveal the contents, a small, broken glass syringe with a needle.

CHAPTER TWO

‘Betsy mentioned some kind of storage facility, and you said Sanford was found in the caves? I presume this is where you are all working?’ Arthur’s gaze was fixed on the damaged syringe.

‘What exactly is kept there is a secret, but I think it’s well known that various valuable and priceless works of art have been moved out of London and other major museums? The risk of losing them during a bombing raid or in a fire was deemed to be too great,’ Antonella said.

Arthur and Jane nodded in unison.

‘There is a large quarry, Westwood Quarry, it runs under the Mendip Hills. It was being used as a mushroom farm before the war. It has all the right credentials for storing precious pieces. Half of the cave system is given over to Royal Enfield for weapons manufacture. It’s considered safe from bombing runs. The other half has a ventilation system and temperature control, even a humidifier. The artworks are being transferred from their temporary homes in various great houses around the country and are being secured in the quarry.’ Antonella stopped and looked at them.

‘This is where Sanford was found when he died?’ Arthur asked.

‘He was in one of the service tunnels. He had been advising on security and sorting out some minor technical issues with the humidity control system,’ Antonella explained.

‘And you, Betsy, Dickie and, I imagine, Lady Tolland are all involved with curating the artworks?’ Jane asked.

Antonella nodded. ‘Sanford too, as a trusted volunteer, was working with Lawrence. Lawrence is a certified electrician, he was working on the

circuitry. The electronics in the facility are state of the art and Sanford was helping him. It's a big job, cataloguing, checking the pieces, making sure everything is protected.'

'Then your brother was found dead in the tunnels,' Jane murmured. Arthur could see she was thinking over everything they had just discovered.

'Before he died, I knew there was something wrong. He wouldn't tell me what it was. He insisted I was worrying about nothing. At first, I thought I was imagining things. That it was the stress and responsibility of managing the movements of all these valuable art pieces that had me second-guessing myself.' Antonella gave Arthur a worried look.

'Did you press him about anything? Or think you had an idea what it might be?' Arthur was interested to hear what she said. This must have been around the time that Sanford had been designing his new crossword grid.

Antonella shrugged. 'I kept asking if he had something troubling him, but he just told me not to worry. He was working on a solution to something, and it would all be clear in a few weeks' time.'

Arthur looked at the syringe where she had placed it down on the table. 'You didn't go to the police with this? Or tell anyone about what you found?'

'I found it a couple of days after...' She paused to dab at her eyes and nose with a cotton handkerchief. 'I went back in the tunnels to where we found him. I was trying to work out what could have happened. By then they had said it was his heart and they showed me the tablets they found in his pocket. It didn't make sense to me at all. Then as I was walking back along the tunnel, I spotted something glinting, hidden in a crevice. That's when I saw that.' Antonella inclined her head towards the syringe.

'It's a shame it's broken. It would have been useful to have any remaining contents analysed.' Jane had taken out her cigarettes. She offered them to Antonella who shook her head.

'By the time I'd found it, the funeral arrangements were in place. The coroner seemed happy with the death certificate issued by the doctor. I thought that if I went to the police then I'd either be dismissed as some silly old woman, or if Sanford had been murdered, then I would be painting a large target on my own back.' Antonella's gaze met his.

'What motive would anyone have for killing your brother?' Jane asked as she lit her cigarette.

Arthur noticed she was taking care to direct the smoke away from him.

‘I don’t really know. He’d argued with a lot of people before he died. I assumed at the time it was down to whatever was bothering him. He was snappy and defensive. That’s why I contacted you, Arthur.’ Antonella lifted her chin and met Arthur’s gaze.

‘You say he argued with everyone. What about?’ Arthur asked. He could see why Antonella was concerned. The syringe lying between them on the table had no place in the environment she had described.

Antonella slumped back in her seat. ‘He argued with Betsy and Dickie over the documents for the movements of the artworks. Betsy was close to tears the one day and even Dickie got cross.’ She waved her hands in the air as if Dickie being cross at someone was almost beyond her comprehension. ‘Then Lawrence asked him something about the specialised air-conditioning system. Sanford had been sorting out a problem with it. The temperature in the storage facility has to be maintained between precise margins you see, and the moisture content carefully managed. There are special sensors. I don’t really understand what happened, but it turned into a blazing row and Lawrence walked out. That meant, of course, that Marietta, Lady Tolland, got involved. Naturally she sided with her brother.’

‘Is there a problem at all with the storage facility at Westwood?’ Jane extinguished her cigarette in a nearby crystal ashtray.

‘No, no, not at all. It’s an enormous amount of work, obviously, with all the logistics and transport. It’s a huge place, and the Enfield part is even bigger than the part we occupy. Not that we share any contact with their workers.’ Antonella leaned forward again.

Arthur nodded absently. He was going over in his mind the last crossword Sanford had sent to him. The one with the new grid. The cryptic clues that when solved correctly had spelled something that had led him to invite Jane to Sanford’s funeral.

‘Have you been through your brother’s papers yet?’ Jane asked.

Antonella nodded. ‘Yes, after I found that’ – her gaze flicked back to the syringe again – ‘I went through everything in his desk and his case. There was nothing untoward. That in itself was worrying.’

‘What do you mean?’ Arthur asked.

‘He kept a journal. He’d kept one for years. A black notebook that he recorded things in. He wrote down all kinds of things. If it was something important, he used a code.’ She looked directly at Arthur. ‘It’s missing.’

The air in the room seemed to have grown still.

‘When did you last see it?’ Jane asked.

‘The day before he died. He’d been scribbling in it in the evening. We were sitting by the fire listening to the radio. I even teased him about it.’ Antonella’s shoulders shook and a small sob escaped her before she composed herself. ‘I asked him if he intended to publish his memoirs someday. He put so much work into his journal. He said that he hoped he would live long enough...’ Her voice trailed off and she blew her nose once more.

‘Where did he usually keep his journal?’ Arthur asked.

‘I’ll show you.’ Antonella sprang to her feet as if eager to move and release some of the tension that had been building in her body.

The thick, heavy curtains in the study had already been drawn once more and a lamp lit on the old-fashioned Victorian-style desk with its plethora of small drawers and heavily carved sides.

‘All his papers were in his filing cabinet.’ Antonella indicated the wooden three drawer unit near the desk. ‘His journal was always in the centre drawer. He kept it locked, but the key was in one of the small drawers with his stamps.’ She pulled the drawer open and took out a small brass key with a faded dark-blue silk tassel.

Arthur took the key to unlock the central drawer. Jane appeared to be busy studying the books on the shelves that covered the entire wall area on either side of the small stone fireplace.

The drawer, as he had expected, was empty. ‘He wouldn’t have moved it to a different place?’ Arthur asked as he pushed it shut once more and locked it.

‘I... I don’t know.’ Antonella looked bewildered by the question.

‘May we take a look around?’ Jane asked.

‘Yes, of course. I’ll just go and see what time dinner will be ready and get things sorted.’ Antonella glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. ‘It’s already almost dark outside and the rest of the blackout needs to be put up.’

‘Thank you. We promise not to disturb anything,’ Arthur assured her before Antonella hurried from the room.

Once the door had closed behind her Jane turned to Arthur. ‘It seems you were right to be concerned.’

‘It appears so. Sanford was clearly very worried, and it seems rightly so.’ Arthur studied the desk before him, opening and closing drawers,

probing the interiors carefully.

‘Do you think he hid the journal somewhere?’ Jane turned her attention back to the bookshelves, scanning each one for anything that might look out of place. The smallest thing might be a clue to work out what had gone on.

Arthur completed his examination of the desk and turned to the filing cabinet. Jane knew that Antonella had probably already been over everything with a fine-tooth comb. Despite her grief she appeared to be a very methodical woman.

‘Anything yet?’ Arthur asked as he sifted through the papers inside the cabinet.

‘Nothing that leaps out at me.’ Everything appeared to be in line, no suggestion of anything being hidden behind the neat rows of books on engineering and geology and art.

The shelves, like the desk, were tidy and all in order and yet something kept niggling at her as she looked at the titles of the books.

‘Arthur, come here for a moment.’ She frowned at the shelves.

He put back the blank crossword grid he had been holding, closed the cabinet and came to stand beside her. ‘What is it?’

‘I don’t know but there is something not quite right on these shelves and I can’t work out what it is.’ The discrepancy was odd. Here and there a book was not quite in the right place. It was filed in its series but out of order. Not on every shelf and not every series but the pattern disturbed her.

‘Wait.’ Arthur looked at the shelves, then went back to the cabinet to pick up the blank grid sheet from the files. The one he had been holding in his hand a moment ago.

He held the grid up before the shelves and squinted at the pattern. ‘He left a code.’

Jane’s pulse speeded as her companion took out his wireframed spectacles from his pocket to study the books before him.

‘Pencil.’ Arthur held out his hand like a surgeon demanding a scalpel. Jane plucked a pencil from the blue-glazed pottery jar on the desk and passed it to him, biting back the urge to add a ‘please’ onto his request.

Arthur’s attention was wholly on the shelves now as he made marks and scribbles on the grid sheet. He seemed to be using the number of the volume in the series and a link with the colour of the cover to determine the position of the scribbles on the sheet, the first letter of the book title going into the appropriate gap.

Jane knew better than to interrupt him when he was focused on a task. Instead, she leaned against the desk and watched as he muttered, paced, crossed out and corrected.

‘Well?’ she asked when she could see the grid appeared complete.

‘Look behind panel.’ Jane frowned. ‘What panel? Where?’

‘That must be where he’s put the journal. Whatever Sanford had uncovered he knew that he could be killed and whoever has killed him is clever enough to try to find and destroy whatever proof Sanford had collected,’ Arthur said.

‘But why not come forward with whatever he had discovered?’ Jane stared at Arthur’s scribbles on the crossword grid.

‘He clearly either didn’t have enough data to render his findings conclusive or he didn’t know who else was involved.’ Arthur folded the grid up into neat and tidy squares before slipping it inside his jacket pocket. He removed his glasses and put them back in the case.

‘Is Antonella at risk?’ Jane asked. If whoever had murdered her brother thought that Sanford’s sister knew something, she might well be a target too.

Before Arthur could reply, the study door opened, and Antonella herself came back in. ‘Dinner will be ready in about fifteen minutes. Did you discover anything?’ She looked at them anxiously.

‘No, nothing at all,’ Arthur said.

Antonella’s shoulders drooped. ‘Oh well, I didn’t really think you would, but still... Um, Jane, would you like to freshen up before dinner?’

‘Thank you, that’s so kind.’ Jane accepted the offer and wondered if her hostess wanted her out of the way so she could speak privately to Arthur.

Antonella directed her up the polished oak staircase to the upstairs bathroom. Jane waited on the landing until she saw Arthur and Antonella enter the sitting room, before taking the opportunity to do some snooping.

Moving quickly and carefully she ignored the bathroom door and tried another one further along the landing. From the faint scent of perfume and the look of the dressing set, she assumed the room to be Antonella’s.

The curtains had already been drawn to comply with the blackout, so she only had the glimmer of light from the landing to assist her as she investigated the various doors. The last door she opened was the one she wanted. Sanford’s room.

She risked snapping on a lamp and looked around. The bed was neatly made with a dark-blue coverlet. The professor's glasses were still in their leatherette case on the bedside table with a book on electrical installation. She glanced around; she had been hoping that perhaps there might have been wood panelling on the walls as there often was in houses of this age and style. Instead, the walls were covered with faded William Morris strawberry thief print paper.

After a swift look inside a few of the empty drawers and cupboards she snapped off the lamp, closed the door and headed to the bathroom. She just had time to ostentatiously flush the toilet and emerge onto the landing as Antonella came out into the hall.

'Jane, would you care for a drink before dinner, or have you had enough sherry for one day?' Antonella asked.

Jane came down the stairs to meet her hostess. 'I think you had better preserve what sherry you have left. It's not easy to come by these days and you have been so generous to us already today.'

'I suppose you do have a point. We were fortunate that we had quite a generous stock in the house before the start of the war. Everything is in such short supply now,' Antonella said.

Arthur wandered out to stand behind Antonella. His gaze met with Jane's, and she knew he had guessed what she had been doing upstairs.

'Let's go through and have dinner. I know you both need to leave soon if you are to get the last train to Devon.' Antonella led the way through to a rather chilly dining room. The circular table was set with a white cloth.

Once they were seated, and the first course of somewhat watery-looking beef broth had been served and the maid had withdrawn, Antonella looked at her guests. 'So will you both help me to find out who killed Sanford?' she asked.

CHAPTER THREE

Arthur coughed delicately. 'It may not be so simple.' It seemed to him that what Antonella was asking might prove very difficult and deadly. Sanford's murderer probably believed they had escaped detection. If anyone started poking around and asking questions then it could be very risky.

Antonella bit her lip and looked down at her soup.

'What Arthur means is that we would have to consider why your brother was killed and that might well put you, and potentially us, in some danger,' Jane explained.

'It seems to me, from what you've told us, that Sanford must have discovered something that involves the storage facility at Westwood Quarry.' Arthur arranged his napkin neatly on his lap and started his soup.

'I don't know what that could be though. We're a small group, as you know – you met pretty well everyone this afternoon,' Antonella said.

'It could be any number of things. You said that the other half of the tunnels is being used for the manufacture of armaments.' Jane as usual had already eaten her soup and she rested the spoon down in the empty plain white china dish. She hoped the second course might prove more substantial since no bread and butter had been forthcoming, and she was quite hungry.

'You think his death may be more to do with the Enfield factory than the art storage?' Antonella looked doubtful.

'It's a possibility that we can't exclude. Ideally, we would need to visit the storage site ourselves and see how everything fits together.' Jane poured some water from the jug on the table into a plain water glass.

‘This would be difficult to arrange without arousing suspicion. After all, these are secure sites. We would need to obtain special permission and a reason for being there. It’s not as if we can turn up like a couple of tourists for a day sightseeing,’ Arthur agreed.

‘Then what should I do?’ Antonella asked.

‘For now, do nothing. Try and pretend that you have no suspicions of anything untoward. Behave as if your brother’s death was unexpected but explainable and keep your eyes and ears open for anything suspicious,’ Jane advised.

Arthur finished his soup at the same time as Antonella, and a few minutes later the maid came and removed their dishes. She replaced them with plates containing a sliver of fish in a thick white sauce with creamed potatoes and slices of carrot.

Once they were alone again the conversation continued.

‘I agree with Jane. Act normally but keep observing everyone. Make notes of anything at all that strikes you as unusual no matter how insignificant it might be. Above all, be careful,’ Arthur said.

‘We will see what we can discover from a distance. If you need to tell us something or you do notice something unusual then you must let us know.’ Jane looked at Antonella, who was aimlessly prodding her fish with the tip of her knife.

‘I suggest you use a code word. You don’t know who may be listening in on your calls or monitoring your post,’ Arthur said. After all, whatever Sanford had discovered was something someone had been prepared to kill for.

Antonella looked a little frightened by his warning, but she gave a brief nod. ‘I understand.’

By the time they were finishing their dessert of tinned peaches and condensed milk they had agreed on a password. They refused the offer of coffee since time was short, and they couldn’t afford to miss the train.

It wasn’t until several hours later when they were finally back at Half Moon Manor that they were finally free to discuss everything in relative safety. Jane looked tired as she cuddled Marmaduke on the comfortable couch in the drawing room. There were shadows of fatigue under her eyes as she sipped the mug of Ovaltine laced with brandy that Benson, his faithful manservant, had suggested they drink before bed.

Benson had listened to their account of the funeral and its aftermath with his usual calm demeanour. He had already been made aware of why they were both attending before they had left for Westwood.

‘Will you be speaking to the brigadier, Miss Jane?’ Benson asked as he placed a large glass ashtray near her elbow.

‘I already gave him some information when I asked for leave to come and see Arthur. I didn’t want to raise it as a possible case until we had more information. I think, though, that I shall need to inform him of everything we have discovered so far when I return to London.’ Jane stirred in her seat and Marmaduke placed a heavy ginger paw on her knee as if to hold her still.

‘This is going to be difficult, Jane. What are your feelings about why Sanford was murdered? Do you think it is a national security matter?’ Arthur couldn’t see any other reason for his former professor’s murder.

Antonella had not given any personal reasons that she knew of for someone to take such drastic action. From all the precautions Sanford had taken by sending him the coded cryptic crossword asking for help and the message concealed in the books in his study, there had to be something important that had led to his death. He believed it had something to do with the nature of the store and the importance and value of what was held there.

Jane drained her drink. ‘Yes, I do. There have been rumours about moving the art treasures and which pieces should go where. Even the crown jewels have been subject to discussion, although obviously my security access doesn’t extend that far.’ She gave a wry smile as she put down her mug. ‘I’ll talk to the brigadier and see what I can discover from the museums in London.’

Arthur nodded and sipped his own drink. ‘Thank you, Jane. I’ll stay in touch with Antonella and with the other members of the Crossword Compilers’ Club.’

Jane gave her beloved cat one last cuddle before bed while Arthur watched in silent dismay as a small cloud of marmalade-coloured fur was deposited on his sofa.

Jane and Marmaduke departed for London immediately after breakfast the following morning.

‘What are your plans on the matter, sir?’ Benson asked when he carried Arthur’s mid-morning coffee into the study.

‘I was just plotting out what I know from Antonella and a contact I have at the National Gallery about the movement of some of the art pieces that are being relocated.’ Arthur had pinned a map onto a corkboard on the office wall near his desk.

Using a ruler and some coloured pencils he had made a number of marks on the map. A cluster of blue marks were centred on London, red marks near Westwood and green marks on a site in Wales. Scattered across the map were what at first appeared to be small spots of red, blue and green.

Benson set down Arthur’s coffee on the desk and studied the map, his countenance impassive. ‘I take it that it is the red marks we are interested in?’ he asked.

‘Yes, the pieces taken from London have been stored in various country houses, but are now being moved on again. Some because the areas originally chosen are too close to potential bombing targets. Some because the storage conditions are not ideal and the works are being damaged and others because their security is not suitable,’ Arthur said.

‘I see. It would appear there is a great many items to move,’ Benson said.

‘Yes, a lot to keep track of and any kind of operation like this means something could fall through the cracks in some way.’ Arthur frowned as he looked at his handiwork. ‘There is something else that’s been bothering me and I wondered if you might be able to assist?’

Benson looked unsurprised by the question. ‘Of course, sir, what do you wish me to do?’

‘Those tablets that the professor had which were mentioned at the inquest. Antonella said the label was torn but the name was Doctor Ver... something or other of Harley Street. Can you try and narrow it down and do some poking about? It would be interesting to know if such a doctor exists and if he ever saw Sanford, or if he was paid by someone to make out that prescription.’ Arthur’s gaze met Benson’s.

‘Of course, I shall do my best. I believe the local library has a useful directory which may be helpful.’ The manservant slipped out of the study, leaving Arthur to his work.

Benson had not been gone long when the black Bakelite telephone on the desk rang.

‘Arthur? It’s Lawrence Coombs, we met yesterday at Professor Watkins’s funeral. Although, of course, we have known each other via the

Crossword Compilers' Club for some time now.' Lawrence's voice sounded slightly hesitant.

'Yes, of course, you were present with your sister, Lady Tolland, yesterday.' Arthur wondered what Lawrence wanted.

'I wanted to speak to you about Antonella. I know you and the professor were close and obviously Antonella is likely to confide in you. It's just that I'm worried about her,' Lawrence said.

Arthur had noticed Lawrence's attentions to Antonella at the funeral. 'She is obviously very upset over Sanford's death. I think the unexpected nature of it hasn't helped.' He couldn't help but be curious about why Lawrence had called him. Was it just concern for Antonella because he was fond of her or was this more in the nature of a fishing exercise? Perhaps to see if Antonella had voiced any of her concerns about her brother's death over dinner.

'Did she tell you the coroner said Sanford's heart gave out?' Lawrence said.

'So I understand. I wasn't aware he had any issues with his health though. She said you had been working together a lot recently. Did he ever say anything to you?' Arthur parried the question back onto the other man.

'No, nothing at all. He never mentioned his health. No breathlessness or chest pain or anything. I can see why Antonella is distressed.' Lawrence sounded thoughtful.

'When did you last see Sanford?' Arthur asked.

'The day before he died. I've been assisting with the work in the facility. Dashed leg of mine means I'm limited with some of the things I can do but at least I can help with the, um, technology side of things. I'm an electrical engineer, you see, so Sanford and I often collaborated as the equipment is quite specialised,' Lawrence explained.

'Antonella said Sanford had been assisting on the electrical circuitry. He was found in an unusual spot I understand.' Arthur, like Lawrence, had no wish to be explicit on a telephone call. One never knew who might be listening.

'That's correct.'

'I presume he was well when you saw him?' Arthur asked.

'Yes, he seemed perfectly fine. Just that he had been a bit tetchy lately. I put it down to the strain of the war. You know, he quarrelled with me over a

blueprint and snapped at Betsy and Dickie. Other than that, everything was as normal.' Lawrence sounded thoughtful.

'I see.'

'May I ask, Antonella, well, she didn't mention being frightened of anything, did she, when you dined with her last night? She's been, well, a bit jumpy lately,' Lawrence asked.

'Frightened? No, not really. I think perhaps Sanford's death coming so suddenly may have scared her and, of course, she will now be alone in the house. I don't know if her maid or housekeeper lives in. She did propose that Jane and I return to stay with her soon for a little while.' This was something of a white lie, but he knew that Antonella would not object if it meant getting to the bottom of Sanford's death.

'That might not be a bad idea if you could. I've been worried about her. Marietta did suggest she come and stay with us, but she declined the offer. She said she needed to face up to things,' Lawrence said.

'That sounds like Antonella. She was always very strong-minded as I'm sure you know. Sanford will be much missed. His crosswords were a work of genius at times.' Arthur wanted to discover exactly what Lawrence might have received from Sanford before his death.

'Indeed, dashed tricky some of them. I liked the new grid he was trying but the clues seemed quite simplistic with the last one he sent me. I compared notes with Marietta and we both agreed it was a little unlike Sanford.'

'Perhaps, although I suspect it was the layout he was interested in testing rather than the clues. This idea of an extra layer of complexity contained within a puzzle to give one final answer if completed correctly.' This confirmed to Arthur that the puzzle he had received had been very different than the one sent to Marietta and Lawrence. The one he had received had been tricky and the answers when read in the new grid had spelled out the message he had shared with Jane.

In danger. Need help. Trust no one.

His former mentor had been a pragmatic, practical man, not given to being fanciful. The danger had been real, not imagined, and Arthur had not been able to act in time to prevent the professor's death.

* * *

After ensuring her cat was safe inside her flat, Jane headed across London to her office at Whitehall. She needed to speak to the brigadier to let him know everything they had discovered in Westwood so far. She also wanted permission to continue investigating and to make a plan granting herself and Arthur access into the operation to relocate the art treasures.

Stephen, the brigadier's secretary, frowned when she arrived unannounced in the outer office.

'Jane, I thought you were away for another day or so. Something about a friend's funeral?' His gaze skimmed her usual office wear of smart heather-green tweed suit and neat white blouse.

'Yes, that's correct. I need to speak to the brigadier. Is he in?' She had no time for making small talk with Stephen.

His mother, Rosemary, was a close friend of Jane's own mother, Elsa. Jane considered this a very bad thing since Elsa was constantly pushing Jane towards Stephen as an ideal boyfriend. Even worse, Stephen himself was eager to pursue her, and she had been forced to make it very clear that she was not interested on several occasions.

Stephen might be conventionally considered good-looking. He certainly turned the heads of most of the girls in the typing pool, but he held no particular attraction for Jane. She was far too busy for any of that nonsense, and she had her own more private reasons for not wanting any kind of romantic attachments. Something from her past that her mother and no one else knew, although she suspected the brigadier might have a notion.

'He is rather busy, Jane. You can't just keep turning up and expecting him to see you without an appointment. He does have a schedule.' Stephen tapped his fingers on the leather-bound diary on the top of his desk to emphasise his point.

Jane gave him a tight smile and rapped on the brigadier's door. At the sound of his stentorian bellow to enter she flashed another more brilliant smile at Stephen and stepped into the inner office.

'Jane, m'dear, I take it you found something at that funeral?' The brigadier placed his fountain pen down on the blotter and looked at her with a shrewd, assessing gaze.

What Stephen and no one else knew was that Jane, Arthur and Benson had a secret role within the department. The Secret Detective Agency

existed to look at crimes which could impact national security but needed a particular combination of talents that came from an unexpected source.

‘Yes, sir.’

The brigadier gestured to her to sit. If war had not been declared the brigadier would have probably been retired by now. Instead, his experience and wisdom meant he played an important role liaising with the prime minister, the cabinet and other branches of the armed forces.

‘Very well, tell me everything.’ The brigadier templed his fingers together and listened carefully as she outlined what they had discovered.

‘Hmm, it sounds as if Professor Watkins was wise to be cautious, but he clearly was not cautious enough. You and Arthur suspect his death is linked to the movement of the art treasures in some way?’

‘It would seem to be the most likely reason,’ Jane agreed.

‘Mr Churchill has made his feelings clear both publicly and privately on the matter of protecting the contents of our museums and galleries. There is widespread looting abroad. Galleries raided, private collections ransacked and appropriated. Artwork burned and destroyed.’ Brigadier Remmington-Blythe rose from his seat and strode about his office, hands linked behind his back as he spoke.

Jane waited patiently in her seat, used to her employer’s methods of organising his ideas.

‘You, Arthur and Mr Benson clearly must investigate this further. However, I can see it will be difficult, not to mention dangerous. You will need access to the storage facility but without arousing suspicions, or it will have to be done in secret.’ The brigadier paused in his pacing and swung around to look at her.

His piercing gaze appeared to be assessing her and how they could manage what seemed to be an almost impossible task.

‘Very well, leave it with me. I suggest you return to Devon and await further instructions. Keep me informed of anything new. I shall make some arrangements and be in touch with you and Arthur.’

Jane took his instructions as a dismissal and got up from her chair.

‘And be very careful, Jane,’ he said as her hand was on the door handle.

‘Yes, sir.’

CHAPTER FOUR

Stephen was waiting for her when she emerged back into the outer office.

‘Really, Jane, one of these days you will push your luck too far. I suppose you are going off on some wild goose chase again, leaving the rest of us to manage your work here?’ Stephen lolled back in his seat, a flinty expression in his eyes.

Jane knew he must have some inkling that her absences from the office were not all as mundane as the brigadier had claimed.

‘What can I say, Stephen? My work is complex and I’m invaluable. I’ll prepare the folders for you to manage my cases while I’m away. Everything is running smoothly at the moment, and I’ll brief you before I go.’ She smiled at him.

‘I suppose too that you’ll be working with Cilento again?’ Stephen snapped as he leaned forward.

‘I work with a good many people as you well know and Arthur is a key member of my team.’ Jane had no intention of confirming or denying anything. She suspected that Stephen resented her friendship with Arthur. She also knew her mother didn’t approve. ‘Anyway, got to go. Things to do.’

She telephoned Arthur as soon as she returned to her office. ‘I have permission from the brigadier to return to Devon tomorrow. We are to await instructions.’

‘We’ll be expecting you and Marmaduke,’ Arthur confirmed.

* * *

Lady Tolland had telephoned Arthur earlier the same afternoon. 'My brother said he spoke to you this morning about Antonella.' Her voice, imperious and sharp, echoed down the line.

'Yes, he mentioned that he was concerned for her welfare since her brother's death.' Arthur kept his own tone bland.

'Lawrence and I are both worried about her. Sanford's death has been the most frightful shock. I wish she would agree to come and stay with us for a little while. I don't suppose you could try to persuade her?' Marietta suggested.

'Antonella seems set on remaining at home. She has staff and I do see her point about needing to adjust to her new circumstances. Jane and I will probably be returning to the area to spend some time with her very soon so please don't worry too much. Antonella will reach out to you I'm sure if she wants any help or support,' Arthur said.

He wondered why both Marietta and her brother were so determined to winkle Antonella from her home.

'Of course, it's just that for a woman alone in times like these, well, sometimes company and protection can be welcome,' Marietta said.

Arthur thought of Jane and Marmaduke living alone in London, at risk from bombing raids almost every day. 'It's very kind of you to think of Antonella in that way. I'm sure she will miss Sanford a great deal.'

'We all will. I used to look forward to receiving his notes and puzzles. Lately too, working with him on the logistics for our project, I felt as if we had grown closer.' There was a slightly different note to Marietta's voice now.

'I know what you mean. He was a valued friend. I always enjoyed the challenges set by his puzzles.' Arthur was careful not to sound as if he was trying too hard to draw information from her.

'His last puzzle was rather simplistic I felt, but his new grid was interesting. He seemed to feel he could use it in a different way to set a message in the bold lined squares. Another layer almost,' Marietta said.

Arthur's pulse sped up. Had Lady Tolland received the same message he had about Sanford being in danger?

'Yes, that was different,' he responded cautiously.

‘The tortoise beats the hare indeed. Such nonsense to tie in with that last clue about Archimedes and gravity.’ Marietta gave a faint chuckle.

Arthur breathed out quietly. There may have been a message in Marietta’s puzzle, but it was definitely not the same as the more direct one that he had received.

‘He was always fond of his ancient Greek tales,’ Arthur confirmed.

‘We may expect to see you and your friend, Miss Treen, again shortly then?’ Marietta asked brightly.

‘It’s very possible. I think it all depends on whether Jane can be spared from her current secretarial duties, although she is owed a considerable amount of leave. She is often dispatched at short notice to all kinds of places around the country too.’ Arthur thought it wise to lay a foundation ready to explain their presence back at Antonella’s home. He was sure it wouldn’t take long for the brigadier to find a way to get them back to Westwood.

‘If you do return you must all come to the hall for dinner. Some company would be most pleasant. I do miss the social events we used to hold before the war, although Lawrence is organising a fundraising event at the moment. An afternoon concert or something next weekend if you are back by then. It’s in aid of the convalescent home in Bristol for injured troops. A worthy cause and close to his heart. I believe he has even secured Elsa Macintyre to sing. If you and your friend are visiting at the time you may wish to come along.’ Lady Tolland made it sound like more of a command than a request.

‘Thank you. I’m unsure of our exact plans at the moment but I’ll let Jane know. She is very fond of music.’ Arthur had no intention of telling Marietta who Jane’s mother was. The connection was something which both Jane and her mother preferred to keep quiet. If Jane suspected that she might run into her mother at Westwood she might well change her mind and try to stay in London.

Benson returned from his mission at the library in the village a little after tea. He came straight to the sitting room and closed the door. Arthur set his newspaper aside and turned to his trusted manservant.

‘How did you get on with your search? Was there a directory?’

Benson nodded. ‘The librarian was most helpful. I let her believe that you were looking for medical advice for yourself.’

Arthur knew that most of the village knew that his health issues with his chest were why he had not enlisted.

‘I believe the prescription found on Professor Watkins may have been issued by a Doctor Veraint. He has a consulting room just off Harley Street. I took the liberty of telephoning his secretary from the public telephone on the high street,’ Benson said.

‘What did she say? I presume you asked if the professor was a patient?’ Arthur asked.

‘I said I had been recommended to Doctor Veraint by a patient of his and gave the professor’s name. The young lady who took the call said she had no record of a patient with that name. However, she said that sometimes Doctor Veraint saw patients at the hospital and would issue prescriptions from there,’ Benson explained.

‘Hmm, so no record of Sanford seeing this doctor at his consulting rooms.’ Arthur was unsurprised by this. He doubted too that Sanford would have gone to London to a hospital unless his own GP in the village had recommended him to do so. Antonella hadn’t mentioned anything like this happening, so it still seemed to be something of a mystery.

‘Thank you, Benson, you have been most thorough as always. Jane has spoken to the brigadier by the way, so please let the staff know that she and Marmaduke will be returning here tomorrow.’ Arthur looked at Benson.

‘Very good, sir. I presume we are to await more instructions from Whitehall?’ he asked as he prepared to leave the room to tell Arthur’s cook that Jane would be returning.

‘I believe so. I expect we may be visiting Miss Watkins again shortly too.’ Arthur thought it best to wait for Jane to come back before contacting Antonella.

* * *

Jane, accompanied by a very disgruntled Marmaduke, arrived by taxi the following afternoon.

‘Poor Marmy, it’s been so hard on him with all this toing and froing.’ Jane handed her cat’s wicker travelling cage to Benson.

Marmaduke glared balefully at the manservant through his one good eye as Jane paid for the taxi and obtained a receipt for the department.

‘Quite so, Miss Jane. I’ll take him through to the kitchens. I believe there are some sardines waiting for him.’ Benson carried the cat inside the house while Arthur came out to help her with her case and bag.

‘I’ve requested a pot of coffee for you in the sitting room. Come through and I’ll tell you what’s been happening while you’ve been in London.’ Arthur took her luggage to the foot of the stairs. No doubt Benson would carry it up to the guest room when he had settled her pet in the kitchen.

She took off her hat and coat and followed Arthur into the cosy room. A fire blazed in the grate, fighting off the late afternoon chill which had started to descend as she and Marmaduke had left the station. The train had been crowded and stuffy, full of troops all on their way to a training camp.

Arthur sank down in his usual seat on one side of the fire and Jane took her place opposite him. It was a relief to sink into the comfortable chair after the wearying train journey. She adjusted the plump cushions behind her back and relaxed in the heat from the fire. Benson carried in a tray containing a chrome coffee pot, matching jug of steamed milk and a plate with a couple of biscuits along with the cups and saucers.

He poured Jane her usual black coffee before adding a generous amount of steamed milk to the coffee in Arthur’s cup.

‘Will you join us, Benson?’ Jane asked before the manservant could perform his usual self-effacing disappearing act. ‘This new mission will concern all of us.’

Benson stationed himself behind the sofa. Jane knew better by now than to ask him to take a seat. She told them about her conversation with the brigadier and that he would send instructions soon. In return Arthur and Benson reported on the telephone conversations and on what Benson had discovered at the library.

‘I think you will need to talk to Antonella again sooner rather than later. Check that she is still all right and see if she would be amenable to us coming to visit shortly,’ Jane said.

‘There is one more thing you should know. Something which affects you personally.’ Arthur’s voice held an apologetic note which immediately set Jane’s alarms tingling.

‘Oh?’ She looked at him as colour crept along his cheekbones and he scratched the side of his nose without meeting her gaze.

‘It seems that Lawrence Coombs is organising a benefit concert this weekend for a convalescent home in Bristol.’ He paused and looked at her. ‘Your mother is performing.’

Jane had been about to take a sip of her coffee. Instead, she moved the cup away from her lips. ‘Wonderful. I take it that Lady Tolland and her brother are unaware of Elsa’s connection to me?’

Arthur nodded, his expression indicating that for once he had picked up on the sarcasm in the word ‘wonderful’.

‘So, if we are at Westwood for the weekend we shall probably encounter Miss Elsa?’ Benson’s expression was as impassive as usual, but Jane knew he had a fondness for her mother.

It was the only chink she had ever found in Benson’s armour, and his kindly feelings towards her mother always baffled her.

‘I don’t think we can avoid it. Lady Tolland has already expressed her desire for us to attend the benefit event should we be in the area,’ Arthur confirmed.

‘Do you believe Lady Tolland wants us to return to Westwood?’ Jane asked.

Arthur considered the question. ‘It seems strange to me that both Lady Tolland and her brother telephoned today expressing concern for Antonella. It felt as if they were probing about something, something to do with Sanford’s death. It sounded too as though they had not received the same crossword from Sanford that I received. The grid was the same and the responses which led to a hidden message were there, but the message itself was different. Very different.’

‘You think they believe that one member of the Compilers’ Club may have received a special message from the professor?’ Jane asked after taking a sip of coffee.

‘I think there are people who know there was something wrong about Sanford’s death and are worried in case he left a clue somewhere.’ Arthur set his own cup back on its saucer. ‘Sanford was a very cautious, clever man. If he sensed he was in danger then they would surmise that he would have left clues. As indeed, we know that he did.’

‘Not just clues but also that journal Antonella mentioned. Then there was the mention of a panel. Where is it do you think?’ Jane asked. ‘Do you believe that he anticipated you would decipher his message on those shelves? Is it something he felt would have meaning for you personally?’

‘I don’t know. I think he would have known that Antonella would show me into the study, and it is the kind of thing he may well have predicated I would see.’ Arthur looked thoughtful.

Jane picked up the coffee pot and waved it in his direction.

‘No, thank you, Jane, you finish it, by all means.’ He declined her offer and she refilled her cup.

‘I checked the upstairs of the house and there was no panelling of any kind up there. Obviously, I didn’t check the floorboards as I had to be quick, but somehow I don’t think that was what he meant,’ Jane said. ‘Unless you know somewhere he may have gone regularly that might fit the bill. Otherwise, that leaves the tunnels where his body was found. An electrical panel or something like that, perhaps?’ she suggested.

‘We know he had been working in that area. If he did manage to hide something there then it’s in a restricted area. You said the brigadier would have orders for us soon?’ Arthur looked at her.

‘I told him that we would need a way to gain access to the area without causing too much suspicion. It’s going to arouse some no matter how he does it. I can’t see a way to avoid it, but I think it must be done.’ Jane had been thinking about the problem on the train.

‘I am certain the brigadier will come up with a solution. He has the ear of many important people,’ Benson observed.

Jane nodded. She knew he was right, but she still felt uneasy. She felt even more uneasy now she knew that her mother was going to be around Westwood while they were there.

CHAPTER FIVE

The telephone rang the next morning as they were finishing breakfast. Jane's plate was already empty, and she rose from her seat ready to see who was calling so early.

'Benson will get it.' Arthur calmly applied a precious scrape of butter to his toast.

Benson put his head around the dining-room door. 'The brigadier wishes to speak to you, Miss Jane.'

Jane placed her linen napkin on the table and hurried out of the room to Arthur's study.

'Good morning, sir.' She perched on the leather seat at Arthur's desk, taking care to hold the receiver away from her ear. She knew the brigadier's habit of bellowing into the telephone all too well.

'Jane, m'dear, I've been giving our problem some thought. I've had a word with a few other people.' He paused briefly and she knew he was choosing his words with care in case anyone else might be listening in on the line.

'It is a knotty problem,' she prompted.

'I think the best way to tackle matters is that you go in openly. Because of where our person was found it raises questions. Questions which people in high places wish answered, and reassurances given. You and Arthur will be granted clearance to examine the operation closely and to ensure its security. Arthur can assist with the technology, while you audit the arrangements. We believe the factory is secure so you will concentrate on the other facility,' the brigadier said.

‘I see.’ Jane could see the advantages of his decision but also the potential problems.

‘It does expose you both to risk, but it also gives some protection. If, as you believe, something serious is awry there is a risk of a cover-up, but I believe you and Arthur can see through that.’ The brigadier sounded confident.

‘We will do our best, sir.’ Jane’s heart beat a little faster.

‘I have every confidence in you. The stakes are higher than you know with this one, Jane, so be careful. Report back to me through our other channels.’ He ended the call.

She replaced the receiver back on its stand. It seemed they were definitely heading back to Westwood sooner rather than later.

Arthur was sipping his tea when she returned to the dining table.

‘Your coffee is going cold, Jane.’ Arthur moved her cup and saucer closer to her as she sat down. ‘I take it we have our instructions?’

Jane nodded. ‘Indeed. The brigadier is arranging for us to be given positions to scrutinise the operation at Westwood. I am to audit the security, and you can assist Lawrence with the technology.’

‘Only in the facility storing the artworks?’ Arthur asked, peering owlishly at her over the top of his teacup.

‘Yes. He said they are happy with the factory security.’ She could see he had immediately grasped both the good and bad points of the brigadier’s plan.

The telephone rang again before he could say anything further.

Benson reappeared at the dining-room door. ‘Miss Watkins is asking for you, sir. She said it’s regarding Oxford.’

Arthur stood and went out to his study. Jane finished her coffee and waited for him to return. Oxford had been the code word they had agreed upon if something was wrong.

He was back a few minutes later. ‘Antonella has invited us to come and stay with her. Sooner rather than later.’ He retook his place at the table.

‘Has something happened?’ Jane could see he was mulling something over in his mind. She doubted that news of the brigadier’s plan to appoint Jane in a supervisory role and the technology role for Arthur would have reached Antonella and the other curators just yet.

‘Antonella thinks someone was prowling about outside her house last night. She heard a strange noise in the garden. At first, she thought it may

have been a fox or a pheasant or something. Then this morning she found footprints in the flower bed outside the study window, and she thinks someone tried to force the catch. The frame shows signs of damage.'

'Good heavens, has she informed the police?' Jane asked.

'Yes, she called them first thing and once they had gone, she rang here. Her gardener is going to fit stronger catches to the doors and windows today. She is determined to remain in her home,' Arthur said.

'That is brave of her. Did you tell her about our appointment to return to Westwood?' Jane fiddled with the hem of the napkin she had dropped on the tabletop earlier.

'I said that we had received a message from Whitehall. Sanford's death, although apparently from natural causes, has caused concern in London. They wanted the art treasure transfers to be completed as soon as possible and security reviewed at the site. Since that is your field and you had met the curators your name had been put forward. I also told her that Sanford's death compromised the issues they had been experiencing with the technology, so I was to assist Lawrence.' The corners of Arthur's mouth curled upwards in a careful smile.

'Well done.' Jane approved of his handling of the story.

'It will be interesting to see how people take our reappearance in Westwood so soon and our new roles,' he said.

'It may give us an indication of who could have been responsible for Professor Watkins's death depending on their reactions,' Jane agreed.

Arthur had arranged with Antonella for them to arrive later that afternoon providing they could pack and take the train in time. Jane decided it would be better for Marmaduke to remain at Half Moon Manor where she could telephone every day to check on him. She knew that Arthur's staff would take good care of him and it was unfair to subject him to more travelling. Her cat was not overfond of his travelling basket.

She suspected that this decision to leave her cat behind was something of a relief to Arthur. His asthma didn't respond well to close proximity to Marmaduke. It would also place an encumbrance on Antonella at a time when she was mourning her brother's loss if she took her pet with her.

Her own packing didn't take long since she had only removed the items from her case that she had used the previous evening. Benson, as usual, was the model of efficiency and they were all soon crammed onto another crowded train on their way back to Antonella's home.

Taxis were unsurprisingly in short supply when they reached their destination. Jane and Arthur remained in the station waiting room with their luggage while Benson tried to find transport to Antonella's house.

Daylight had started to fade, and the earlier spring sunshine had given way to a sharp chill which nipped at Jane's ankles.

'I asked Antonella not to say anything to anyone about the prowler at her home. Obviously, the police know since she filed the report, but I felt it best that anyone else connected with the facility remained unaware,' Arthur murmured as Jane finished her cigarette.

She blew out the last puff of smoke, taking care to direct it away from her companion, before dropping the glowing butt on the floor and extinguishing it with her foot.

'I think that was wise. Lady Tolland and her brother would no doubt use an incident like that to try and pressure her into staying with them.' She picked up the cigarette end and placed it in a nearby bin.

Benson returned. 'I have managed to obtain transport.' He helped Jane to gather the luggage and they filed out to a dilapidated black car. 'The fuel shortage has made it difficult to ensure sufficient transport locally,' Benson said apologetically as he took Jane's case and added it to the small pile of luggage in the boot.

'I'm just grateful we don't have to walk all the way to Miss Watkins's house.' Jane slipped onto the saggy rear seat next to Arthur.

She could feel the tension emanating from him as Benson took his place next to the elderly driver and gave the address. He was clearly concerned about Antonella and she didn't blame him. This latest incident, so soon after the professor's funeral, was very worrying. And he and Jane were undoubtedly headed towards potential danger rather than away from it.

The front door of the house flew open before the taxi driver had switched off the engine. Antonella had clearly been waiting for their arrival.

'Arthur, Jane, I am so glad to see you.' She flew down the front step to greet them.

'Thank you for asking us to stay. It's most kind.' Jane picked up her case while Benson took care of the other bags.

She wanted to give the driver the impression that this was just a normal visit. You could never be too certain about who was watching or listening these days.

‘You have met Benson before, I think.’ Arthur indicated his manservant as he collected his medicines bag from the taxi driver.

‘Oh yes, of course, welcome, all of you. Do come inside out of the cold. It’s grown quite chilly this last hour or so.’ Antonella led the way into the hall.

Their hostess gave directions about which rooms they were to take and once the luggage had been dispersed, she set about ensuring the blackout was put into place and the lamps lit.

‘My housekeeper has gone home for the evening. I asked her to leave our supper in the oven for later,’ Antonella confided when they were all gathered together once more in the sitting room.

A fire crackled cheerfully in the tiled grate and the peach silk shaded lamps cast a pleasant glow around the room. Antonella looked tired and anxious as she wrapped her navy cardigan around her thin frame.

Arthur took the armchair opposite Antonella, Jane sat on the sofa. The room was reassuringly warm and comfortable after the journey. Benson had opted to remain upstairs unpacking and preparing Arthur’s medical equipment for his evening dose of medication.

‘Now, tell us again what happened last night. You said you heard a prowler?’ Jane took Antonella through the events of the previous evening. Antonella repeated what she had said to Arthur.

‘The police came and made a report after they examined the window. They seemed to think this kind of thing happened after there had been a funeral sometimes. People notice a cortège and come to see if the house is empty. Opportunist thieves, the constable said.’ Antonella shivered as she spoke, despite the fire.

‘And you haven’t told anyone else about the incident? No one you work with?’ Arthur asked.

Antonella shook her head. ‘No, of course my housekeeper was here when the constable came and no doubt my neighbours may have seen him arrive, but I did as you asked and refrained from telling anyone at the facility.’

‘Both Lawrence Coombs and Lady Tolland have contacted me since I returned home.’ Arthur looked at her.

‘I don’t understand. Why? Is it to do with what happened to Sanford?’ Antonella asked.

‘They said they were concerned for your safety and wanted to know when Jane and I intended to return here or indeed if we intended to return. Lawrence asked if I thought you were afraid,’ Arthur said.

Antonella’s grey eyes widened and Jane could see the other woman interpreting the implications of Lawrence Coombs’s question.

‘You believe he knows about the prowler?’ Antonella asked.

‘I don’t know but it struck me as an unusual question given what had happened at your house,’ Arthur responded.

A log crackled and shifted in the hearth, sending a small shower of sparks up the chimney.

Antonella appeared to accept his response even though Jane could see it troubled her.

‘Now, I have been tasked with reviewing security and logistics for the transport and safe storage of the artworks to the facility at Westwood Quarry. Obviously, I know that Lady Tolland has been involved in that role. I understand that her brother and your brother were completing the work on the electrical systems. Arthur is to step into Sanford’s shoes and assist Lawrence. I take it the problems refer to the air conditioning and temperature regulation?’ Jane switched the subject back to the main tasks of their operation.

The concern about Lawrence Coombs’s odd question to Arthur was filed away at the back of her mind. There would be other opportunities to get to know Lawrence and his sister in the coming days.

‘There was an issue in part of the cave system with humidity. There are special sensors. We can’t risk damp or mould affecting any of the items being stored there,’ Antonella said.

‘And your other colleagues? What exactly are their roles and yours within the operation?’ Jane asked.

‘Betsy is my deputy. She runs regular metering checks on the works, makes certain that any restoration works are done, that kind of thing. I list all the works that enter the storage along with Marietta. I make sure the records are kept and everything is catalogued. Who owns them, where they are from, all the paperwork. Dickie places them in the racks, he pulls out different pieces for checking and handles internal movement within the facility. He assists both Betsy, me and Marietta. It’s a huge job,’ Antonella explained.

‘And an important one. I take it these are the pieces from the National Gallery and other noted London collections?’ Arthur said.

‘They were moved out when the bombing started. Some are stored underground in London. Others were sent elsewhere. At first, various private country houses out in the countryside took different things. In some places the conditions they were kept in were not suitable and damage occurred. Then the pattern of the bombing raids altered and places which had been secure have become risky.’ Antonella stared into the flickering flames of the fire as if seeing the same flames which had damaged many of the major cities and ports around Britain.

‘The other part of the quarry is given over to the manufacture of munitions?’ Arthur asked.

Antonella shrugged. ‘They say it’s to manufacture motorcycles but everyone knows that’s not true. We have nothing to do with that side of things. They have a separate entrance and are some distance from our storage facility. They also have their own security and other arrangements since they are operating all the time. It was important that in the event of something, well, untoward occurring, there should be no risk to the facility.’

Jane looked at Arthur. They now had a much clearer picture of the operation of the storage unit. Antonella excused herself to see if their supper was hot enough to serve. Benson entered the room with Arthur’s medical equipment. While he set it up Jane quickly told him what they had learned from Antonella.

Once Arthur was settled and breathing in his medication, Jane heard the sound of the telephone ringing in the study. Benson’s brows rose slightly as Jane jumped up from her seat and quickly slipped over to the sitting-room door to crack it open.

She positioned herself so she could listen as Antonella took the call. Fortunately, their hostess had failed to completely close the study door so Jane was able to catch snatches of the conversation.

‘Marietta, this is a surprise.’ Antonella sounded slightly out of breath after hurrying from the kitchen.

There was a pause.

‘A telegram from London. Yes, I see.’ Antonella was clearly responding to something the other woman was telling her.

‘Yes, but...’

Jane moved quickly from her gap at the door when she saw Antonella glance out into the hallway towards the sitting room. She surmised that Marietta had received the brigadier's instructions about Jane and Arthur's roles.

'Arthur and Jane are staying with me. They've just arrived.'

Jane heard what sounded like the rustling of paper on the desk.

'No, of course, tomorrow definitely.' There was the click of the receiver and Jane scuttled back to her seat just as Antonella opened the door.

'Lady Tolland has received a telegram from London regarding your work.'

'I see. What did she say?' Jane was curious to hear how Marietta had taken the news.

'She wanted to know if I had heard from Arthur and if I knew when you were both arriving. She seemed surprised when I said you were already here. She has said that, if you liked, you were very welcome to stay with her. I did say that you were both here as my guests at present.' Antonella wiped the palms of her hands on the gingham apron she had obviously donned to protect her clothes whilst she prepared supper.

'That's most kind of her. Would you prefer it if we stayed with Lady Tolland? We don't wish to be a burden to you so soon after your brother's death,' Jane asked. She knew that Antonella had been eager to have them stay but she wanted to be certain they were not imposing.

'No, I would like you both to stay here. The company, especially after last night, would help me a great deal. I would certainly feel safer.' Antonella blinked, her eyes filling with tears as she looked at Jane.

'Of course,' Jane agreed.

'Marietta said she was surprised that Arthur hadn't been in touch directly, but I told her you had only just arrived. She wishes to meet you both in the morning. Ten o'clock at the storage facility.' Antonella glanced first at Arthur and then at Jane.

'We shall look forward to it,' Jane said.

CHAPTER SIX

Antonella usually cycled from home to work but since there were no spare bicycles and it was too far for Arthur to walk, they managed to organise a taxi. Antonella left at her usual time and said she would see them there. Benson remained at the house with instructions from Arthur to look in Professor Watkins's study once more. This time it was to try and find any notes, diagrams or maps on the professor's electrical work at the facility.

Jane looked around her with interest as the taxi pulled to a stop at the guardhouse. Lady Tolland was already waiting for them near the entrance to the facility. A uniformed guard manned a small wooden guardhouse where he observed their arrival from beneath the brim of his cap. Marietta was not accompanied by her brother as Jane had expected. Instead a pale, nervous-looking young woman of around nineteen dressed in a plain grey dress with a white lace collar stood behind the wheelchair.

'Good morning, Miss Treen, Arthur. Who knew that we should be meeting together again so soon and under such different circumstances?' Lady Tolland signalled to her companion to steer her wheelchair closer to the guardhouse. 'I have arranged for you and Arthur to both have passes. Arthur, yours is obviously a visitor pass so you may only enter when signed in and accompanied by one of the permanent staff. Miss Treen, yours will allow you full access and oversight,' Marietta explained as the elderly uniformed security guard issued them with the relevant documents.

'Thank you. It's most efficient of you and please do call me Jane.' She smiled at Marietta as she signed and initialled the documents the guard

provided. 'And your companion is?' She looked at the young woman who was waiting nearby.

Marietta flicked the girl a brief glance as if she had forgotten she was there. 'Miss Hannah Taylor, she is my assistant.'

'I'm delighted to meet you.' Jane extended her hand to the girl who shook it gingerly as if surprised she had been acknowledged.

'Antonella, Betsy and Dickie are already inside and at work. I believe you met Betsy and Dickie at the funeral?' Marietta raised an imperious hand, and Miss Taylor resumed her position behind the wheelchair to push her mistress forward and into the facility.

The entrance to the facility was via a pair of enormous green-painted metal doors set into the rock face. The guard accompanied them to allow them inside. Once they had entered, he stepped back out and then promptly locked the doors behind them.

'I take it this is the only way in?' Arthur asked as they stood inside a well-lit chamber which had been hollowed out of the rock. His voice echoed slightly, bouncing around the space.

'This is the main entrance. There is a manned post outside, as you have seen. Further down this tunnel are two more doors that were formerly the doors of an old bank vault in London. These are kept locked with the keys being under strict supervision. Beyond that point there are various chambers which are fitted with racks and stands for storage. There are tunnels for maintaining the temperature, electricity, ventilation, etc. Some of those lead outside but sturdy metal grills are securely welded in place and there is an alarm system,' Lady Tolland said.

Jane looked around and noticed a button set into the wall near the doors, presumably linked to the guardhouse. A covered metal box was nearby, and she guessed this must be one of the housings containing the electrical wiring for the complex systems running through the facility. The cave was cool but not unpleasantly cold and she thought she could detect a faint movement of air and an older scent like a woodland floor.

'Come!' Lady Tolland raised her hand once more and Miss Taylor leapt into action to propel her mistress towards the double doors further down the corridor.

The doors were indeed as Marietta had promised, vast and immensely sturdy in appearance with art deco or nouveau moldings. Lady Tolland handed her iron ring of keys to her assistant who unlocked the doors and

opened one with Arthur's assistance. They continued on into a smaller, narrower chamber and the doors were closed once more behind them.

Once they were secure, the group continued their journey through a space filled with statuary and bulky items wrapped in hessian. Jane saw there were various antechambers of different sizes leading off the main corridor like the branches of a tree. The walls were all of rough-hewn rock and she thought she could still see pick marks from where the stone had been quarried centuries before.

Up ahead she could hear voices and the sound of someone moving something heavy. They seemed to be gradually descending further under the hillside as they progressed. Betsy suddenly appeared in front of them, a pair of spectacles dangling from a chain around her neck and an anxious expression on her face.

'Oh, good morning. Dickie and I were wondering where everyone was today.' She blinked when she saw Jane and Arthur. 'Oh, this is a surprise. Antonella mentioned you had returned.'

'Miss Treen has been tasked by London to check our little operation to ensure our security is adequate. Apparently, Professor Watkins's dreadful demise has caused some uneasiness on high. They wish to be assured that all is well. They have also asked that Arthur assist Lawrence with completing the tweaks we were making to the humidity monitoring and ventilation system,' Lady Tolland explained.

'Oh, I see. Goodness me, Miss Treen, I mean, Jane, what a happy coincidence. We will be delighted to show you everything,' Betsy said.

'Thank you. It all came as something of a surprise to me too, I must admit. Although I do get sent all over the place to audit things and check paperwork and routines. I think because my superiors were aware I had attended the funeral, they decided I would be a good fit to assess the operation here,' Jane explained.

'I think I was asked to help Lawrence because of my connection to the professor. I believe it was felt I would understand his work and be able to interpret his notes and blueprints,' Arthur added.

'Lawrence, of course, is the best person to show you what's happening with all of that side of things, Arthur, but Dickie can take you to see the workings,' Marietta said. 'It may help you understand the nature of the problems.'

Dickie, clad in brown overalls over the top of his clothes, finished pulling a large piece of wooden framing into place and stepped forward.

‘Miss Treen, Mr Cilento, good morning.’ Dickie wiped his hands on a rag hanging from the bib on his overalls and then shook hands with them. He had clearly overheard the conversation explaining why they were there.

‘I’ll be happy to show you the service tunnels, Mr Cilento, if you want to follow me,’ Dickie offered.

‘Thank you, and please do call me Arthur.’

Jane stood by as the two men headed off together towards a more shadowy part of the room. Antonella emerged from a side tunnel, her angular frame clad in a dark-brown smock to protect her clothes.

‘Now then, Jane, I shall leave you with Antonella and Betsy for the moment so you may get your bearings. I shall be in the main office just along there when you are ready to look at our documentation. Come, Hannah!’ Lady Tolland signalled to her assistant who promptly wheeled her away to the office.

‘Lady Tolland can be rather overwhelming until you get used to her,’ Antonella remarked drily catching sight of Jane’s expression.

‘Let us show you the most important things first,’ Betsy said. ‘Where we make tea and where the lavatory is situated. I’ve heard that in the factory side of things the staff there work so many hours underground they have sunlamps to keep them healthy. Can you imagine!’

‘Most extraordinary. Thank you, that would be very helpful,’ she agreed and followed the two women on a tour around the storage facility.

The caverns were much more extensive than she had realised. Some of the rooms that had been quarried from the rock were vast. Statues stood wrapped in layers of canvas material packed with card to protect any fragile areas. Busts of all sizes, nudes, classical Greek and Italian marbles filled the one hall almost completely.

‘Some of the Elgin Marbles are in here. The first hall you came through houses the latest arrivals,’ Betsy said.

Each area had been given a letter and a number so the custodians could locate each piece rapidly and monitor the conditions. The paintings were stored in racking systems that appeared to have been constructed from timber sized accordingly to support and fit the pictures.

‘Unfortunately, some of the pieces have sustained some damage either from shelling or from unsuitable storage. We have to check each piece over

when it arrives and conserve the pictures to prevent further damage,' Antonella explained.

'That could be removing mould or blooming on old varnish, repairing a frame and regilding, or even sorting out a tear in the canvas itself,' Betsy said.

Like the halls containing the statuary, the pictures were also labelled with a letter and number to provide a guide to where they were housed within the facility.

'We also record the condition and what work we have carried out after the piece has arrived.' Betsy led Jane to a space with stronger illumination. She could smell something that was a combination of turpentine and varnish.

'This is the conservation and restoration area. We bring the pictures in here to unpack them when they arrive. Antonella and I check them all and work out what may need to be done before they are attended to. Once we are satisfied they are in good condition, we allocate them to a place within the store,' Betsy said.

Jane saw the area contained two paint-splattered old work tables, various brushes, pots and jars, tubes of paint and palettes, magnifying glasses and Anglepoise lamps and torches. A couple of paint-stained smocks hung on hooks embedded in the wall nearby.

There was a small desk and a battered-looking swivel chair and a green metal filing cabinet which she assumed contained documentation of the repair work.

'How many more deliveries are you expecting?' Jane asked.

Betsy looked at Antonella before replying. 'Marietta deals with the logistics, what pieces are coming from where, all of that kind of thing. She ensures the storage records are accurate and maintains the budget.'

'I see. Are all the pieces housed here pictures and statues?' She was keen to understand the scope of what was being stored in the caves.

'No, there are manuscripts and records too. As well as some fragile ancient artefacts. Precious metals, bronze items. Tapestries, carpets, anything of artistic or cultural value. The whole variety of what one might expect to find in the London museums and also some of the other city galleries,' Antonella said. 'Obviously, you know we are not the only store.'

'There seems to be a lot here already.' From what Jane had seen already Hitler and Göring would have a field day if they could ever have access to

this kind of treasure trove. She had heard and read reports of the looting that had gone on and was continuing to happen abroad.

She knew too that some irreplaceable treasures had also been destroyed by the invading forces simply because of who the artists were. If Antonella's brother had suspected that something was amiss with this facility then she knew why he had been killed. The value of what was being held at Westwood was incalculable.

'There is still plenty of space despite one cavern containing the Kitty Hawk airplane. Dismantled and in boxes, of course,' Betsy said. 'Our biggest problem is the lack of staff. It's hard work staying on top of everything with so few of us.'

Jane's brows rose in astonishment. She hadn't expected to discover an airplane hidden underground. She could, however, see the truth in what the curator was saying. The secret nature of what was there and the need for skilled workers was a difficult balancing act to manage.

* * *

Arthur accompanied Dickie through a small almost hidden door and found himself in a narrow maze of tunnels hewn out of the rock. Above his head was a tangle of wires all fastened together in a neat bundle which ran along the ceiling.

'These are the wires which operate the sensors for the humidity and temperature. Groundbreaking technology, the professor said.' Dickie's voice echoed back from where the older man was moving ahead of Arthur.

'How many of these tunnels are there?' Arthur asked. It felt quite claustrophobic as his shoulders at some points brushed against the rock walls of the passage.

'It's like a rabbit warren. Most run parallel to the caverns. The electricians used these too for the wiring for the lights. The Enfield site next door is even larger,' Dickie said.

The passage widened out and Arthur could see circuit boards in panels affixed to the wall. A bank of switches was beside them alongside a complicated fuse board.

'Is there a telephone down here?' Arthur asked as he examined the electrics.

‘Yes, there’s one in Lady Tolland’s office. They had a job to get the cables in, but Professor Watkins insisted it was required.’ Dickie pulled out a grubby white handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

Arthur could see his companion’s face was glistening with sweat. ‘I say, are you feeling all right?’

Dickie tucked his handkerchief away. ‘Just hot from running around this morning. Those frames are heavy to shift on your own and I’m no spring chicken.’

‘Is this where the professor was found when he collapsed?’ Arthur asked.

‘No, he was further along the side tunnel, that way.’ Dickie pointed into the gloom of a dimly illuminated opening a few yards further along.

‘Can you show me? If he was down there tracing a fault it would be good to see where he had been working.’ Arthur wasn’t sure if Dickie believed his explanation but he was keen to see for himself where Sanford had been found.

‘You may need to duck in a few places, the roof is quite low,’ Dickie said as he led the way into the much smaller passageway.

Arthur could see what he meant. The walls of this tunnel were much more roughly hewn and the floor was uneven. Although there were lights, they were more widely spaced and it was clear the passage was not intended for general use.

‘Where does this lead?’ Arthur asked. He thought he could feel and smell cooler fresher air against his face.

‘It’s a dead end. It curves around and leads outside, only that’s closed off with a metal grill. This was one of the ventilation shafts and an escape tunnel in the event of something going wrong when this was a mine. This place was a mushroom farm too for a while a few years ago so I think they used it to run fertiliser or water in.’ Dickie came to a halt and Arthur saw they were once more in a slightly wider part of the tunnel.

A couple of old cardboard boxes with illegible writing stood to one side, mouldering away and clearly long abandoned.

‘The professor was found just there so we think he had been tracing the wiring looking for a fault.’ Dickie pointed to a place on the wall where a compact junction box was sited. The cover was closed up tight, and he saw several cables feeding into the box.

‘Has Lawrence looked at this since the professor’s death?’ Arthur asked as he pulled out his spectacles and placed them on his nose so he could take a better look at the box.

‘I don’t know, sir. I expect he’ll be along in a while, and you can ask him yourself. I don’t come inside this tunnel as a rule. I’m kept too busy in the storage area.’ Dickie edged around him obviously keen to return to his work.

‘Thank you. You head back and I’ll catch you up. I know you have a lot to do.’ Arthur continued looking at the box. He could see the screws holding the cover were new and shiny, so someone had worked on it recently.

Once Dickie had gone, Arthur took off his glasses and put them away. He continued along the passage to the end where he found the iron grill that Dickie had mentioned. It was clear the cover had been in place for a long time. Moss covered the metal bars and ferns were growing through the gaps making the daylight cast green shadows onto the rock walls.

Whoever had murdered Sanford could not have entered the tunnel through that grill. And Arthur was certain he had been murdered.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Antonella made Jane a cup of tea in the compact staffroom, then showed her through to Marietta's office. Lady Tolland was seated behind her desk while her assistant was busy at one of the dark-green metal filing cabinets. The office was tidy and orderly but Jane could see it was the administrative hub of the operation.

The bank of filing cabinets filled the one wall and were all labelled alphabetically. On the desk in front of Lady Tolland were metal wire in and out trays for correspondence. A green shaded metal Anglepoise lamp and a squat black telephone stood beside a large blotter and a metal spike for invoices.

There were three wooden chairs; two were placed against the wall and the third was in front of Lady Tolland's large metal desk. In the far corner was a smaller wooden desk with a typewriter, lamp and stack of paper. Another office chair was placed there, presumably for whoever used the desk. Jane wondered who was responsible for the typing. Marietta's assistant, perhaps?

'Do come and take a seat, Miss Treen.' Marietta flapped her hand at Jane.

'Please call me Jane.' Jane took her unwanted drink from Antonella as she reminded Lady Tolland to address her by her first name.

'Jane, yes, of course,' Marietta said. 'Antonella, dear, isn't Betsy waiting for you to look at that Gainsborough? She wanted another opinion I think, before it's packaged back up.'

‘Yes, of course. I’ll see you later, Jane.’ Antonella flushed and disappeared.

‘Well, what do you think of our little operation so far?’ Marietta fixed her with a shrewd glance as Jane set her utilitarian thick china cup and saucer down on the corner of the desk.

‘I knew that the storage facility covered a large area, but I must admit I was unprepared for the scale of this place,’ Jane said as she looked at the wall behind the other woman.

She could see a large calendar with dates marked by red circles. There was also a chalkboard with details of deliveries due from various houses around the neighbouring counties. Some place names she recognised and some she didn’t.

‘There is a large amount of material we are expected to receive, catalogue and store. I understand that the facility in Wales is of a similar size and scale. Many of the pictures there have been placed recently. They had to be moved from the original safe house in Wales. A security issue. The calendar and board assist in planning what is due to arrive and from where so we can prepare spaces accordingly,’ Marietta said as she noticed Jane looking at the wall and its contents.

‘Yes, I’ve also heard that the facility in Wales is as large as this one. The London one is more contained,’ Jane agreed.

Marietta turned her fountain pen around between her fingers as she studied Jane’s face. ‘Why are you really here, Jane? It all seems quite a coincidence following Sanford’s death that you should be the person London has selected to come and review our operation.’

‘I have a great deal of expertise in auditing and security. It is quite literally what my particular department does. Even in wartime Whitehall still expects to see value for money. We are a small team. Since my senior knew that I had been in the area for the funeral and that Arthur had a connection with Antonella, they felt that I would be the best person to send. The professor’s sudden death concerned a few people within government.’ Jane knew she was repeating information that Marietta probably either knew or had surmised already, but she was keen to ensure the story remained consistent.

‘Sanford’s death was highly regrettable and unexpected, but the inquest appeared clear that it was one of those heart events that could have happened at any time and any place. I’m not sure why his death having

occurred in the facility would have caused such alarm.’ Marietta continued to study Jane’s expression carefully.

‘The powers that be dislike unexpected events. The prime minister has spoken publicly about his commitment to protecting our most prized artistic and culturally valuable artefacts. I think from what I have been told that they were keen that there were no contributing factors in Sanford’s death that might cause a vulnerability in security.’ Jane met the other woman’s gaze with a level stare.

‘Contributing factors in what way?’ Marietta’s eyes narrowed.

‘He was very involved with setting up the sensor systems and the electrics. Some of that equipment, the humidity detectors, contain groundbreaking technology. I suppose they want to be assured there was nothing except natural causes that could have led to his heart failure. It probably also reminded them that they needed to be assured of the security of the facility. As I said, the safety of the artworks and the precious museum pieces is something the prime minister takes a personal interest in as well as his own public commitment.’ Jane templed her fingers together and leaned back in her seat without breaking eye contact with Marietta.

‘Well, as you saw when you came in, we have a guard on duty all day and from eight o’clock in the evening until the guard returns in the morning, the Home Guard secure the facility. When the last curator leaves an alarm is set and the facility is fully sealed. The doors are a formidable deterrent to anyone trying to enter. We are also well protected from bombs since we are deep under the Mendip Hills here. The company using the other part of the old quarry to produce munitions is far enough away that even if there should be an incident there, we are self-contained and unlikely to suffer harm.’ Marietta gave a thin smile.

‘That does all sound most reassuring,’ Jane agreed.

‘Then I’m certain you will not need to spend too long on your report. I can give you any figures, etc., that you may require. Miss Taylor, my assistant, will be happy to help.’ Marietta glanced towards Hannah who was busily occupied now with setting up the typewriter on the other desk.

‘That’s most gracious of you.’ Jane had already determined she would produce her reports in her time frame and not in one that Lady Tolland appeared keen to impose. ‘Perhaps you could show me your inventory and explain the storage system. I noticed you use an alphabetical and numerical method to determine where each piece is placed.’

‘We do. It always amused Sanford. He said it was somewhat like his crosswords. Four down, ancient scroll from the British Museum relating to the purchase of copper.’ Marietta gave a small chuckle.

‘I’m not really good at crosswords. Arthur, of course, adores them. I take it you were a member of the professor’s Compilers’ Club for quite some time?’ Jane asked as Marietta opened her desk drawer to take out a bundle of leather-bound notebooks. She had no intention of letting Marietta know what her skills actually were.

‘Oh yes. I met Sanford when I was in my twenties when we were both at Oxford. Women had only recently been admitted. Ridiculous really,’ Marietta said.

Jane had also attended Oxford. Her mother had not approved. Elsa had felt that Jane’s time would have been better spent accompanying her on her various tours as her pianist and looking for a suitable husband.

‘Marietta! Are you in the office?’ A male voice boomed outside, and Jane noticed a telltale trace of pink creeping into Hannah’s pale cheeks.

‘Of course, Lawrence. I’m with Miss Treen,’ Marietta called back before glancing towards her. ‘Jane, I mean.’

Marietta’s brother appeared in the office. ‘Sorry, you did say this morning. I forgot you had company. I’ve been trying to tie up all the loose ends for this charity bash at the weekend. That Macintyre woman keeps adding to her list of demands. Now she wants a special car to collect her from the station. She refuses to share with the harpist.’ Lawrence extended his hand towards Jane as he finished speaking. ‘I’m sorry, we’ve met before, haven’t we? At Sanford’s funeral, you were with Arthur.’

‘That’s correct.’ Jane wished she could have a cigarette. The no smoking signs that littered the walls of the facility, however, ruled out that small pleasure.

‘Of course she was with Arthur. He is here too. Dickie has taken him to look at the electrics.’ Marietta frowned at her brother as he dropped down onto the other vacant chair near Jane.

‘Yes, Antonella had said Arthur was bringing someone to the funeral with him. Took us all by surprise a bit.’ Lawrence’s gaze sharpened. ‘And now you’re here to check us all out, so Marietta said.’

‘Did you finish sorting Miss Macintyre out?’ Marietta asked, giving her brother an annoyed glance. Clearly she had voiced her thoughts about Jane and Arthur being sent to check up on the facility to Lawrence.

Jane also thought that if Lawrence managed to sort her mother out he would be one of the few men who had ever succeeded in that quest.

‘I hope so.’ Lawrence looked at Jane. ‘I say, will you and Arthur be coming to the afternoon concert this weekend? The more the merrier and the funds are for a good cause. It’s in aid of the army convalescent home in Bristol. Miss Macintyre is frightfully popular, so it promises to be a jolly good show.’

‘So, I understand,’ Jane remarked in a dry tone. She wasn’t about to explain to Lawrence and his sister that Elsa was her mother. It wasn’t always something Elsa herself wanted people to know. Having a grown-up daughter was ageing apparently, so her mother had informed her on more than one occasion. ‘I shall see if Arthur wishes to attend. He doesn’t always care for crowds.’

Marietta raised an eyebrow. ‘Where did you two meet, by the way? Arthur has always struck me as being a man who was engaged in his work. He never seemed to participate much in social events as you just said, my dear.’

‘We met via our work. I get sent to all kinds of operations and Arthur was involved in one of them. That was quite a few months ago now.’ Jane kept the explanation simple. With her mother due to arrive at the weekend she had to be mindful of what she said.

‘How nice.’ Marietta’s tone didn’t quite seem to match her words.

‘Hannah, you’ll be coming to the concert, I suppose.’ Lawrence half turned in his chair to look at Marietta’s assistant who was busily typing.

Hannah blushed but before she could respond Marietta cut in. ‘Well of course she’ll be there. She’ll be helping me obviously. Someone has to give out the programmes and deal with the raffle.’

‘Yes, indeed.’ Lawrence turned back to Jane and his sister and Jane saw Hannah bite her lip as she continued to type. She thought the girl was hitting the keys with slightly more force than was necessary as she did so.

‘Anyway, you had better go and find Arthur before he gets hopelessly lost in the tunnels. You need to explain the issues we’ve been having and see if he has a solution.’ Marietta looked at her brother.

‘Righto, yes, must push on.’ Lawrence got to his feet and held out his hand to Jane once more. ‘Don’t mind my sister, her bark is worse than her bite, you know.’

She smiled politely and shook his hand before he left the room, giving Hannah a cheeky wink on the way out.

‘Now, shall we go through some of the documentation?’ Marietta suggested as she pulled the journals forward and Jane turned her mind back to the job in hand.

It was lunchtime before she knew it and Arthur appeared with Antonella at the office doorway.

‘It’s time for a break,’ Antonella suggested. ‘The kettle is already on and I’ve packed us some sandwiches.’

Jane knew that Benson had brought some provisions with them from Arthur’s home. Staying in other places put a huge strain on the hosts due to the rationing restrictions. Some items could only be obtained where the card had been registered and while other items could still be purchased, they were often expensive and hard to find.

She stood and stretched ready to follow Antonella and Arthur to the small room that seemed to serve as a staff area.

‘Marietta, are you joining us?’ Antonella asked.

‘Hannah and I will come along later. You go with Arthur and Jane. I expect Dickie is already in there. He never can wait for lunch.’ Marietta gave a dismissive sniff.

Jane walked with the others to the staffroom. Dickie was already seated at the square wooden table in the centre of the room. Betsy was busy opening a parcel of greaseproof paper near the kettle.

‘Do have a seat,’ Antonella said. ‘I’ll just get the lunch box. I do hope meat paste is all right with you both?’ She looked anxiously at Arthur.

‘That sounds wonderful. It really is terribly kind of you to think about us.’ Jane took a chair between Arthur and Dickie.

‘I’ve Spam today. Mind you, it’s cut so thin I reckon you could see through it,’ Dickie observed. ‘How about you, Betsy? What delight have you packed?’

‘Jam,’ Betsy said, carrying her lunch to the table to join them.

‘Where is Lawrence? I thought he would be joining us?’ Dickie asked.

‘He’ll be along in a minute. He went to check on something in one of the other passageways,’ Arthur said as he accepted a sandwich from the battered old tin which Antonella appeared to be using as her lunch box.

‘How are you finding things, Jane?’ Antonella asked, before taking a generous bite of her own sandwich.

‘I think I’m beginning to understand how the operation is working. Marietta appears most efficient,’ Jane replied cautiously.

Dickie snorted. ‘Oh, Marietta is very keen on keeping everything tidy.’ He lowered his voice slightly. ‘Poor Hannah gets lumbered with all the actual doing of the work, mind you.’

‘That poor girl is treated appallingly. I don’t know how she stands it,’ Betsy agreed.

‘She’s lasted longer than the girls who were with Marietta before.’ Antonella offered Jane another sandwich before retrieving the morning crossword from her bag.

Jane could tell from what she’d observed that morning that her companions weren’t exaggerating. Marietta had issued a stream of orders to her assistant while Jane had been with her. Everything from typing letters to finding files, adjusting Marietta’s cushions, making tea, the girl hadn’t stopped.

Lawrence arrived in the room and went right to the kettle. ‘Tea?’ he asked cheerfully.

‘Actually, do you have any coffee?’ Jane asked. ‘If not, I can bring some with me tomorrow. I have some in my suitcase.’

‘Um, let me see.’ Lawrence rummaged around in the small wooden cupboard above the kettle. ‘Yes, there’s a little bit of coffee in this tin,’ he said, having prised off the lid to peer inside.

‘Splendid. Black, no milk, please,’ Jane confirmed. She wasn’t sure how good her drink would be, but she couldn’t keep drinking tea. It was bad enough being deprived of her cigarettes.

Lawrence clattered about making everyone drinks before carrying the loaded metal enamelled tray over to the table. He set it down with a bump, sloshing tea and coffee into the saucers.

‘Jane, coffee.’ He lifted off her cup and set it in front of her as if bestowing a great favour.

‘Has everyone got tickets for the concert now?’ Lawrence asked as he took a seat. ‘Arthur, Jane was a little cagey when I mentioned it earlier. It’s during the afternoon so no need to fret about being out during the blackout. You will both come, won’t you?’

Arthur finished chewing the last bite of his sandwich and swallowed before replying. 'If we are still here, then, I daresay we can make it.'

Jane hid her smile behind her cup. Arthur didn't sound very enthusiastic.

'I think Benson, Arthur's manservant, will wish to attend. He is a great fan of Miss Macintyre,' she said impishly.

Arthur's gaze tangled with hers. 'Yes, he is rather.' He looked at Antonella's crossword. 'Espionage, nine letters.'

Antonella murmured her thanks and filled in the clue.

'Marvellous. I'll put three tickets aside for you all. Antonella, are you still up for coming?' Lawrence's tone became solicitous.

'I will. I think it's better that I keep myself busy. Being in company stops me from brooding but thank you for your consideration, Lawrence.' Antonella's tone was crisp and Jane could tell she didn't want anyone to express sympathy.

'Right, yes, of course. Four tickets then,' Lawrence responded in a rather nettled tone. Jane sipped her coffee and wondered what the relationship actually was between Lawrence and Antonella.

CHAPTER EIGHT

After lunch, Arthur spent the afternoon with Lawrence. They worked together to update the various cables that ran through the tunnels. The blueprints that Sanford had produced provided quite a useful map of the storage facility as well as showing where the various junctions were. It was clear that although much of the wiring had been laid in the last few years there were places where it had been patched into cabling that had pre-existed before the old quarry had been commandeered.

It seemed to be those areas which were causing some issues, along with places where the moisture and temperature sensors were not in the right places. The technology was new and had only been tried in a few other places. Lawrence was knowledgeable about the tasks but to Arthur's mind he had a somewhat laissez-faire approach to the work.

They stopped again at three for tea and Arthur ambled back with Lawrence to the staffroom hoping that Jane might also be there. He wondered how she was coping without her usual supply of cigarettes and the limited supply of coffee. Instead, he found Marietta Tolland and her young assistant.

'Ah, Arthur, how are things going? Lawrence tells me that some of the wiring resembles a rats' nest in places. Do you think it will be difficult to sort out the issues with the sensors?' Marietta asked as Hannah positioned her wheelchair at the table.

'That does seem to be the case from what I've seen so far. Lawrence has more electrical expertise than I do but some of the wiring is quite complex. I think we may need some additional moisture sensors in some areas of the

facility to control the humidity,' Arthur said as he took his seat beside her in response to her gesture to him to sit.

Hannah and Lawrence boiled the kettle and prepared the tea things together. Arthur thanked them politely when they set a cup in front of him, while Marietta prepared to grill him about Jane.

'Hmm, I shall have to try to get more money for works I suppose then. That's always a challenge, extracting money from the ministry. Jane seems such a nice young woman, by the way. She told me you two first met at work,' Marietta remarked with an arch look for Arthur and a frown for Hannah who had spilled some of her tea in her saucer.

'That's correct.' Arthur saw no reason to enlarge on his reply. He doubted that Jane would have said very much more. He knew she would want to keep things simple so as not to blow their story that they were in a relationship by giving unnecessary details.

'Who are her family, do you know? She said she was from Kent originally?' Marietta continued.

'That's right. She has a house in a small village not far from the coast. Her father died last year and her mother lives in London.' Arthur picked up his cup and sipped the pallid brew slowly.

'And you, of course, still live in Devon at Half Moon Manor, rattling around in that big, old house your uncle left you?' Marietta said.

'Yes.' Arthur again didn't feel the need to expand his reply. Marietta knew his address from their crossword compilation correspondence.

He noticed Hannah and Lawrence exchange weary glances as if they were used to Marietta dominating conversations.

'You and Jane must come to supper tomorrow at the house. And dear Antonella too, of course.' Marietta gave her brother a swift look.

'That's very kind of you to invite us. I'll check with Jane and Antonella first in case they have plans already,' Arthur said.

'Goodness me, what plans could they possibly have? Lawrence can collect you all and drop you back afterwards so there is no need to worry about transport or the blackout,' Marietta said decisively. 'It'll do Antonella good to be out in company. She has already agreed to attend the concert at the weekend. Lawrence and I have been quite concerned about her being alone since losing Sanford. It's a good thing you and Jane are here so she isn't lonely.'

Arthur wondered why Marietta and her brother were so obsessed about Antonella being alone in her home. Sanford had always spoken positively about his sister's independence. Apart from Antonella being understandably rattled by the potential intruder he saw no reason to doubt his old friend's judgement.

Lady Tolland continued to give her opinions on everything while they finished their tea. Hannah remained completely silent unless her employer required a yes or no from her to support something she had said. Any opinion Lawrence made was usually overruled by his sister before he had finished speaking. Arthur remained quiet, observing the dynamics between the group and drawing his own conclusions.

* * *

Lawrence insisted on driving them back to Antonella's at the end of the day. Marietta had her own vehicle driven by Hannah, while Betsy and Dickie departed by bicycle. Jane privately wondered how Lawrence and Marietta appeared to have sufficient petrol to be able to continue running their vehicles.

'Toodle-pip, I'll see you all tomorrow I expect. Would you like a lift in?' Lawrence said as they got out of the car at Antonella's home. He lifted Antonella's bicycle from the rack at the rear of the car where he had fastened it on with rope.

'Thank you, that would be very helpful,' Jane accepted, even though Arthur could see that Antonella didn't look as happy about the offer as one might have expected.

'I'll see you all at eight thirty then.' Lawrence gave a cheery wave and pulled away. Antonella wheeled her bicycle around the back through the gate to secure it inside the shed. Jane and Arthur went into the hall to deposit their hats and coats.

Antonella had been quiet on the way home, leaving Lawrence to prattle on about the weather and his plans for the concert. She came into the hall from the direction of the kitchen.

'Are you feeling all right, Antonella?' Jane asked as they removed their coats in the hallway. She thought their hostess looked pale.

'I think I've a headache coming on. Please excuse me for a moment. I need to go and find an aspirin.' Antonella gave them a tight smile and

headed upstairs.

Jane followed Arthur into the sitting room and lit a cigarette. She had already smoked two as soon as she was outside the storage facility before getting into Lawrence's car. The relief of being able to smoke again after being incarcerated underground all day was enormous. She took care to sit apart from Arthur and directed the smoke away from him as much as she could.

Arthur had scarcely had time to settle in his seat before Benson came to join them. He was carrying Arthur's medical equipment which he promptly began to set up.

'I have collected as much information as possible from Professor Watkins's study,' Benson observed as he adjusted the mask and tubing so that Arthur could receive his inhalations.

Jane blew out a thin plume of smoke, relishing the rush of nicotine from her cigarette. She had been feeling quite at odds all day since not being permitted to smoke and being without her usual amount of coffee. 'Was there anything that stood out to you in what you found?' she asked.

'I have compiled everything in a folder ready for you. There was one thing that I thought appeared amiss,' Benson said.

'Oh?' Jane leaned forward with interest. Benson, like Arthur, was good at spotting small anomalies.

'I found a couple of lists of names. I believe them to be the members of the Crossword Compilers' Club. The names on the two lists are however slightly different.' Benson finished fiddling with the equipment and Jane saw that Arthur was paying attention to what Benson had to say.

'An older list and an updated one?' Jane asked as she stubbed out her cigarette in one of the ashtrays Antonella had provided for her.

'That was my first thought, but I don't believe so. I shall fetch the file, and you can see for yourself, Miss Jane.' Benson left the room and returned a few minutes later carrying a slim brown folder which he presented to her.

Jane placed it on her lap and opened it. The lists Benson was referring to were the first two items inside. They had been handwritten in ink on pages which appeared to have been torn from a cheap writing pad.

The first list had all the names she expected to see. Arthur, Lawrence, Marietta, Antonella, Betsy and a couple of names of others who resided abroad in Australia and New Zealand. Both sheets of paper bore the same header, underlined twice in Professor Watkins's handwriting, CCC for

Crossword Compilers' Club. The second list had a different set of names, none of which she knew. Most had been struck out with a single line. Only one name was left.

Cecilia Znaczenie. She didn't recognise it, Hungarian maybe, or Polish? Not that there was any reason why she should. Even so, the crossing out of all the other names was troubling. Most of those were illegible under the heavy ink scoring. She could make out a few but they too all seemed foreign, possibly Dutch, maybe even German. Unlike the first list which had addresses, this one simply had names.

She passed the pieces of paper over to Arthur and continued to examine the rest of the contents of the file. Most of the documents were exactly what Arthur had requested Benson to look for. Blueprints and maps of the storage area. Drainage and electrical schematics. Then there were other items, partly completed crosswords and scribbled notes which made no sense.

'Do you recognise any of the names that have been crossed out?' Jane asked as Arthur tried to balance his spectacles on top of his mask so he could read Sanford's writing more clearly.

'Yes, a few. Anthony Brogda was at Oxford with me. A brilliant mind, Hungarian. We were in chess club together.' Arthur's voice was a little muffled by the rubber and the faint whooshing noise of his medication being delivered. She knew he wouldn't say much more until the treatment was finished and Benson had packed the equipment away.

She waited impatiently for the treatment to end, tapping her fingers restlessly on the padded arm of the chair. She was anxious to discover as much as possible before Antonella joined them.

Benson removed Arthur's face mask and handed him his glasses so he could put them back on again.

'Do you recognise any of the others?' Jane asked.

'Piet Van Heiden was Dutch. He was killed last year. I remember him from a visit I made here, and he was staying at the same time. Benson, do you recall Piet?' Arthur looked at his manservant who was patiently placing equipment back inside the medical bag.

'Yes, a tall, blond-haired gentleman, fond of cycling. He had joined the air force here as a pilot. I wasn't certain of his surname.'

'Louise Schweitz was Polish. She was the daughter of an old friend of Sanford's. They were a Jewish family. Sanford hadn't heard anything from

them for quite some time.’ Arthur’s expression was grim as he looked at the list. ‘I can’t make out any of the other names.’

‘Do you think these were all people who Sanford had been corresponding with and who are now either dead or missing?’ Jane asked.

‘It certainly looks that way. Although I don’t recall ever exchanging clues or puzzles with any of the people on this list.’ Arthur frowned as he squinted at the remaining crossed-out names trying to make out the ones which were barely legible.

‘Two separate lists perhaps, as many of the people whose names you have managed to make out were obviously based in Europe?’ Jane queried.

‘Hmm.’ Arthur didn’t sound convinced although to Jane it seemed a logical conclusion.

‘What about this Cecilia Znaczenie?’

‘I don’t recognise her name as anyone Sanford ever mentioned,’ Arthur said.

She handed over the rest of the file. Arthur set aside the blueprints and schematics, presumably so he could look at those later. Then he turned his attention to the torn fragments of notepaper with the enigmatic scribbles.

‘I included those as the professor didn’t appear to be the kind of man who retained documents for no reason. I assumed they must have held meaning or he would have disposed of them,’ Benson said.

‘I agree with your assessment. He was a very orderly man. Where did you discover them?’ Arthur looked up at Benson.

‘Tucked between the clean leaves of the desk blotter.’ Benson fastened the medical bag and straightened as if ready to leave the room. ‘There is one more thing, Miss Watkins’s housekeeper tells me that Mr Coombs has been calling at the house quite frequently. Before the professor died, he was heard to tell Miss Watkins that she had better not be thinking of marrying him.’

‘Interesting,’ Jane observed. It seemed her thoughts had been correct about Lawrence’s interest in Antonella.

Benson shifted the weight of the medical bag in his hand and opened the sitting-room door. As he went out, Antonella entered. Jane wondered how long she had been in the hall, if she had heard anything they had said. Not that they had been speaking loudly. Habit meant they had all kept their tone low.

‘Dinner will be ready for around seven. I think we have some sort of casserole this evening.’ Antonella took the seat opposite Arthur. She looked pale and the lines around her eyes seemed deeper.

‘How is your head?’ Jane asked.

‘Still pounding, I think it’s from concentrating and the smell of the varnish. I’m hoping the tablets will take it off. Did Mr Benson discover anything helpful in Sanford’s study?’ She glanced at the file on Arthur’s knees.

‘We’re not sure. The blueprints will be interesting and the plans. I used the ones we found before while I was there today but some of these may help with the wiring for the sensors.’ Arthur slid the blueprints he had placed on one side back into the folder.

‘Yes, I suppose they will. There wasn’t anything else? Nothing to point to who may have killed him?’ Antonella’s voice wobbled as she asked the question.

‘We’re still looking through a few things,’ Arthur said. ‘Did Sanford ever say anything to you about the crossword compilers he used to correspond with in Europe, before the war?’

A cloud passed over Antonella’s face. ‘He was concerned about them. He lost touch with people as they moved or when their countries were invaded. It was difficult to get information.’ She sighed and her shoulders sagged. ‘You know how it is. Then he heard from a few people. Some of them have died. Piet, for instance, you met him here once I think. His plane was shot down over the Channel. His death really affected Sanford.’

‘Of course,’ Jane agreed.

‘It seems that Marietta is intent on us dining at her home tomorrow,’ Antonella said as she looked first at Arthur and then at Jane.

‘It did sound as if it was an offer we couldn’t refuse,’ Arthur replied and Jane saw Antonella’s lips twitch upwards at his response.

‘Marietta is one of life’s unstoppable forces. It’s part of what makes her so good at what she does,’ Antonella said. ‘Without her I doubt that half the items we have in storage would have made it to safety and in such good condition. She really has thrown herself into her role.’

‘Her assistant is very quiet,’ Jane said.

‘Hannah has the patience of a saint. She’s stayed longer than the last girls who were there. How she hasn’t brained Marietta with a frying pan by now I really don’t know. She bullies the poor girl mercilessly. Lawrence

does his best to support her and tries to get Marietta to lay off her.' Antonella shook her head. 'I half expect her to give notice any day. Marietta does pay well though. I think she has to or Hannah would have left weeks ago.'

'When did Hannah start working for her?' Jane asked.

'Oh, it must be about five months ago now. Hannah had been employed by Lady Clarricott before she came to Marietta. I think Marietta knew the family and when Lady Clarricott died she offered Hannah a position. It all happened quite suddenly, if I recall correctly. Lady Clarricott was elderly but seemed to be in good health. Then apparently she had an unexpected fall on some stone steps in the garden. She never regained consciousness and Marietta fell out with Hannah's predecessor, Mavis, at the same time. She claimed the girl was dishonest. Sent her off without a reference. Last thing we heard she had gone to Scotland and was working as a lumberjill for the forestry people.'

Jane thought that based on what she had observed and what Antonella had just told them, felling trees and lugging timber would be a piece of cake after working for Lady Tolland.

CHAPTER NINE

Jane left Antonella with Arthur and went to the study to telephone Half Moon Manor before going into dinner. Her hostess had given her permission to call Arthur's home to check on Marmaduke's welfare. She had really missed returning to a house without Marmaduke's comforting gingery presence. The housekeeper's voice crackled in her ear once the operator had connected the call.

'Good evening, Miss Treen. I expect as you'm calling about your cat,' Mrs Mullins said.

'Yes, I do hope he's settled in and is behaving himself?' Jane suspected that just as Antonella's expression had indicated, the housekeeper probably also considered her slightly ridiculous for worrying over a pet.

'Master Marmaduke is settled in the kitchen right now, Miss Treen, on the rug in front of the range. Wore hisself out today he has,' Mrs Mullins said.

'Oh?' Jane hoped her cat was behaving. There was a slightly strained tone in the housekeeper's voice.

'Brought us in a squirrel, he did. I thought as it were dead. Turned out it wasn't. It were just stunned. Perishing thing escaped afore I could catch it and run up the drawing room curtains. Took me half hour to chase it out with a brush.' To her credit Mrs Mullins didn't sound cross, more resigned to the chaos.

'I am so sorry,' Jane apologised. At least it sounded as if her cat was not missing her.

‘Don’t you worry yourself. I’ll keep a good eye on him. Oh, by the by, please could you let Mr Benson know as a Miss Davenport has telephoned the house asking after him,’ Mrs Mullins said.

‘Yes, of course, and thank you again, Mrs Mullins.’ Jane replaced the receiver and returned to the sitting room to let Arthur know that his drawing room curtains were safe.

Antonella smiled as Jane recounted the story. ‘It does sound as if Marmaduke is quite a character.’ Her gaze rested thoughtfully on Arthur for a moment.

Dinner proved to be hot and tasty. The paucity of the meat in the casserole was made up by the addition of extra vegetables. Antonella excused herself again once dessert of tinned pears in condensed milk had been served.

‘I’m so sorry, my head is still aching so I’m going to retire upstairs early. I’ll see you all tomorrow at breakfast.’

Jane thought Antonella did look unwell as she said her goodnights.

‘Perhaps she will feel better after a good night’s sleep,’ Arthur said after their hostess had gone.

‘She has been dealing with a lot lately,’ Jane agreed. The attempted break-in so soon after the funeral must have been quite frightening.

‘Would you like coffee served in the drawing room?’ Benson asked as he entered to clear the dishes.

‘Thank you, Benson. Oh, by the way, Mrs Mullins asked me to pass a message on to you. She said to let you know that a Miss Davenport had telephoned the manor asking for you,’ Jane said.

‘I see. Thank you, Miss Jane.’ Benson’s tone remained even and steady as usual, but Jane had noticed his hands still for a moment when she had mentioned the name of the caller.

She accompanied Arthur back to the sitting room where Arthur made up the fire and Jane turned the wireless on low to listen to some music. The room was snug with the blackout in place and the lamps casting warm pools of light from the low tables.

‘Do you know who Miss Davenport is?’ Jane asked as she took her seat opposite Arthur.

He shrugged. ‘No, I’ve no idea. I don’t recall hearing the name before.’

Jane filed it away in the back of her mind. Perhaps it was a personal matter, and it was really none of her business. Benson delivered their coffee

and withdrew to clear the kitchen and dining room.

Arthur picked up the file again from earlier. 'I want to take another look at those two pieces of paper Benson discovered concealed in the blotter.'

Jane poured their coffee while Arthur put on his spectacles and held the pieces of paper up to the lamp.

'Anything?' she asked as she added steamed milk to his cup.

'No, just the notes Sanford has made.' Arthur placed the scraps of paper down on top of the folder.

'Are they cryptic clues again? Possible crossword questions?' Jane sipped her own cup of black coffee after asking her question.

'Maybe, possibly random thoughts that he tucked away to deal with later on.' Arthur didn't sound as if he was convinced by this solution.

'Read them out loud, perhaps inspiration may strike us,' Jane suggested.

'Lost in translation, that's the first one. The second is a quote, seek and ye shall find.' Arthur read them both aloud, his frown deepening as he did so.

'Seek and ye shall find may be an indicator telling us to look at what we've got for the answers. Or a biblical reference perhaps? Maybe the answers are in those other pieces of paper. Those lists?' Jane said.

'Lost in translation, lost in translation.' Arthur set his cup down suddenly in the saucer, sloshing coffee over the brim of his cup. 'Translation. There were dictionaries in the study.' He jumped up and went out of the room.

He was back a minute or two later bearing a small stack of books in his hands. 'Sanford kept dictionaries and thesauruses in lots of different languages. He needed them to compile the clues for his crosswords. He was quite a linguist. He spoke seven different languages.'

Jane put her coffee to one side as Arthur tossed a book onto her lap. 'What am I searching for?' she asked.

'I'm not sure but try and see if that surname Znaczenie has a meaning. There has to be a reason why this Cecilia woman is the only name that isn't crossed out and with the translation reference...' Arthur's eyes gleamed behind the lenses of his wireframed spectacles.

Jane looked at her dictionary. 'German.' She opened it up and turned to the back and looked along z. 'Nothing.'

Arthur set his first book to one side. 'Nothing in that one either. The Polish one may be more promising.'

Jane waited as he flicked through the pages following down the lists of words, his lips moving silently as he read.

‘Znaczenie, got it.’ He raised his gaze to look at Jane.

‘Well?’ she asked. ‘What does it mean?’

‘Panel,’ Arthur said.

‘Then we aren’t looking for a physical actual panel who may have the answer we’re after. Or who has the journal. We’re looking for a person instead? Is that what you’re saying?’ Jane wanted to be sure she understood what he was telling her.

Arthur set the dictionary aside. ‘Look behind the panel. That was what the grid said. Now we have this other reference to panel.’

‘So is Cecilia Znaczenie a person or is it a cover? I suppose I can ask the brigadier to see if there is anyone of that name,’ Jane suggested.

‘We should check with Antonella too tomorrow. She would know, I suppose, if Sanford had ever mentioned someone named Cecilia. Benson can look for addresses, telephone numbers, that kind of thing.’ Arthur rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

Jane could see he was not entirely satisfied with their conclusions. ‘Where is this panel, if it’s not Cecilia? Benson and I have checked the house. You’ve been all over the storage facility today with Lawrence and have seen all the electrical panels there.’

‘We need to ask Antonella if there is somewhere Sanford liked to go. It has to be somewhere local. If Cecilia turns out not to be a person but is another clue to where the journal is hidden, this second reference to a panel may have been left in case we didn’t see the first clue on the bookshelves. I don’t believe that journal can be far away. Whoever killed Sanford was watching him or he thought they were watching him. They must have guessed he was close to discovering whatever it is that placed his life in danger.’ Arthur picked up his discarded coffee cup and finished his drink while appearing to think about everything they knew so far.

‘They must be worried he has left evidence behind. If, as we believe, it may be someone close to him, they would know he was likely to leave a message. Some kind of insurance. That may be why there was someone prowling around, trying to break in.’ Jane was deeply uneasy.

‘I’ll put these dictionaries back in the study and keep the notes Benson found in my wallet.’ He suited his words to actions.

‘What about the lists of names?’ Jane asked when he returned to his seat.

‘I think we’ve discovered the meaning behind those.’ Arthur sounded very certain and with one swift move he consigned the papers with the names to the fire. The orange flames destroying them in an instant to shrivel them into black ash.

Jane hoped he was right.

Lawrence called for them as expected the following morning after breakfast. Antonella still looked pasty as she gathered up the parcels of sandwiches wrapped in greaseproof paper that Benson had prepared for their lunches.

‘We shall go straight from the facility to Lady Tolland’s for supper so won’t be back until later,’ Arthur warned.

‘Very good, sir.’ Benson had already received his instructions from Jane earlier while Arthur had been asking Antonella if she knew a girl called Cecilia.

As they had guessed, Antonella had no recollection of anyone of that name. ‘I went through Sanford’s address book and his correspondence when I was arranging the funeral. I wanted to be certain that I didn’t miss anyone out that he knew and was in touch with,’ she explained. ‘I don’t recall anyone called Cecilia.’

Jane had taken the precaution of leaving a message with Stephen, the brigadier’s secretary, asking about a ‘Cecilia Znaczenie’. Not that she believed this was a real person, at least not with that name, but it could well be an alias. An agent, perhaps. It had to be followed up.

‘Jane, dear heart, how are you enjoying Wiltshire?’ Stephen asked. ‘Nice food? Listen, your mother is in your neck of the woods this weekend performing at a concert. Did you know?’

Jane knew he was giving her a subtle warning in case she was using a cover story of some kind that her mother could blow. ‘Yes, we have tickets for her event.’

‘Ah, she doesn’t know you are there, unless you’ve told her, of course, but my own darling mater seemed to be unaware when I had supper with her last night,’ Stephen said. ‘Naturally, I didn’t say anything.’

‘No, I haven’t spoken to Mother recently.’ Jane felt the familiar lump of guilt settle in her stomach. She rarely contacted her mother beyond a duty

telephone call each week.

‘Don’t worry, I’ll keep mum. I thought you should know in case you wanted to lie low,’ Stephen said.

‘Thank you. Let me know if you find out anything about anyone with that name.’ She replaced the receiver and squared her shoulders ready to face another day at the quarry, and another longer evening in Lady Tolland’s company.

Lawrence was annoyingly cheerful as he drove them to the facility. He chattered away about the plans for the concert and who might attend. Antonella, as usual, sat in the front beside him while Jane sat next to Arthur in the back. Arthur had the blueprints and schematics that Benson had uncovered with him in a small leather attaché case. She knew he intended to compare the blueprints Lawrence had provided with the ones in his case.

When they pulled up at the entrance to the storage facility, the guard checked them in and got Lawrence to move his car to the side. Marietta’s vehicle was already there.

‘Got a delivery coming in this morning, sir, so we’ll need room for the lorry,’ the guard said as he unlocked the facility door so they could enter.

Betsy came to greet them when they entered through the second door after pressing the bell for admission. Once inside, Jane could see that Dickie was already preparing space for the works they were expecting.

‘Marietta says there is a consignment from Tilbury Hall. Sixteen paintings and five statues.’ Betsy looked at a list which Marietta, or more probably Hannah, had typed up for her.

‘We’ll scoot along out of the way then,’ Lawrence said. ‘Come on, Arthur. You said you had some other blueprints? It might help us to work out what those cables over in C section are for.’

Arthur and Lawrence disappeared into the heart of the quarry. Jane was keen to observe what happened during a delivery. Yesterday had provided her with the opportunity to see what went on in theory but today she would see for herself how it all worked. Something strange was going on inside Westwood, something that had led to Professor Watkins’s death. She was sure of it, and she was determined to discover what that something might be.

The first set of doors were opened and the guard stood by as a large dark-green lorry reversed as far into the large entrance way as possible. With both of the facility doors open instead of just one half, she could see it

gave enough room for the bigger pieces to be offloaded. Once the lorry was in, the second set of doors were opened.

Antonella had removed her hat and coat and was ready to assist with the delivery. Jane followed suit, standing to one side so as not to get in the way. The driver and his mate jumped out and opened the double doors at the rear of the lorry. She could see the back was completely filled with the pieces on Betsy's list. Dickie had a sack truck standing by and they started by taking off the heavy marble statues which had been wrapped in layer upon layer of hessian cloth for the journey.

The statues were checked against the list and, with much heaving and care, were taken to their final place in the store, so the entrance remained clear. Jane guessed part of this was because they would prove tricky to move once the men had left and any cleaning work could be done when they were unwrapped and checked.

It took almost an hour to get the statues off and manoeuvred into place within the store before the men could begin to shift the paintings. Each one had been carefully packaged between layers of cardboard and thin wooden batons. Betsy checked off the titles, and the pictures were stacked on the empty wooden storage frames to await checks later on their condition. Once those were satisfactory, they would be entered into the catalogue and moved to their final place deeper inside the store.

Once the lorry was empty, the men drank the tea that Betsy had provided and left. The guard locked the doors behind them, and they were shut inside once more.

'It must be time for our break now I think,' Betsy declared once the last picture was safely on the racking.

'I'll go and put the kettle on.' Antonella headed for the staffroom while Dickie returned the sack truck to the store cupboard where he kept his various tools.

Jane lingered after the others had gone ahead to take their tea break. She wanted to take a closer look at the pictures which had arrived. Fastened to the rough canvas hessian sacking and cardboard covering each picture, she saw there was a neat brown, cardboard tag along with a sticker on the frame strut. The tags and sticker gave the title of the picture, the artist, and the original home of the painting. She knew this was so that when the war was over the artworks would be returned to the correct galleries.

So far everything she had observed pointed to a well-run operation with things going smoothly and according to plan. Yet Professor Watkins had died in the facility so there was something that was wrong with what was happening there. There had to be. She just wasn't sure what it was.

'Jane, I've made you coffee,' Antonella called.

'Coming.' Jane was forced to stop and join the others for a break. She would just have to keep searching later.

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CHAPTER TEN

Arthur accompanied Lawrence down to section C, the area of narrow tunnels near where Sanford's body had been discovered. Once they were in front of the panel of circuitry which seemed to be causing the problems, Arthur took out the plans he had found in Sanford's study.

Lawrence had the blueprints he had been using, and they spread them out side by side to compare. Arthur's copies had a slightly earlier date at the top and seemed to be the original, much simpler wiring scheme for the lighting and the air conditioning. The other set had more complicated sensors and circuitry to monitor moisture and humidity levels.

'They seem to have upgraded everything from the old mushroom farm when they decided to store the artworks here.' Arthur was not an electrical engineer, unlike Lawrence, but he suspected his role was similar to the one Sanford had fulfilled. To work out the tangle of wires and map them to the plans while working under Lawrence's supervision to troubleshoot the issues the unit faced.

His basic knowledge of electrical works and the skills he used in decoding material were all relevant to the task in hand.

'It certainly looks that way. You say you found these older plans in Sanford's study?' Lawrence asked.

'Yes. I got my man, Benson, to search for them yesterday while we were here. Antonella thought she had seen something when she was going through Sanford's papers before the funeral. I knew that Sanford might have something in there that we could use.' Arthur kept his tone noncommittal.

‘Sanford always did keep everything he felt might have a use. All neat and tidy, of course. He had the best collection of nails and screws anywhere in England in his shed.’ Lawrence kept his gaze fixed on the plans. Arthur wondered if he was missing some kind of subtext.

‘That’s very true. Antonella has been sorting all his papers out for the solicitor and the bank. Sanford passing away so suddenly has meant there are a lot of loose ends for her to tie up.’ Arthur risked a quick sideways glance at his companion.

‘I suppose so. I have offered to help her with it all. Marietta has too, but she said she would manage by herself,’ Lawrence said.

‘Sanford had a lot of friends all over the world so there is a great deal of correspondence for her to go through. Some of the names she remembers and then there are others she’s less familiar with. Of course, the war means that communication to various countries has become nigh on impossible now.’ Arthur wanted to see if this provoked any kind of reaction from Lawrence. He was sure that he must have met Piet when he had stayed at Sanford’s and there must have been others too whose names had been on the list.

It was strange that just that one name had been left without being crossed out. Was it a real person? Or was Cecilia Znaczenie just another of Sanford’s clues pointing them to where he might have concealed his journal? He didn’t believe it was mere coincidence that znaczenie meant panel.

‘I remember meeting lots of people at Sanford’s home before the war. People from Belgium, France, Poland. It’s all such a sad business right now.’ Lawrence’s expression tightened.

‘Some of them were in the Crossword Compilers’ Club. Piet and Anthony and Cecilia.’ Arthur waited to see Lawrence’s reaction.

‘Piet was a pilot, he died in a crash. I don’t know what happened to Anthony. His clues were brilliant, but he just disappeared. I don’t recall anyone called Cecilia.’ Lawrence frowned and glanced at Arthur.

‘A Polish girl, I think. I didn’t know her well.’ Arthur played it off. It seemed their instincts were right and Cecilia was a clue not a person.

Lawrence’s sandy-coloured eyebrows rose slightly but Arthur didn’t see any recognition flicker on his face.

* * *

Jane volunteered to wash up the teacups while the others went back to work. Antonella was working on cleaning a large oil painting which seemed to be suffering from mildew. Betsy wanted to commence checking over the newly arrived statues with Dickie's assistance. It was all too easy apparently for a big toe or an ear or, worse still, some other appendage to become chipped or dislodged during transport.

Tilbury Hall had been deemed to be too close to recent bombing raids to be classed as a safe storage house anymore. Betsy was concerned that vibrations from the bombs and the potholes in the roads may have shaken something loose on the statuary. Since the figures belonged to the British Museum, Betsy was anxious that everything should be in order.

She had just finished drying the cups when Hannah came into the staffroom to return the cups from the office. It seemed she and Lady Tolland had taken tea at their desks.

'I'll wash these, Miss Treen,' Hannah offered when she saw Jane had the tea towel in her hand.

'No, it's quite all right. I know that Lady Tolland keeps you busy. Oh, and please do call me Jane.'

Hannah gave a shy smile. 'Thank you, Jane. To tell the truth I could do with a few minutes' breather,' the girl confessed in a low voice.

Jane smiled back. 'I can imagine. I've heard that Marietta is something of a taskmistress.'

'It's not so bad. I find if I can escape every now and then for a few minutes it helps me get through the days,' Hannah confessed.

'Do you live in?' Jane asked as she ran clean water into the sink to wash the crockery.

Hannah nodded. 'Yes, I have quite a nice room, but it means that I am on call for a long time. It's so busy my time off often seems to disappear.'

Jane swirled the soap around the cups to remove the brown tea stains. 'Your family must miss you. Where are you from?'

'London, near the docks. Our house was hit so we had to move out. We were in the shelters when the bomb hit. I suppose we were lucky not to be hurt but we lost everything. Mum and my little brother are with my aunt in Shropshire. Mum doesn't like it. She's not used to the country, she says it's

too quiet. Dad stayed, he works on the loading. His mate is renting him a room.' The girl's expression was sombre.

'You must worry about him still being by the docks. Still, at least you have bed and board here with a wage,' Jane said. The girl had clearly suffered a lot and must be missing her family and her home. Sadly, there were many like her and until the fighting stopped no doubt there would be many more.

'Lady Tolland said you are dining at the house this evening?' Hannah said as she turned, ready to go back to the office.

'Yes, she kindly invited Arthur, Antonella and me. Will you be joining us too?' Jane asked as she hung the damp tea cloth on the edge of the sink to air.

'I expect so. Will you be staying long with Antonella?' Hannah asked as Jane joined her ready to brave Lady Tolland in her den.

'It all depends. I have to write a report for my superiors on the efficacy and safety of the facility. Arthur is assisting Lawrence to sort out the issues with the sensors and then I suppose we will return home. My cat is at Arthur's house and I miss him terribly so I hope it won't take long,' Jane confided as they walked back to Marietta's office.

'I had a cat. A little black one called Sooty. When the bombing started he ran off and we never found him again.' Hannah looked as if she was about to cry.

'I rescued Marmaduke from a bomb site as a kitten after a raid. He lost an eye. You never know. Maybe someone has your cat somewhere safe.' Jane did her best to cheer the girl up, but Hannah looked unconvinced.

'Hannah, goodness me, girl, how long does it take to wash two cups? We have a meeting with Athene Metcalf to look at moving the pictures she has there. I need you to drive me.' Marietta didn't give her assistant time to get through the office door before wheeling herself out from behind the desk. 'Jane, dear, you could come with us. That will give you the opportunity to see the operation from the other side, so to speak.'

Hannah gave Jane a quick apologetic look. 'I'll collect our coats, Lady Tolland.'

'Thank you. Yes, I should like to see how the logistics are organised once pieces have been identified for storage,' Jane agreed.

Jane thought Marietta was probably right. Much as she would have liked to poke about in the office without either Hannah or Marietta being

there, she should look at how the pieces were selected and transport arranged.

‘Lawrence, Jane and I have a meeting. Bring Antonella and Arthur back to the house when you finish,’ Marietta accosted her brother as he and Arthur were heading for the staffroom.

Arthur exchanged a quick glance with Jane, and she returned a barely perceptible nod to indicate all was well. She knew he would keep investigating in the caves. Jane determined she would do her best to find out more about both the operation to move the artworks and Marietta’s relationship with Sanford and Antonella.

Hannah took Marietta’s keys to let them out of the facility, before wheeling her employer to her car and assisting her from the chair onto the passenger seat. The wheelchair was then stowed inside the car. Jane took her place on the rear seat.

‘May I smoke?’ Jane already had her bag open looking for her cigarettes and lighter.

‘Of course, my dear,’ Lady Tolland agreed.

Hannah checked the directions with Marietta, and they set off along the lanes towards the main road. It appeared that the house they were going to was about an hour’s drive away.

‘Dear Athene only has about a dozen or so pieces but two of them are extremely large and valuable. They should have been safe where they were, but her roof has developed a terrible leak and she is concerned about the damp,’ Marietta explained as Hannah expertly guided the large car around a man on a bicycle.

‘Are there many more houses who have pieces that will need to be moved into the facility?’ Jane asked.

‘Obviously there are less as time goes on. The most at risk and largest collections moved first. Some to us, some to Wales, and others stayed in London. Now we are mainly receiving smaller collections or items that should have been safe but are being observed to be at risk,’ Marietta said. ‘Do be careful, Hannah, you’ll have us in a ditch,’ she reprimanded her assistant, even though Jane thought there was nothing wrong with the girl’s driving.

Marietta kept up a more or less constant stream of commentary about all kinds of things all through the journey. She only paused to either reprimand

Hannah for some alleged transgression or for Jane to agree or disagree with something she had said.

‘Almost here, take the next right turn, Hannah, and we should see Ravenswood Park right in front of us.’ Lady Tolland waved her hand imperiously in front of Hannah’s nose.

Jane’s heart gave an unexpected thump, hoping she had misheard what Marietta had said. Instead, her fears were confirmed when Hannah steered the car between two tall stone posts each topped with a raven bearing a shield which Jane recognised all too well.

She tried to compose herself as they entered the long drive between an avenue of lime trees to approach a large stone mansion built in the Palladian style. How had she not made the connection when Marietta had mentioned who they were visiting?

‘Pull up near the front door, Hannah. I think we should be able to get the chair into the house as there is only a small step. Lady Metcalf will have staff to assist us.’ Marietta directed the girl on where to park while Jane took several deep breaths and braced herself for the meeting.

With luck Lady Metcalf wouldn’t recognise her. She had only seen her once before, briefly at the funeral and Jane hadn’t attended the gathering afterwards. Everything had happened so fast back then there had been no time to think, and Jane herself had been in no fit state to meet Hugo’s parents. There had seemed no point since he was gone and she would have to carry on without him.

Jane swallowed hard and waited as Hannah unloaded Marietta’s wheelchair and went to assist her employer from the car. It all seemed so long ago now, and so much had happened since those awful few weeks right at the start of the war. Her mind flew to the modest ring sitting in the drawer of her bedside cabinet back in London. The symbol of a promise that had been cut short by tragedy.

The door to the house opened and two male servants appeared, assisting Hannah and Lady Tolland with the wheelchair over the threshold and into the spacious hall of Ravenswood.

Jane hung back a little as Lady Metcalf arrived to greet them. Tall and elegant with her brown hair confined in a neat chignon at the nape of her neck she bent to kiss Marietta’s cheeks. ‘Marietta, darling, it’s been too long.’

‘Athene, I’d like you to meet Miss Jane Treen, she has been sent by Whitehall to oversee our little storage programme, and, of course, I think you may have met Hannah before.’ Marietta looked around for Jane, forcing her to come forward.

‘I’m delighted to meet you, Lady Metcalf.’ Jane was proud of how steady her voice sounded as she shook hands with the woman who might have become her mother-in-law.

A tiny frown crinkled Lady Metcalf’s forehead as she looked at Jane. ‘It’s good to meet you. I’ll take you up to the gallery so you can see the pictures. I suppose Marietta has told you all about the roof? It’s a problem with the lead sheeting and that wretched storm a few weeks ago.’

‘Yes, she said there had been a leak and that was why you needed the pictures to be moved,’ Jane said.

‘It’s such a nuisance.’ Lady Metcalf still had a curious expression on her face as if trying to place Jane’s features. ‘Marietta, darling, do go on into the drawing room. I’ve asked them to bring us some tea. I’ll take your assistant and Miss Treen to look at what needs to be moved in the gallery, and we’ll come and join you when we’re done.’

Lady Tolland was duly escorted to the drawing room while Hannah and Jane followed Lady Metcalf’s trim, tweed-clad figure up the shallow flight of oak stairs to the gallery.

Jane could see at once what had happened. Watermarks stained the once elegant wallpaper, and several pictures had already been moved out of imminent danger and were stacked against one of the dry walls. Plaster had fallen from the ceiling in places and the ornate plaster mouldings and cornicing were damaged. The air smelt of damp and decay.

‘Goodness me, what a disaster.’ Hannah had taken out a notebook, and she started cataloguing all the pictures which would need to be moved.

‘Of course, these two are the largest.’ Lady Metcalf had paused in front of two huge portraits suspended from the cornicing. ‘They are family pictures but of great value both to us and to the nation.’

Jane steadied her breathing as she looked at the portrait of Hugo’s grandfather. Apart from the clothing of an earlier age, she could have been looking at Hugo himself. Grief hit her afresh and she blinked rapidly to keep it in check.

‘We shall have to make special arrangements to move those.’ Hannah had joined them and was busy peering up to see how the pictures had been

secured in place. 'The weight is considerable I would imagine, but at least the access down the stairs to get them out should be satisfactory.'

'Excellent. I was a little worried about that. There are valuable figures at the bottom of the bannisters,' Lady Metcalf said. 'Do you need more time up here or shall we go and join Lady Tolland?'

'I just need to make a few more notes,' Hannah said as she scribbled in her book. 'Do go ahead and I'll join you shortly.'

Jane followed her hostess, leaving Hannah to complete her task.

'I must say, Miss Treen, you seem very familiar. Tell me, my dear, have we met before somewhere?' Lady Metcalf asked, glancing at her as they prepared to walk down the stairs.

'I don't think so. I've never been to Ravenswood Park before,' Jane answered honestly, and hoped that would be an end to that line of questioning. She had no wish to revisit a part of her life which was still so painful.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Marietta was presiding over a silver tea service when they entered the large and elegant drawing room. 'Is everything all right?' she asked, looking first at Jane and then at Lady Metcalf.

'I believe so. Your assistant is just finishing making notes about the pieces. She seems to think the portraits can be managed. As you know from our previous discussions, they are very large.' Lady Metcalf subsided gracefully onto an armchair while Marietta poured the tea. Two yellow Labradors sat close by, clearly hoping for a biscuit. Jane remained standing in order to help Marietta distribute the cups.

Her stomach gave a low growl, and she realised she had missed her lunch. Thankfully there were actual slices of cake and even some biscuits on the tray. Once Lady Metcalf had been served, Jane helped herself and settled on the sofa to eat what she could before Hannah joined them.

'Marietta said you had been sent directly from Whitehall, Miss Treen. It's good to know that Mr Churchill is taking the threat to our art treasures so seriously,' Lady Metcalf said.

'Absolutely, those were my feelings too. Security is most important,' Marietta agreed.

'Everything seems to be working most efficiently from what I've observed so far,' Jane responded cautiously and wondered if she would look greedy if she took another slice of apple cake.

Lady Tolland beamed approvingly at her, clearly pleased by Jane's comment. Hannah slipped into the room looking a little flushed.

‘Have you taken notes, names of the pieces and artists, looked at the fixings?’ Marietta asked before Jane could even hand the girl a cup of tea.

‘Yes, Lady Tolland, all done. The measurements are here too.’ She tapped her notebook before tucking it inside her bag. ‘I believe I have all the information you will need to arrange the transfer and storage.’ Hannah gave Jane a small grateful smile as she took her tea and a slice of cake.

Marietta sniffed but refrained from any further comment while Hannah took a drink of tea.

‘Henry was hoping that the estate workers might be able to help us repair the roof but it’s so difficult now with so many having been called up. The ones that are left have so many jobs to do already. Then there is the difficulty in obtaining materials. If only dear Hugo had been spared.’ Lady Metcalf blinked rapidly before seeming to give herself a small shake.

‘I do feel for you, my dear, such a terrible loss to your family. This wretched war feels as if it’s been going on forever,’ Marietta agreed.

Jane took solace in the last of her tea. It felt so strange hearing Hugo’s name spoken aloud again. She knew he had told his parents that he had news for them. They had been preparing to tell them of the engagement the weekend he’d been killed. Clearly Lady Metcalf hadn’t recognised her surname, and she didn’t know exactly what Hugo had said about her.

‘I haven’t been in London for simply ages now. Jane, dear, is the damage as bad as some of the reports have made out with the bombing raids?’ Marietta asked.

‘Some parts of the city have been extensively damaged, especially in the East End. I was in Kent too not long ago and the towns along the coast there have also been badly affected,’ Jane said.

‘Henry is in London today. He has meetings at the War Office,’ Lady Metcalf said. She looked at Jane again. ‘My dear, you do seem so familiar and I can’t think why.’

‘I think I have one of those faces, it happens a lot.’ Jane forced a smile. ‘I have played piano for a number of artistes in the past, so perhaps you’ve seen me before at one of the fundraising events.’

She didn’t want to directly bring up her mother’s name but hoped this might settle Athene Metcalf’s concerns about recognising her.

‘Speaking of fundraising, Athene, you and Henry will be attending this charity do of Lawrence’s at the weekend, I hope? You are most welcome to stay overnight with us at the house.’ Marietta set her cup and saucer down

on the tea trolley. 'We'll have quite a nice house party and Elsa Macintyre is singing.'

'It does sound delightful. I'll speak to Henry when he gets home and let you know,' Lady Metcalf said. 'One misses being out in society so much.'

They finished their tea and the servants were summoned once again to help Hannah get Marietta and her chair back out to the car. Lady Metcalf followed them outside to see them off, her Labrador dogs following faithfully at her heels.

Jane hopped onto the back seat and promised herself a cigarette as soon as they had pulled away. The visit to Ravenswood Park had taken far more out of her than she had anticipated.

Lady Metcalf waved them off and Jane exhaled slowly as the woman's figure receded into the distance.

'Are you feeling all right, Jane, dear?' Marietta asked, glancing over her shoulder. 'You look a little peaky. I hope it's not from sitting in the back of the car?'

'I've had a slight headache come on, that's all. I'm sure it will go off soon,' Jane assured her.

'So strange Athene thinking she'd met you before. She's usually terribly good at remembering faces,' Marietta said.

'It was very strange,' Jane agreed. She met Hannah's curious gaze in the rear-view mirror and forced herself to look composed.

The drive to Marietta's home was filled once more with Lady Tolland's chatter. This time mercifully, it was almost entirely directed towards Hannah with hundreds of questions about the paintings and the condition of the artworks.

This left Jane free to gather herself, lean back against the leather upholstery and allow herself time to recover. She had never told anyone about Hugo. Well, no one except her beloved father and then she had lost him too later on. She and Hugo had decided not to tell Elsa about the engagement until after they had spoken to Hugo's parents and Jane had met them. They should have gone to Ravenswood when Hugo was next due for his leave. Two days before that date he had been killed.

Hartfield House, Marietta's home, was smaller than Ravenswood Park but no less grand or palatial. The front entrance had been adapted for Marietta's wheelchair, so it was much simpler to enter the hallway. Jane knew from Arthur that Marietta's late husband had been considerably older

than his wife. He had died several years before the war from a stroke, leaving behind several mistresses, a well-stocked wine cellar and gambling debts.

Marietta had sold the wine, dismissed the mistresses and worked to discharge the debts. Lawrence had moved into one wing of the house after his own marriage had collapsed.

The household was in some disarray as they entered. It appeared that Lawrence, Antonella and Arthur had arrived shortly before them. Lawrence was on the telephone near the foot of a sweeping oak staircase apparently conducting a difficult conversation. Antonella and Arthur were standing nearby having given their coats to a maid, who promptly came to assist her mistress.

‘No, Miss Macintyre, I do understand but I’m sure we can find you a suitable pianist.’ Lawrence’s voice was clearly audible as he pinched the skin above the bridge of his nose with his free hand while answering Elsa.

‘What’s going on?’ Jane murmured to Arthur.

‘Elsa is threatening to cancel, something about her pianist. The telephone was ringing as we arrived.’ Arthur’s gaze met hers.

Jane sighed. She knew her mother and her talent for drama all too well.

‘Lawrence, is that Miss Macintyre?’ Jane asked as she approached.

He covered the mouth of the receiver with his hand. ‘She has a problem with her pianist, she says she can’t perform.’

‘Give me the telephone.’ There was a steel in her voice that compelled Lawrence to hand the receiver to her. He took a step back. ‘I don’t know, can you...’

His voice trailed off as Jane braced herself and took the handset from him.

‘Mother, it’s Jane. Lawrence says you have a problem with the event this weekend.’

‘Janey pie, oh my gosh, sweetie, whatever are you doing there? It’s my pianist. He’s refusing to come, something about his sister being in hospital and the children. Why a man should worry about something like that I simply can’t imagine. Anyway, I was just explaining to Mr Coombs that I need someone who can accompany me. A professional person, not the vicar’s wife or some girl fresh out of school. I am an artiste, my fans expect perfection.’ Elsa’s cultured American tones rushed into her ear.

‘I can accompany you. I know all of your repertoire. Bring the music with you and I’ll be here.’ Jane had no time for Elsa’s theatrics. She had been listening to versions of this script her entire life.

‘But how? I mean, Janey, what are you even doing there? Don’t tell me they gave you time off from that little typing job again? Does Stephen even know? I mean you are taking liberties with your work, honey.’

‘Stephen is not my boss. I am already here working. My employer is fully aware.’ Jane glanced around meeting the curious glances of the other people in the hall.

Lawrence gaped at her, his mouth slightly open. Hannah and Marietta looked confused. Antonella frowned, while Arthur returned her glance with a sympathetic half smile.

‘Janey pie, I really don’t understand you at all. I suppose that Arthur Cilento is mixed up in this somewhere, isn’t he? Is dear Mr Benson with him?’ The harsh tone of her mother’s voice around Arthur’s name softened when Benson’s name left her lips.

‘Yes, Arthur is here with me and Benson has accompanied him. Now, is everything settled?’ Jane asked. She had no desire to get into any personal matters with an audience listening intently to at least one half of the conversation.

‘Of course, honey. Tell Mr Coombs that I hope he’s remembered my order for a car and I’ll see you soon. Kisses.’ Elsa rang off.

Jane replaced the receiver carefully on the bracket of the candlestick-style telephone. ‘Miss Macintyre is coming. I’ll accompany her.’

Arthur gave her a tiny nod, and his steady presence soothed her frayed nerves.

‘Jane, Miss Treen, I, we, that is I had no idea that you and Miss Macintyre...’ Lawrence’s eyes were still wide in a mix of bewilderment and admiration.

‘My mother prefers a separation between her public and private life.’ Jane unbuttoned her coat and handed it to the uniformed maid who was still waiting near the cloakroom. She guessed this incident in the hall would be the chief topic of conversation in the servants’ hall later on.

‘Well, bravo, and thank you, my dear, for offering your help.’ Marietta was the first to break the tableaux. ‘I think this deserves a drink, don’t you? Lawrence, some cocktails.’ She signalled to Hannah to propel her into the drawing room.

Jane's hands were still shaking as Arthur joined her to follow the small procession into the long, elegant room. He gave her fingers a gentle squeeze.

'You look as if you've been through the mill this afternoon.' His voice was low in her ear, his breath stirring a stray strand of hair that had slipped free from her bun.

'You have no idea. Mother is just the cherry on the cake,' she responded with feeling and allowed him to guide her to a seat on a long, low, tapestry-covered sofa.

He took his place beside her, keeping her hand in his while Lawrence went over to a well-stocked gilt bar trolley sited next to a grand piano. Hannah placed Marietta near the large Italianate marble fireplace, while Antonella took a seat on a nearby occasional chair.

'Righto, drinks.' Lawrence picked up the cocktail shaker and rang the bell for ice.

There was a babble of voices as everyone spoke to fill the awkwardness following the conversation in the hall. Lawrence took orders for drinks with Hannah assisting him. Marietta talked about Ravenswood Park and Antonella spoke of her progress removing damage from a Gainsborough painting.

Hannah handed around martinis while Jane did her best to relax. Her neck and the back of her head ached from tension. The fictional headache acquired at Ravenswood Park threatened to become a real one. Arthur seemed to sense her discomfort and stayed close to her as the conversation buzzed around her.

'I must say, Jane, you are quite the dark horse. No wonder Athene thought she recognised you.' Marietta's voice cut across the rest. 'Arthur, we had no idea your girlfriend was so well connected.'

Jane felt him shift awkwardly beside her. 'As Jane said in the hall, her mother likes to keep family and her professional life separate.'

'Well, I for one am jolly glad you arrived when you did. You pulled quite a rabbit from the hat. You saved my bacon, I can tell you. It was all looking pretty sticky if we couldn't find a suitable pianist at such short notice. I did say we had the band to accompany her, but your mother is quite the perfectionist,' Lawrence said as he moved to another sofa matching the one Jane and Arthur were seated on.

Hannah took a seat beside him looking slightly self-conscious as she cradled her glass.

‘I do hope that’s a soft drink, Hannah, dear.’ Marietta shot her assistant a sharp glance.

‘It’s just juice, Marietta,’ Lawrence assured his sister in a smooth tone while Hannah’s cheeks blossomed poppy red.

It was growing dark now outside and Jane could hear the sounds of the staff moving around the house to ensure the blackout was in place. Lawrence jumped to his feet to assist the maid who came in to close the drawing-room shutters and to pull the thick damask drapes to cover the large windows.

‘I do so hate all of this,’ Marietta said once the task was completed and the lights were on. ‘It makes one feel so enclosed. I shall be glad when we are further on in the season and we can sit outside on the terrace for a while. I know it’s almost spring and everything is greening up, but it does feel as if it’s been winter forever.’

Jane knew what she meant. Everything these days was grey and dreary. Summer did seem a long way off when you were trapped inside with the fire flickering and the constant dread of hearing the sirens wail.

‘Perhaps you could play for us after dinner, Jane? If it’s not too much of an imposition,’ Marietta suggested. ‘We have such a lovely piano here and I’m afraid that there is only Lawrence who tinkles on it every now and then.’

‘Of course, it would be my pleasure,’ Jane agreed. She understood the social norms. It was the done thing that when given supper you were expected to provide entertainment either by cards, sparkling conversation, or some similar contribution.

Marietta looked pleased with herself. ‘Dinner should be ready soon. Hannah, please assist me. I’ll just go and freshen up before the gong.’

Hannah immediately abandoned her drink and went to wheel Marietta from the room.

‘Did you make any progress with the sensors this afternoon, Lawrence?’ Antonella asked once their hostess had departed.

‘I think so, didn’t we, Arthur? It was frightfully helpful comparing the earlier blueprints with the ones the ministry supplied. I think we may have nailed the issue. Now we need to come up with a solution,’ Lawrence said.

‘That sounds very positive,’ Jane agreed and took a sip of her drink. It was a little strong for her tastes. Lawrence certainly had a generous hand when it came to mixing his cocktails.

‘Did you think there would be much work on the pictures coming from Lady Metcalf?’ Antonella asked, looking at Jane.

‘I’m no expert about picture restoration but the damage to the roof of the gallery seemed extensive and everything smelled of damp. I would imagine that some of the works may have suffered,’ Jane said.

‘We shall have to try and find another restorer to join us. It’s a lot of work for just Betsy and me.’ Antonella looked concerned.

‘Leave all of that to Marietta, you know she’s a positive powerhouse when it comes to organising things.’ Lawrence swallowed the last of his drink. ‘Anyone for a top-up before dinner?’

‘No, thank you.’ If she was going to play after they had eaten, she had better keep her wits about her, Jane decided. Arthur and Antonella refused as well so Lawrence shrugged and refilled his own glass.

Dinner at Hartfield proved to be surprisingly good. French onion soup to start, followed by slivers of duck in a rich plum sauce. Jane wondered if the duck had come from the estate. The chandelier glittered overhead and the crystal and silverware gleamed. Dessert was a delicate pastry with slivers of apple and real cream. It was almost as if the war was a distant bad dream.

By the time coffee was served back in the drawing room away from the vast and cool dining room, Jane was beginning to feel a little better. She noticed that Lawrence had managed to seat himself beside Antonella, while Hannah busied herself serving the coffee with a slightly disgruntled expression.

Arthur continued to stay close and Jane decided that fictional boyfriend or not, his presence was decidedly reassuring given what had happened that afternoon.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Arthur watched as Jane seated herself at the grand piano. She lifted the lid, ran her hands over the keys and played a scale as if testing the sound. He knew that something untoward had occurred during the trip to Ravenswood Park. There had been an expression on Jane's face when she had returned to Marietta's home that he hadn't seen before.

Her gaze met his for a brief moment before she started to play and he smiled gently at her. She started a Chopin nocturne he had heard her play at her home in Kent. He knew it was a favourite piece that she had once said was soothing. The room was silent as they listened to her play. Antonella had her eyes closed and he suspected she was thinking of Sanford.

Her brother had loved music of all kinds, but this piece had often been heard drifting from the gramophone when Arthur had called in to see him when he had been at Oxford. Hannah had perched herself on the end of the sofa next to Lawrence, leaving him sandwiched between her and Antonella. By the twist in the corners of Marietta's lips, he knew this move had not gone unnoticed by Lawrence's sister.

It struck him as strange that since working more closely with Jane he had become more aware of the nuances of people's behaviours. He had realised for years that reading people's true meanings both from their words and their actions was not his forte. This evening though he could feel the undercurrent of tension in the room, even if he couldn't determine who or what was causing it.

There was a ripple of applause as the piece ended and Jane lifted her long, slender fingers from the keys.

‘Oh, I say, bravo, Jane. That was simply marvellous.’ Lawrence beamed his approval.

Antonella dabbed a tear from the corner of her eye. ‘That was lovely. It was one of Sanford’s favourite pieces of music. He always said he found it moving.’

‘Thank you. You are all being very kind. It was one of my father’s favourites too. I often used to play it for him.’ Jane looked at Antonella.

She flexed her fingers and played a short selection of more modern pieces. Some of them were ones which Arthur knew she played for Elsa. Jane finished with another classical piece and was rewarded with another warm round of applause.

‘Thank you for a splendid evening, Marietta. It’s been wonderful to have a few hours out but perhaps, Lawrence, we might trouble you to drive us home before it gets too late?’ Antonella turned to her companion.

‘Golly, yes, of course. Heard they are clamping down now on unnecessary journeys so better not push our luck,’ Lawrence agreed.

Arthur stood and went over to Jane who was placing the piano lid carefully back over the keys. ‘Are you all right?’ he asked in a quiet tone.

‘Yes, I think I will be, but thank you.’ Her gaze didn’t meet his and he touched her arm in a gesture of support.

Marietta had summoned the maid, and they were soon bundled back into their hats and coats ready for the journey home.

‘Thank you for a lovely evening,’ Jane said as Marietta said goodnight to them all.

‘It was my pleasure. We must do this again before you both leave. You play divinely,’ Marietta said as Hannah moved to hover near her mistress’s wheelchair awaiting instructions.

‘We shall look forward to it.’ Arthur placed his hand on the small of Jane’s back.

‘We have the concert before then to look forward to,’ Lawrence reminded them as he offered his arm to Antonella as he escorted them out of the house to his waiting car.

The journey back to Antonella’s home took longer because of the darkness and the prohibition on the use of headlamps. Arthur was quite relieved when they finally pulled up and could say goodnight.

‘I’ll see you in the morning. Toodle-pip!’ Lawrence waited for Antonella to put her key in the door before driving off.

Benson greeted them in the darkened hallway, switching on the lights once the door was closed.

‘A good evening, sir?’ he asked, looking at Arthur as he collected their outdoor things and hung them on the coat stand.

‘Very pleasant,’ Arthur confirmed, hanging back as Jane and Antonella went ahead into the sitting room. ‘Did you find anything more today while we were out?’ he asked, once the women were in the other room.

‘There was nothing in any address books or correspondence for a lady of that name. However, I ventured to the church this afternoon. Miss Antonella’s housekeeper asked if I would take some greenery from the garden for the ladies arranging the flowers. It struck me, sir, that there is panelling within the church and a window dedicated to Saint Cecilia. I believe her to be the patron saint of music,’ Benson said.

‘I see, thank you.’ Arthur processed this new information. The church was very close to Antonella’s house and thinking about it now, there had been an area with wood panelling near the organ below a stained-glass window.

‘The brigadier’s secretary telephoned and he confirmed that in response to Miss Jane’s enquiry there was no one called Cecilia Znaczenie known to the department,’ Benson added. ‘Shall I prepare cocoa?’

‘Yes, please.’

Arthur wandered into the sitting room to find Jane seated on the sofa while Antonella was busy poking the fire.

‘Benson is making cocoa.’ He took a seat next to the fireplace as Antonella replaced the poker on the brass stand.

‘That’s very kind of him.’ Antonella seated herself on the opposite chair and adjusted her cushion. Her grey eyes looked tired in the warm glow emanating from the invigorated fire. ‘I hope you both won’t take this amiss, but I think I shall take mine upstairs. It’s been a long day, and I think an early night may be in order.’

‘Of course, we understand completely,’ Jane said as Benson entered the room.

He was bearing a small wooden tray with three thick china mugs of steaming cocoa and a plate of biscuits. He set it down on the polished occasional table.

‘Thank you, Benson.’ Antonella stood and collected her drink. ‘Goodnight, all, I’ll see you in the morning.’

After she had departed and the door was closed once more with the home-made sausage-shaped draught excluder securely put in place, Jane invited Benson to take a seat. He sat on the very edge of the most uncomfortable chair in the room. A straight-backed carved oak seat which looked as if it had been repurposed from some ecclesiastical building.

‘Perhaps you could tell Jane of your discoveries earlier today,’ Arthur suggested as he accepted one of the mugs of cocoa from Jane.

She listened intently as Benson passed on the message from Stephen and of his discovery inside the church.

‘Well done, Benson. I presume the church is usually left unlocked during the day?’ She cradled her drink in her hands as she asked the question.

‘I believe so, Miss Jane,’ Benson confirmed.

‘Then we need to get in there tomorrow to poke around,’ she said.

Benson cleared his throat politely. ‘I was wondering, sir, if I could be spared for the day tomorrow? There is an urgent personal matter which requires my attention.’

Arthur blinked in surprise. ‘Well, of course. Will a day be long enough?’ he asked.

‘I should imagine so. I regret any inconvenience this may cause but I am afraid it can’t be helped.’ Benson stood as if wishing to leave before either Arthur or Jane could ask any questions.

‘I’m sure we shall manage. Is everything quite all right though?’ Jane asked, a frown puckering the normally smooth skin of her brow.

‘I shall know more tomorrow, Miss Jane. If you’ll excuse me, I have some tasks to finish in the kitchen.’

Arthur stared at the sitting-room door after Benson had departed as if the wooden-panelled surface might provide a clue to his faithful manservant’s unexpected request.

‘That sounded rather odd. Do you think something is wrong? Is he unwell?’ Jane asked. ‘Does Benson take days like this usually?’

Arthur shook his head. ‘No. Benson is a man of regular habits. Two weeks by the sea at Ramsgate in September, a week in the Lakes in spring and a few days here and there to visit old friends he served with. As far as I know he has no health problems.’

‘What about family?’ Jane asked, blowing a curl of steam from the top of her mug.

‘I know he had a sister living near Broadstairs. I don’t think he’s ever mentioned anyone else.’ Arthur couldn’t recall Benson mentioning any other family members. He had always been very reticent about his personal life.

‘Hmm.’ Jane let the subject drop although she still seemed concerned.

‘How was your day? You went to Ravenswood Park this afternoon?’ He watched her carefully.

She sighed and gave him a bare bones recital of what she had observed and how it all tied together with the arrangements made for the transportation and storage of artwork. It all sounded as if everything was following the protocols which had been set down. Yet there had to be something that had led to Sanford’s death in the storage facility.

He also had the feeling that something else had happened at Ravenswood. Something perhaps more personal that had affected her. It was clear, however, as she finished her cocoa, that she was not about to confide in him about what it might be.

* * *

Jane said goodnight and went up to her room as soon as she had finished her drink. She had seen Arthur’s expression when he had asked her about her visit to Lady Metcalf and knew he thought something had happened.

She took a seat on the stool in front of her dressing table and undid her bun, shaking her thick, chestnut hair loose ready to brush it out before bed. The face that looked back at her in the mirror looked tired and she grimaced at her own reflection. A silver hair glinted on her temple in the lamplight and she tugged it out, wincing as she did so.

The afternoon had been distressing, like pulling a plaster from a cut you thought had healed. Instead, the scab had come off leaving the wound still pink, painful and exposed. She wished Marmaduke was with her. It was at times like this when she missed his gentle companionship.

She prepared for bed, her mind busy running over everything they had discovered so far. Benson’s request for a day off was troubling. Not because he didn’t deserve time off, he absolutely did, but it was the way he had asked and the reason. It was most unlike him, and she had seen that Arthur too had been perturbed.

The next morning she was awake before the rest of the household. She dressed quickly, shivering in the chilly air of her bedroom before heading downstairs. Benson was already at work, lighting the fire in the sitting room. He was dressed smartly as usual but in his brown trousers and a jacket that she knew he usually preferred when he was off duty.

‘Miss Jane, you are up early today. I was about to make a cup of tea before I leave for the station.’ He didn’t seem surprised to see her.

She followed him into the kitchen. Antonella’s housekeeper wasn’t due to arrive for at least another hour, so Jane seated herself at the kitchen table while Benson filled the kettle.

‘My mother sends her regards and hopes to see you at her concert on Saturday. I hope you’ll be back for then?’ Jane said as he set two cups and saucers on the table.

‘I do not expect any delays today, Miss Jane. I always enjoy Miss Elsa’s performances so am looking forward to her performance immensely.’ He placed the short, stubby milk jug in front of her. ‘Would you prefer coffee, Miss Jane?’

‘Please.’ She ran the tip of her forefinger around the brim of the saucer as he prepared the chrome coffee pot.

The kettle whistled on the hob and the manservant lifted it off, carefully using a cloth to avoid burning himself on the handle. He poured some water into a small teapot that was obviously only for use in the kitchen and made Jane’s coffee with the rest.

The task completed, he set both teapot and coffee jug on the table and took a seat opposite her. They sat in companionable silence while the tea steeped and the coffee brewed. Outside in the garden they could hear the birds chirping as the early sun began to dry the dew-laden grass.

Benson had just poured some tea into his cup when there was an alien sound. Jane stiffened in her seat, her gaze locking with Benson’s. He slipped from his seat and went to the window, standing to the side so he wouldn’t be observed should anyone be outside in the garden.

Neither he nor Jane spoke as she too left her seat and headed silently along the hall to the sitting room where the fire Benson had lit earlier was now crackling merrily in the grate. He had also opened the curtains, so she too peered cautiously out through the bay, concealing herself behind the drapes. She checked in the dining room too and saw nothing.

There was no one in sight. She tried to think what the noise could have been as she scanned the deserted area at the front of the house for clues. She saw nothing that appeared to be out of place. Still, the uneasy feeling still bothered her as she made her way back to the kitchen.

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Benson re-entered the house through the back door.

‘Did you see anything outside?’ Jane asked as she retook her seat at the table and picked up her rapidly cooling coffee.

‘There was no one there, but the sound we heard was the latch on the side gate and there are footprints still visible in the dew on the grass.’ Benson topped up his tea from the pot, the jaunty striped knitted cosy having done its job to keep the tea warm.

‘Male or female prints?’ Jane asked after swallowing some of her drink.

‘It’s impossible to say. They were only just noticeable since the sun is drying the grass quite quickly.’ Benson’s gaze met hers.

‘It would seem we are being watched,’ Jane said, and the manservant bowed his head in agreement. A shiver ran along her spine.

Benson rose and put the kettle back on the hob. ‘I shall inform Mr Cilento when I take up his tea. Then I’m afraid I need to leave for the station.’

‘Of course, you mustn’t miss your train,’ Jane agreed. ‘How are you getting to the station? Have you booked a car?’

Benson looked up from where he was preparing Arthur’s morning tea tray. ‘Miss Antonella has kindly granted me the use of her bicycle. She says the station master will ensure it is stored safely until I return.’

Jane was relieved he wouldn’t have to walk since although it was not out of the question to do so, it was quite a long way. Benson made the tea and departed upstairs with the tray. Jane finished her coffee and washed her

cup and Benson's in the sink. She wondered who had been in the garden and why.

Antonella joined her in the kitchen shortly after Jane had watched Benson wobble off towards the station on the borrowed bicycle.

'Good morning, Jane, I take it Mr Benson has left already to catch his train?' Her hostess moved around the kitchen collecting the heel of the loaf to slice up for toast and a fresher one to prepare packed lunches.

'He has just left. Thank you for loaning him your bike.' Jane placed the kettle back on the hob once more guessing Antonella would like tea with her breakfast.

'With Lawrence kindly taking us back and forth to the storage in his car, I don't need it at the moment.' Antonella deftly smeared butter substitute thinly over the bread for the sandwiches.

'It is very good of him, especially as fuel is in such short supply.' Jane poured boiling water onto fresh spoons of tea leaves in the warmed teapot.

'Marietta gets a fuel allowance as part of her role, and I think, since Lawrence is a local magistrate, he also gets some kind of dispensation. I don't think it's all official, but I don't ask too many questions to be honest. I suspect it is not all above board, but who knows these days.' Antonella gave a weary shrug as she opened a small jar of fish paste.

Jane suspected the older woman was right and there probably was something dodgy about the source of the petrol. 'I shan't come to the storage facility today. I need to start writing my report. Is there a typewriter available anywhere that I could use, do you know? I don't wish to use the one in the office at Westwood. Marietta is frightfully busy and she and Hannah need to work without disruption.'

'There is one in the vestry office at the church. The ladies of the institute use it for their correspondence, and the vicar likes to type his sermons.' Antonella rolled her eyes at this.

'Would they object to my using it for an hour or so do you think?' Jane was secretly quite gleeful at this information. Not only could she get her report typed but she would have the perfect excuse to poke around inside the church.

'Golly, no one would mind at all. It's available for anyone to use. The church will be open from ten so go on in and help yourself,' Antonella said. 'They do like a contribution to church funds in return. Oh, and take your own paper,' she added, with a wry smile.

‘Of course.’ Jane smiled back, understanding her meaning perfectly. Wartime or not, churches could always use funds.

The packed lunches prepared, Antonella turned her attention to toasting the bread. She accepted a cup of tea from Jane with a grateful smile. ‘I daresay Arthur will be down for breakfast in a minute. I expect Benson took his tea up before he left.’

‘Yes, I think he also prepared Arthur’s medication too.’ Jane knew Arthur’s morning routine quite well now.

Antonella gave her a sideways look as she prepared the plates ready for breakfast. ‘You and Arthur do seem very well-matched. I must admit, I was a little surprised initially when he asked if you could accompany him to Sanford’s funeral.’

‘Oh?’ Jane kept her tone mildly curious.

‘Do please forgive me if I’m speaking out of turn, Jane, dear. I’m very fond of Arthur, Sanford always held him in high esteem, but I simply never envisaged him with a girlfriend. He’s always been so immersed in his work.’ Antonella’s cheeks had flushed a delicate pink.

‘Arthur is very focused on his work, that’s quite true. I suspect our relationship has come as something of a surprise to him as well as to people that know him.’ Jane felt this explanation was both truthful and necessary to cover the real reason she was there.

‘I’m very glad for both of you. You seem to bring out a different side to him. He seems more engaged with the world now.’ Antonella dropped the toast onto a plate and reached over to pat Jane’s hand. ‘This war is hard. It’s good to have someone else to lean on.’

Jane had no chance to reply as Antonella whisked away with the toast into the dining room, leaving her to follow with the tea and the rest of the crockery.

Arthur followed her into the dining room. ‘Benson has gone I take it?’ he asked as Jane buzzed around the table putting down plates and cutlery.

‘Yes, he left for the station a little while ago.’ Jane took a seat opposite him while Antonella went back into the kitchen to fetch the marmalade. ‘I’m going to stay here today. I need to type my notes, and Antonella says there is a typewriter in the vestry at the church that I can use.’

His brows raised in understanding as their hostess returned to join them.

‘Sounds like a good idea. Your mother will be arriving tomorrow, I suppose.’ Arthur helped himself to tea.

‘Lawrence is collecting her at midday. She had very specific requirements about her transport.’ Antonella gave Jane an apologetic look.

‘I’m sure she did.’ Jane expected nothing less. She knew her mother all too well. She also knew that as soon as Elsa arrived, she would expect Jane to drop everything to rehearse her music with her so that by Saturday everything would be perfect.

They had just finished breakfast when there was the toot of a car horn outside.

‘That will be Lawrence now.’ Antonella jumped up to carry the used crockery back to the kitchen.

‘Leave this. I’ll tidy everything up before your housekeeper arrives,’ Jane assured her.

‘Thank you, so much.’ Antonella dashed off to collect her things.

‘Will you be all right, Jane? I presume you are going to investigate the church?’ Arthur murmured once their hostess had left the room. ‘Just don’t take any risks.’

‘I’ll be careful. Did Benson mention the intruder?’ she asked.

‘He did. It’s quite concerning that we are being observed. And you are recovered from yesterday?’ he added.

Jane nodded. ‘I am completely fine.’

His gaze lingered on her face for a moment as if to reassure himself that she was telling the truth before he went to get his hat and coat to join Antonella in the car. Jane waved them off from the front step before closing the door and returning to the dining room.

She knew she had roughly thirty minutes before Antonella’s housekeeper was due to arrive for her day’s work. She tidied the dining room and washed up and put away the breakfast things.

Just as she was placing the linen teacloth on the Sheila Maid to dry, the telephone started ringing inside the study. She wiped her hands on the front of her tweed skirt and hurried to answer the call.

‘Hello.’ She read off Antonella’s telephone number and heard the disembodied voice of the operator informing her it was a long-distance call, and she was being connected now. She moved the receiver away from her ear as a precaution.

‘Hello.’ The familiar bellow from the other end which followed the usual clicks and crackles was that of the brigadier.

‘Good morning, sir.’ She was glad she had moved the receiver.

‘Jane, m’dear, we have a problem.’

This was not good news. Brigadier Remmington-Blythe usually used ‘problem’ as a substitute for catastrophe.

‘Sir?’ She looked around the top of Professor Watkins’s desk for some paper and a pencil in case she needed to take instructions.

‘We have received word of a potential PR disaster in the offing.’

Jane knew he was choosing his words carefully since the telephone lines were not secure and one could never be certain that no one else was listening in to a conversation.

‘How so?’ She twiddled the pencil around in her free hand while she waited for him to explain.

‘The PM made a certain very public statement regarding the work you are currently engaged upon. It would seem that security has been breached, or more worryingly is about to be breached, and your site has been identified. If an element is liberated and ends up in enemy hands, they will waste no time in demonstrating where that piece has been obtained from, thus implying our defences are failing. This would leave a certain person with a rather egggy face and a lot of questions we would rather not have to answer.’ Brigadier Remmington-Blythe had dropped his voice to more of a rumble.

‘I see. Do you have information that it is definitely this particular facility that is at risk of the breach?’ Jane asked. She knew there were other storage places holding the treasures from the museums, galleries and some private collections.

‘As far as we can make out from what we have decoded, it seems so. The pieces the intercepted message referred to are known to be stored there. I shall send you the information via telegram. Check the security but be careful, I want whoever may be behind this caught. It will not be enough to just prevent the theft.’

‘I understand.’ Jane could see the problem.

‘This could all be connected, of course, to Professor Watkins’s demise,’ the brigadier continued. ‘He may have become aware of an issue.’

‘That sounds possible. We’ll follow up at this end, sir. I’ll look out for your telegram.’ Jane leaned back in her seat once the call ended and lit one of her cigarettes.

This new information from Whitehall was deeply troubling. The battles for victory in this war were not merely the ones being waged on the

battlefields. The biggest battle was for the hearts and minds of the population. Keeping up morale and uniting communities against the common enemy was vital if they were to emerge victorious.

If a well-known picture by a famous British artist known to be owned and usually shown in London at a major gallery were to be somehow stolen and sent overseas, it would be enormously damaging. Even more so after the prime minister's declaration to ensure that not one single piece was to be lost in such a way. She shuddered as she imagined such a picture in the hands of Hitler or Göring in the propaganda wars.

She finished her cigarette and picked up the receiver again. She wanted to make a swift, more personal call to Half Moon Manor to ensure her beloved Marmaduke was still safe and well. After yesterday and now the brigadier's call, she missed her cat more than ever.

Antonella's housekeeper arrived just after she had finished speaking to Arthur's cook. The elderly woman seemed surprised to see Jane as she stepped out into the hall.

'Oh, you give me a bit of a start there, miss. I didn't know that anyone would be at home today,' the woman said as she untied her patterned headscarf and draped it on the hooks of the coat stand.

'It's quite all right. I promise I shan't be under your feet for long. Miss Watkins told me that I could use the typewriter in the church vestry to prepare my report, so I stayed behind,' Jane explained.

'Tis a bit beaten up that old thing, but it works right enough. The church will be open about ten. Mr Talbot the verger has the keys and he always unlocks the doors then. Mr Benson has gone out for the day today, I think,' the woman said as she bustled past Jane to take her wicker shopping basket into the kitchen.

'Yes, he left earlier to take the train. Did he mention anything to you about where he was going?' Jane asked. She felt a little guilty asking the question since it was Benson's private business, but she was worried about him.

'No, miss, he didn't say. There was something to do with a Miss Davenport, I think. He said he needed a day off after talking to her on the telephone.' The housekeeper set her basket on the kitchen table with a thump and took out her apron.

Jane didn't press any further. It was clear the woman wanted her out of her domain so she could begin her work. She wondered afresh who Miss

Davenport was and why Benson would need the day off after talking to her.

* * *

Arthur sat in the rear of Lawrence's car and listened as he and Antonella discussed the concert arrangements and the logistics at the facility. Lawrence intended to tackle the temperature sensor that had been causing the issues today. Arthur knew his role would be mostly confined to passing over screws and drivers or setting up the stepladders.

The chatter fell silent for a moment when Lawrence pulled up into his usual space near the guardhouse.

'I say, who's that fellow? He's new,' he asked.

Another man dressed in uniform was alongside the regular guard. This one was younger, wider and had a steely gaze that looked as if he meant business.

'I don't know. Did your sister say anything to you about security being improved here?' Antonella asked as she collected her handbag and the box containing their packed lunches.

'No, nothing at all.' Lawrence climbed out of the car and Antonella and Arthur followed suit. Marietta's car pulled up alongside Lawrence's with Hannah at the wheel.

Arthur stood quietly at the side of the car and watched Marietta's gaze lock on to the strange figure in the guardhouse. Her hand gestures became more urgent, and Hannah scuttled from the driver's seat to collect her employer's wheelchair.

Lawrence went to assist his sister from the car into her chair. 'It looks like we have a new security guard,' Lawrence said as Marietta chivvied Hannah into place.

'If that is the case then I have not been informed. Hannah.' Marietta snapped her fingers and they moved as a group to the guard post to log in with Marietta leading the procession.

'Good morning, Lady Tolland. It seems we've been assigned a new staff member. Orders from London apparently.' The regular guard didn't meet her eyes as he handed her the clipboard to sign.

'So, I see. I wasn't informed about anyone new starting.' Marietta scribbled her name and passed the board around for them all to sign.

‘It was instructions from one of the galleries, your ladyship. They were concerned that we might be understaffed here,’ the guard said as he took back the sheet.

The new man hadn’t yet spoken. Arthur watched him covertly from under the brim of his hat.

‘What is your name, my man?’ Lady Tolland peered imperiously at the new guard.

‘Stevens, your ladyship. I’m to support your regular security man to ensure cover is adequate. The Home Guard will still continue to cover nights.’ The new guard had a low, deep voice. Arthur thought he detected a hint of a north London accent. The man didn’t sound local.

‘I see. Well, extra staff are always welcome, I suppose, although I wish they would send more curators and conservators,’ Marietta said as Betsy and Dickie arrived, pink cheeked and breathless on their bicycles.

Stevens nodded in acknowledgement of her complaint and watched impassively as the new arrivals signed in, before he escorted them to the doors to open up.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Jane reviewed her notes and waited until she saw the stooped grey-haired figure of the vergers go by the front of the house to unlock the church. After she had seen him return, she called out to the housekeeper to let her know she was going to the vestry before putting on her coat and slipping out of the front door.

It was a fresh, blustery day. The clouds skidded across the crisp blue sky and the orange centred daffodils swayed in the breeze as she walked along the street to the church. Much to her annoyance when she opened the wooden door to enter the building she saw she was not the first person to arrive.

A plump woman in her forties, her hair tied up in a colourful cotton scarf with a duster and tin of brass polish in her hands, was already hard at work. She looked up as the door closed behind Jane with a hollow thump that seemed to sound around the building.

‘Good morning,’ the woman said as she rubbed polish onto a brass plaque.

‘Good morning. Miss Watkins said that I might use the typewriter in the vestry for my notes. Will that be all right?’ Jane asked.

‘Oh yes, miss, you go right ahead. The church does expect a donation though. I assume she mentioned that?’ The woman continued to scrub industriously at the brass, making it shine in the coloured light filtering in through the stained-glass windows.

‘Of course. I’d be delighted to contribute. It will be so helpful to get this typed up.’ Jane moved her arm to indicate the brown cardboard folder of

paper and smaller black notebook she was holding.

The woman beamed happily at her. 'The vestry is open. It's that door down there at the side, my dear. Are you staying with Miss Watkins?'

'Yes, just for a few more days. I think she likes our company, you know, after losing her brother so suddenly.' Jane sensed the woman was ready for a bit of a natter while she worked.

'That was a terrible thing.' The woman's smile faded. 'He was such a nice man, the professor. He used to come and visit the church quite often. I'd come in and find him sat down there near the front. He always said it helped him to think, the peace and quiet here. I couldn't believe it when I heard as he'd passed away. He always seemed such a fit man, cycling and walking everywhere.' The woman tutted and shook her head as she poured more polish onto her cloth. 'It just goes to show, you never really know. Heart attack I think they said it was.' She glanced at Jane.

'I think so. It was a dreadful shock to Antonella too,' Jane agreed. 'This is a beautiful church, I can see why the professor liked to spend time here.'

The cleaner flushed with pride. 'Thank you, miss, we're very proud of it.'

'It's so lovely that you keep it open and looking so nice. I suppose I had better go and type up these notes. I presume you have an offertory box for donations?' Jane asked.

'It's down near the front, miss, near the vestry door,' the woman said.

Jane thanked her and strolled slowly towards the vestry entrance. She took her time to look for the panelling that Benson had suggested might be the place where the professor could have concealed his notes.

She spotted a window that might well fit the bill for being a depiction of St Cecilia sited near the pipe organ. Satisfied that she had at least identified a starting point for later she continued on into the vestry to find the vicar's typewriter.

The vestry was quite small with a large, old-fashioned wooden cupboard for storing robes and a battered desk, chair, lamp and typewriter. It was also quite chilly so she quickly decided it would be better to keep her coat on.

She settled herself into the chair and wound some paper into the machine. Fortunately, she was a quick typist with a good speed so she didn't anticipate it would take her too long to make sense of her notes. Hopefully by then the cleaner would have completed her polishing and she

would be able to explore the area near the organ that she'd seen on her way to the vestry.

After around an hour, when her fingers were beginning to cramp in the cold, she thought she heard the dull thud of the church door closing. She finished off the paragraph she was typing then took the paper from the machine. It all sounded quiet in the church.

Jane moved quickly to place all her documents back in the folder and gathered her things before opening the vestry door to peep out into the nave. It seemed that the cleaning lady had finished and gone, leaving behind only the smell of Brasso and dust motes floating in the air near the stone font.

She stepped out into the church and made her way to the area of wooden panelling she had seen near the organ. The offertory box was nearby so she slipped her promised donation inside. She studied the small stained-glass window which Benson had thought depicted St Cecilia. Since she was the patron saint of music she supposed it was an appropriate place to site such an image.

The wood panelling seemed quite old, encasing the area all around the organ. The pipes of different sizes soared upwards, and she noticed it was a newer type no longer needing the services of a choir boy to operate a set of bellows to make it work. Instead, it seemed to have been connected to the electrical supply to provide the pressure.

She worked away around the panels looking for anything that might appear loose or different from its neighbours. Frustratingly, there was nothing obvious. She began to tap and listen for signs that one of the planks of dark-brown stained pine might be concealing a hollow space.

Just as she started to think she was on a wild goose chase she realised that unlike the rest of the floor of the church which was stone, the area beneath the back of the organ had been replaced with wood. She assumed this must have been done to conceal the electrical supply when the instrument had been modernised.

Jane crouched down and looked more closely at the floorboards. One of them seemed looser than the others, she assumed for ease of maintenance. After a quick look around to ensure there was still no one else inside the church she pulled at the one end. It lifted up quite easily and her pulse raced when she saw a small black leather-bound notebook.

She whisked it out of the space and dropped the plank back, hitting the wood with the heel of her hand to ensure it fitted snugly. She tucked the notebook safely inside her bag. It would be safer to read the contents inside the warm house than to loiter in the cold church.

The door of the church opened as she turned to pick up her folder where she had rested it down on a pew while she'd been investigating the floor.

'Oh, I do beg your pardon. I am not disturbing you, I hope?' The vicar wandered into the church, an apologetic smile on his face.

'Not at all, Vicar, I was about to leave. Miss Watkins told me I could use your typewriter. I was just leaving a small donation for your funds.' Jane settled her papers under her arm.

'Ah yes, I knew I recognised you. You are the lady staying with dear Antonella. I believe we met at Professor Watkins's funeral.' The puzzled frown on the vicar's brow smoothed once he had realised where he knew her from.

'That's right.' She accepted his extended hand and shook hands with him. 'I was telling the lady polishing the brasses earlier what a lovely church you have here.'

'Indeed, so much history but alas that also brings the burden of upkeep. Thank you so much for your donation and I'm glad you were able to use our machine. Do give my regards to Antonella.'

'I will, thank you.' Jane made good her escape before the vicar could inveigle further funds from her or engage her in a lengthy discussion on the history of the church. At the funeral he had given a lengthy discourse on the carved imp above the font. She was eager to return to the house to examine her find before Arthur or Antonella returned. She was also keen to see if the brigadier's telegram had arrived yet.

The house was filled with the sound of somewhat tuneless female singing when she stepped into the hall. Antonella's housekeeper had obviously been cleaning in Jane's absence. The house smelled pleasantly of lavender polish and beeswax.

'Oh, Miss Treen, I was just going to go to the church to look for you. A telegram arrived a minute or two ago.' The housekeeper emerged from the study having clearly heard Jane enter the hall.

She reached into her apron pocket and handed the telegram over.

'Thank you. I was expecting this.' Jane took the telegram and wandered into the sitting room.

‘Can I get you a drink, miss? Or something for lunch?’ The housekeeper followed behind her.

‘A cup of black coffee would be marvellous. It’s quite chilly in the vestry, my fingers are frozen.’ Jane took a seat beside the fire, glad of the heat from the flames.

‘Would you like a sandwich or some soup?’ the housekeeper persisted.

‘A sandwich would be lovely.’ Jane didn’t want to open the telegram until the woman had gone and then she wanted peace and quiet to study the notebook she had retrieved from the church.

As soon as the woman had gone to the kitchen, she opened the telegram.

Turner, Nat G alt Constable

Jane sighed and reread the few words before consigning the missive to the fire. She had hoped for the name of a work, not just two possible artists, and the gallery that usually housed them. She would need to delve into the filing system and then manually check the racks to see if the pictures were still where they were supposed to be. It would be a mammoth task, and she wasn’t sure if there was anyone other than Arthur who she could completely trust to assist her.

It made sense that the enemy would try to extract a typically English picture by a renowned English artist. In propaganda terms that would send a powerful message. It would say your treasures are not safe, we can steal whatever we wish. Your English landscape is in our hands and soon your country will fall too.

That was probably why they hadn’t tried to steal a da Vinci or a Rembrandt, or any one of the many other famous pictures currently stored deep in the bowels of Westwood Quarry.

The housekeeper entered the room bearing a tray which she set down on the side table.

‘There you are, Miss Treen, pop it back in the kitchen when you’ve finished. I have to go home now for a spell to let a man in who’s coming to fix my tap. I’ve been waiting weeks for him to come and I mustn’t miss him.’

‘Dear me, no. It’s so difficult these days getting repairs done. Take your time and please don’t worry,’ Jane reassured her, secretly pleased at the idea

of having the house to herself for an hour. It would give her time to see what Professor Watkins had hidden in his notebook.

Jane poured herself a cup of coffee from the pot and waited patiently for the front door to close and the housekeeper to scurry away down the street. As soon as she was gone, she took a bite of her fish paste sandwich and pulled the notebook from the depths of her handbag.

The first entries appeared on the surface to be unremarkable. The journal had been used almost like a diary. Each entry was dated and started the same way with a note about the weather and the phase of the moon. Then there was a mention of work, of compiling crosswords, and giving an opinion on a student's thesis.

Jane continued to eat her sandwiches while she read the entries. There was no mention of seeing a doctor or of feeling unwell. No record of having left Westwood to take a trip to London for a medical consultation. That in itself seemed to confirm their belief that the pills found with his body had been planted there by his murderer.

The entries were concise. A few had sketches with them, schematics of what appeared to be the wiring issues which Lawrence and now Arthur were attempting to resolve. She dusted the breadcrumbs from her fingertips and set the empty plate aside.

The more recent entries now started to cover the weeks approaching the professor's demise. There was still no mention of any kind of feelings of ill health, although Jane thought she noticed a slight change in tone. Up until then the entries had been bland, almost nondescript jottings. A few mentions of Marietta's officiousness, Lawrence not taking things seriously, but nothing that struck her as unusual.

Gradually, however, she saw there were a few more mentions of names or initials of people she could identify.

Betsy looks anxious and mentioned she is struggling with cataloguing. Dickie being blamed for racks not in the right place.

Then the first mention of something not being right.

Jane paused to take a long drink of her now much cooler cup of coffee. She sensed from the diary that Sanford had been a man who chose his words carefully, both in life and on the page. If these names were appearing

now, then she needed to pay attention. There was something in this book that had led him to hide it, leaving complicated clues to enable it to be found only by a person he trusted. Arthur.

H is quiet. Marietta looks tired. L says he is overworked. B reported more anomalies. Dickie took me to one side and said he thought things had been moved again. Spoke to the guard and reviewed entry logs. Nothing unusual looking at previous patterns but still...

The row of dots was new. What did he mean but still? They would need to look at the security logs held in the guardhouse. Did the professor mean the patterns for deliveries or for the staff going in and out of the facility?

Jane read on, the uneasy feeling in her stomach growing heavier with every sentence. She was at the last few days now before the professor's death and still no definitive clue to who might be responsible for his death.

Then the entry dated around the time he had sent Arthur the cryptic crossword in the new grid. She would need to check but she had a feeling it may have been either the same day or the day before. One directly addressed to Arthur personally.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Arthur accompanied Lawrence inside the facility and waited patiently for the other man to collect the tool box from the storeroom. Antonella went to the restoration gallery, while Hannah wheeled Marietta to her office. Dickie set to work immediately, pulling items from the racks for Betsy to check on her list.

He could tell by the way they huddled together after a few minutes, both looking at the clipboard that the woman was holding, that something was bothering them. After a moment Dickie disappeared back into the largest of the rooms where the paintings were stored, while Betsy continued to frown and chew on her lower lip as if trying to work something out.

‘Is everything all right? Does Dickie need some help?’ Arthur offered as he walked across to her.

‘No, everything is fine. It’s just housekeeping. In a place this size with so many things in storage it’s difficult to stay on top of everything.’ Betsy gave him a tight smile.

‘Yes, I’m, sure it must be,’ Arthur agreed mildly, before walking away to meet Lawrence who wanted his assistance to carry a set of stepladders.

He took the wooden steps onto his shoulder and followed Lawrence, his mind running over what he had just witnessed. Something was not quite right, pieces missing perhaps, or just not in the right place? Jane had checked all the systems used to organise and catalogue what was contained in the old quarry. If something had been moved, then who had done it and why? Was this what Sanford had discovered?

He worked alongside Lawrence up until eleven when they stopped to go and make tea. They had fixed one part of the wiring at least and Lawrence was in a good mood. Dickie was already taking his break when they reached the staffroom.

‘The kettle’s just boiled if you want a brew.’ Dickie glanced up from his perusal of the sports pages in the newspaper.

‘Thank you.’ Arthur washed his hands as Lawrence pulled two mugs from the cupboard and checked the teapot, before adding more water and another spoon of tea.

‘Did you and Betsy sort out your housekeeping issue in the picture storage?’ Arthur asked as he took a seat at the table opposite Dickie. ‘She said something had become muddled.’

Dickie frowned and set down his paper. ‘I can’t understand it. Betsy is a martyr to those blooming sheets of Marietta’s. Her and Antonella follow them to the letter. Coding everything and putting everything in the right place. I don’t know what happens but it’s as if there are gremlins or something that come in and muddle stuff up when we aren’t looking,’ Dickie grumbled.

‘I think it’s because we are all so tired. Mistakes are bound to happen and things get misplaced. It’s like you do at home. Swear you left your keys on the table in the hall, then find them in your sock drawer,’ Lawrence said with a chuckle as he placed a mug of tea in front of Arthur.

‘You could be right, I suppose. There’s a lot to keep track of in here, especially with new pieces still coming in,’ Dickie agreed.

‘Does it happen often?’ Arthur asked. ‘Things being out of place?’

Dickie took a slurp of his own tea and considered the question. ‘Not too often but it’s always the pictures. Still, them marble statues are a bit too heavy to move about and muddle up.’

‘I think Marietta is right. We could use more help here with the curation and care of the items we are protecting.’ Lawrence took one of the vacant chairs.

Hannah entered the room. ‘Is there any tea in the pot? Marietta is still on the telephone and I’m gasping for a drink.’

Lawrence immediately rose from his chair. ‘Sit down, my dear, I’ll make some fresh.’

The girl thanked him quietly and took his chair while he busied himself putting the kettle back on to boil and washing out the teapot. He saved the

tea leaves in a container on the side which Antonella had informed him was for her to use in her garden.

‘Has Lady Tolland had any luck squeezing a few bob more out of the ministry to pay for more help do you know, Hannah?’ Dickie asked as he folded up his newspaper and tucked it inside the bib of his brown overalls.

‘I don’t know. She hasn’t said. Why?’ Hannah asked as the kettle began to whistle on top of the small electric ring.

‘We were just talking about how easy it can be to misplace stuff with so few of us to look after everything.’ Dickie picked up his mug to swallow the last of his tea.

‘There is a lot to keep track of in here. We do have the master lists though in the files,’ Hannah agreed as Lawrence carried the refilled teapot and a clean mug to the table.

‘Sanford was saying much the same thing just before he died. I’d been telling him about how easy it was to misplace something.’ Dickie stood and carried his mug to the sink to wash it.

‘Sanford was a very orderly man. He liked everything to be in its proper place,’ Arthur observed. The hairs on the nape of his neck prickled as a sudden fleeting air of tension crept around the table. It dissipated so quickly he wondered if he had imagined it, but he was not someone given to imaginings.

‘Oh well, see you all later, back to the grindstone for me,’ Dickie remarked and went off whistling.

‘I had better go and see if Marietta has finished her call,’ Hannah said. ‘She will want a drink too, I imagine.’

‘Finish your own tea first, you’ve hardly touched it. My sister can wait a few minutes longer for you to take a break.’ Lawrence looked at Hannah who immediately blushed uncertainly.

Arthur was less confident than Lawrence about Marietta having patience to wait for anything at all.

‘I can’t believe that Jane is Miss Macintyre’s daughter, how very exciting. Have you met her? Is she terribly glamorous?’ Hannah asked, looking at Arthur.

‘She is very glamorous,’ Arthur agreed.

‘That really was a stroke of luck about Jane. I expect she’ll be keen to come with me to collect her mother from the station tomorrow. Got to

rehearse before Saturday and all that,' Lawrence said. 'The rest of the band are due then too.'

'Yes, I suppose she will.' Arthur kept his response short and diplomatic. He knew that Jane would be looking forward to her mother's stay with as much enthusiasm as a trip to the dentist.

'The concert tickets are almost sold out.' Lawrence finished his tea.

'I must admit I'm looking forward to it.' Hannah smiled shyly at Lawrence.

'Jolly good.' Lawrence bounded up from his chair to carry his mug to the sink. 'It should be splendid.' He clapped his hand on Hannah's shoulder in passing. 'I'm just popping to see Antonella for a minute. Arthur, I'll meet you back at the panel.'

Arthur watched a cloud pass over Hannah's face before she rose to wash her own cup. 'I had better see if Marietta has finished her call. She will wonder where I am.' She followed Lawrence out of the room.

By the time Lawrence pulled his car up outside Antonella's that evening, Arthur was exhausted. Not physically; his lungs felt better than they had done in a long time. Something that he suspected was to do with the carefully monitored atmosphere inside the storage facility. Instead, it was a mental fatigue of observing and listening, trying to catch and interpret signals that he knew were buzzing around the group.

'I'll cycle in to work tomorrow, Lawrence. It'll save you some fuel since you'll be collecting Miss Macintyre from the station later.' Antonella leaned in to where Lawrence had the car window rolled down.

'I take it that's all right with you, Arthur, to take a day off?' Lawrence asked.

'Of course, I can't do much of the electrical stuff on my own,' Arthur agreed. He didn't have sufficient knowledge or the right certificates.

He walked behind Antonella to the front door and wondered if Benson had returned yet from his mysterious errand. Jane was in the sitting room as they entered the house, and he could tell by the tension in her shoulders and the line of her jaw that she had news for him.

'I'll go and see what's been arranged for dinner. I'm out this evening. It's the ladies' group at the vicarage so we'll be eating early. I do hope that's all right?' Antonella looked first at Jane and then back at Arthur.

'Yes, of course,' Jane assured her.

Their hostess left to consult with her housekeeper, while Arthur dropped down onto the seat beside the fire with a weary sigh and waited to hear what Jane had to say.

She uncurled her long legs from beneath herself where she had been sitting on the sofa and leaned forward conspiratorially. 'I found Sanford's notebook.' She glanced towards the door leading into the hall where it was still cracked open.

'That's good news. I take it that it was where we thought? Anything useful inside it?' Arthur, like Jane, kept his voice low.

'I need to show you. This evening, we can go through it,' she said.

He nodded.

'There's also something from the brigadier that I need to tell you.' Her expression was serious.

Arthur stiffened, he could tell this was something important. 'After dinner when Antonella is out,' he murmured. Then he added in a louder voice, 'Is Benson back yet?'

Jane leaned back in her seat. 'No, not yet. I do hope everything is all right with him.' Her brow puckered as she spoke and he could see she was concerned.

'It is quite out of character,' Arthur agreed. He, like Jane, was troubled by Benson's absence.

* * *

Dinner, as promised, was served early after Antonella's housekeeper had finished for the day. Antonella fried the Spam fritters herself, while Jane prepared the mashed potatoes and cabbage. Dessert was raspberry jelly with the inevitable tinned condensed milk.

'It's rather strange at the facility having a new guard,' Antonella observed as she ate her pudding.

'A new guard?' Jane's gaze sharpened as she asked the question.

Antonella explained.

'A sensible move to boost security, I suppose,' Jane said. 'Rather odd that Marietta didn't know about it, but then I suppose her role is really the storage and care of the artefacts. The security arrangements are probably decided elsewhere.'

Arthur glanced at her. There was something about the way she spoke that made him wonder if this was to do with the information from the brigadier.

Once the table was cleared, Arthur assisted Antonella with the blackout measures. It wasn't fully dark yet outside but since Benson hadn't yet returned it made sense to do them now.

'I shan't be late back, probably about nine thirty,' Antonella said as she went to put on her hat and coat.

'Will you be all right walking home alone in the dark?' Arthur asked.

'Oh yes, it's only a couple of minutes. You know the vicarage is close to the church so it's not far away,' Antonella assured him, before collecting up her keys and leaving.

As soon as she had gone Jane pounced, almost tugging him into the sitting room. 'Right, tell me more about this new guard?' she demanded as he sank back in his favourite seat.

He went over what they had said at dinner but added a description and the effect seeing a new man in the guardhouse had upon the others. In return she told him of her telephone call and the subsequent telegram from the brigadier.

Arthur listened carefully. 'You think this new man's arrival is a result of what intelligence have overheard?' he asked.

'It does seem to be the most likely explanation. Beef up security, but not enough to set the cat amongst the pigeons to let them know the messages have been intercepted.' Jane lit one of her cigarettes and paced up and down in the centre of the room.

'And now we need to check the catalogue against the racks for those two artists? Turner and Constable and the source is the National Gallery?' he said.

'It's a quite horrendous task,' Jane said. 'And we'll need to do it over the weekend somehow without the others discovering what we're doing.'

'You have this concert to manage too. Your mother will expect you to be at her beck and call all day Saturday.' Arthur frowned as he tried to work out how they could manage the job. 'There is also something else.' He told her about the mishaps with the catalogue and the conversation about things being misplaced or moved.

'We need to see those sign in sheets. Clearly, someone must be going in there after hours. It's the most logical explanation but there is something

else. There's something in the journal that you need to see.' Jane extinguished her cigarette and took the seat opposite his. Her gaze drifted towards her handbag.

'I agree someone is moving things around. My question is still whether they are entering via the guardhouse or through some other entrance we haven't managed to discover yet,' Arthur said.

Jane picked up her black leather handbag and rummaged in the depths, before pulling out a small book. 'I told you that I found Sanford's journal. It was hidden under a floorboard behind the organ near the Saint Cecilia window. You need to read it.' She presented it to him with a flourish.

'I take it you've had time to look at it?' he asked.

'This afternoon when I had the house to myself for an hour. The first part was just a normal diary. Nothing unusual stood out but then the entries began to change. Look, read from here onwards.' She had marked the page with a dark-blue hair ribbon.

Arthur pulled his wireframed glasses from his jacket pocket and took the book. He had just begun to read when the telephone rang in the study, shattering the silence.

'I'll go. It could be Benson or the brigadier.' Jane hurried out of the room. He could hear the muffled sound of her voice as he carefully read through the entries in the diary. His pulse leapt and the blood in his veins seemed to chill when he saw the final page addressed to him. The mental weariness that had gripped him earlier fled as he took in the message.

Jane slipped back into the room and retook the chair opposite his. 'That was Lawrence. We are all summoned to drinks tomorrow teatime.' She stopped talking and looked at his expression. 'I see you've found the final entry.'

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Arthur, if you are reading this, and I am certain that you are, then it's too late for me. Someone involved in the Westwood facility is at best a thief and at worst both a traitor and a thief. Now too, since I am dead, I suppose a murderer. I wish I could put down a name. All I can do is tell you what I've noticed. Smaller art pieces disappearing from where they should be, items moving within the store. Enough to create confusion, preparation perhaps for something bigger. I found another way into the facility. Behind the old mineshaft that's capped for ventilation, follow the rabbit path and turn left at the big oak tree. In the hillside behind the bushes is a grill. I think whoever is behind this is planning something serious and with the enemies' appetite for art treasures I am worried. I knew you would crack the codes to find this book. I trust you to get to the bottom of whatever is going on. Protect Antonella, the house is being watched as I believe they know that I'm onto them. Be careful. Your friend always, Sanford.

Arthur looked at Jane. 'This confirms he was definitely murdered.'

Jane nodded. 'We knew that already, but seeing this written down in his own handwriting...' Her voice trailed away. She could see that reading the diary and that final message had affected him deeply.

‘It also confirms everything the brigadier told you today.’ Arthur closed the book as if he could no longer bear to see the neat lines of blue ink inside the diary.

‘We have to follow this up. We must find this entrance and go and check that all the pictures by Constable and Turner are exactly where they are meant to be. I presume that if we enter by this grill that Sanford mentioned we won’t trigger any alarms,’ Jane said.

‘Precisely, the alarm system only covers unauthorised entry via the outer door. How to manage it though?’ Arthur tapped his fingers thoughtfully against the cover of the book.

‘I saw a map of the village earlier in the study. It’s an old one, made when the quarry was still in use. It should show where that shaft is and we can work out the route from there. The map is in a frame on the back wall near the reading lamp.’ Jane jumped up once more to go and collect her prize.

She lifted it carefully from its hook and carried it back to Arthur, blowing off a fine layer of dust from the top of the frame as she did so. The map was hand drawn in ink with a fine nib on faded yellow tinged paper. They had noticed it the first night they had been there but assumed it was merely decorative as it appeared so old. The shaft Sanford had mentioned in his journal was clearly marked.

‘It’s not too far away from the house. The quarry is so large it runs further out in the direction of the village than you would think,’ Arthur said as he studied the map.

Jane knew he was committing the image to his memory. ‘I’ll put this back before anyone notices,’ she said once she was certain he had it filed away inside his mind.

She had just replaced it and returned to the sitting room when she heard the distinctive sound of the back gate opening once more. Jane stiffened automatically, wondering if whoever had been in the back garden earlier that morning might have returned.

‘That’s the gate,’ she murmured.

Arthur stuffed Sanford’s book back inside Jane’s bag and they went through to the kitchen. A key scraped in the lock and Benson entered the house looking mildly astonished to see them both standing there waiting for him.

‘Benson, it’s you, we thought it might be whoever was here this morning.’ Jane set down the heavy glass rolling pin she had snatched up off the kitchen dresser.

‘I was restoring Miss Watkins’s bicycle to the shed.’ Benson quickly closed the door so no light could leach out and get them in trouble.

‘We kept you some supper.’ Jane indicated a plate with another one set on top to cover the food. ‘Shall I heat it up for you?’ She moved towards the stove.

‘Thank you, Miss Jane, that’s most kind.’ Benson removed his hat and unbuttoned his coat.

His movements were stiff and his complexion looked grey and weary. Wherever he had been all day had clearly tired him out. Jane filled a small pan with water and placed the plates on top, setting the pan to boil. The heat from the steam would warm the plate and the food it contained.

‘Did you manage to see Miss Davenport?’ Jane asked, drawing a warning glance from Arthur.

Benson paused in the act of hanging his hat and coat on the hook inside the pantry. ‘Yes, Miss Jane, I did.’

‘Is everything settled now?’ Arthur asked carefully.

Benson turned to look at them. ‘I believe so. At least for a while.’

Jane pulled some cutlery from the drawer and placed it ready on the kitchen table so Benson could eat his supper when it was ready. She sensed that there was more to this story, but he clearly wasn’t going to elaborate. It was also not their place to ask more questions, even though she desperately wanted to know.

‘We made some progress here today while you were gone.’ Arthur took a seat at the table and gave his manservant a summary of everything that they had discovered between them.

Benson listened attentively while Jane finished heating up his supper. His expression was grim when Arthur had finished. Jane set his plate carefully down on the table, handling it with a cloth where the crockery was hot.

‘This is all most perturbing.’ Benson picked up his cutlery after thanking Jane. He added a large dollop of Daddies sauce to the side of his plate next to the Spam fritters. ‘It sounds imperative that this entrance is located and sealed.’

Jane took a chair next to Arthur. 'It's going to be tricky time-wise as the benefit concert is on Saturday and my mother arrives here tomorrow afternoon.'

Benson chewed efficiently and methodically before replying. 'Perhaps I could accompany Mr Cilento in the morning to locate the entrance. Miss Watkins can use her bicycle to get to the facility if Mr Coombs is not collecting her. If you remain here at the house, Miss Jane, until Mr Coombs collects you to meet Miss Elsa at the station, we should, I think, return in time to inform you of our discoveries before you depart.'

'That sounds sensible. Antonella has already told Lawrence that she'll cycle to work in the morning. We should definitely be back here before you have to leave to meet Elsa. It shouldn't take us long to find the opening if we follow Sanford's instructions. Once we know if we can get in and out that way then we could potentially enter on Saturday morning before you are needed by your mother. With three of us working we can check the racking against the catalogue and determine if everything is still there,' Arthur said.

'We would need to be careful and act quickly.' Jane could see how the plan would work. 'If a painting is missing, we would know which one and the size of what we are looking for. There may well be time to locate it and return it before it is sent overseas if the thief has already struck.'

If a picture was taken it was likely that it would be removed from the frame and either rolled or stored flat in packaging of some kind in order to smuggle it out. It couldn't be taken out the conventional way since all their bags were searched by the guard as they left the facility.

Antonella had probably only been able to get out the fragments of the syringe used to kill her brother by concealing it in a handkerchief. A picture was a totally different proposition. If a painting had been stolen already then it would have to be passed on to someone with a reliable way of smuggling such a precious item across the Channel.

Jane's mind raced through the possibilities of how such an object could be safely transported; a small boat? A diplomatic bag, perhaps? Or was the theft planned for the concert weekend with people coming to Hartfield House? Someone there could be the person transporting a stolen picture back to London, then across the Channel and into the hands of the enemy.

There was a noise at the front door which stopped their conversation. Arthur rose and went into the hall to investigate.

‘Antonella, we’re all in the kitchen. Would you like some cocoa? I think we were about to make some.’ His voice carried back to Jane and Benson.

Benson finished his supper and placed his plate in the sink to wash before retrieving the milk pan to prepare drinks. Antonella entered the kitchen followed by Arthur.

‘Goodness me, I thought you would all be in the sitting room.’ Antonella looked around at them all as Benson picked up the large blue and white enamelled jug containing the milk.

‘I have secured your bicycle in the shed, Miss Watkins. I was about to make some cocoa,’ Benson replied blandly.

‘How lovely, I could use a drink. The tea at the vicarage is terribly poor. The vicar’s wife insists on reusing the tea leaves so much there is scarcely any colour in one’s cup,’ Antonella said.

‘Leave it with me.’ Benson set about making drinks and Jane and Arthur accompanied their hostess to the sitting room where they spent a convivial hour.

The evening ended with cocoa and an early night.

Antonella set off for the storage facility early the next morning, her sandwiches stowed safely in her bag as she wheeled her cycle out to the street. Jane watched her departure, before going through to the kitchen where Benson was placidly preparing tea and toast.

‘Antonella just rode off. The housekeeper won’t arrive here until nine,’ Jane said.

Arthur joined them as they ate together while planning the morning.

‘I have prepared torches and may I suggest taking the gun, sir, as a precaution?’ Benson poured tea through the strainer, his tone suggesting he was offering milk or sugar rather than a weapon.

Jane blinked. She hadn’t been aware that Arthur, or rather Benson, had packed the gun. Although, logically, she knew it had been a sensible thing to do. She took a steadying breath knowing Arthur’s aversion to violence.

Arthur nodded. ‘I’ve added a few tools to my jacket in case there is a problem with the grill.’

‘You just need to find the entrance and verify whether it’s the same one Sanford described in the diary entry. If it’s viable to get in and out then we can use it tomorrow morning. I’ll be here until just after lunch. Lawrence is calling for me to collect Elsa, then we are going straight to Lady Tolland’s. I

expect Lawrence will fetch you and Antonella after work for evening drinks,' Jane said.

'You'll have a busy afternoon rehearsing.' Arthur looked at her. He didn't say anything aloud but she knew he meant her afternoon would not simply be busy but would also be trying.

'I expect so. I'm also anticipating that Marietta will hope for a few songs during the evening drinks.' Jane knew from what Lawrence had said previously that the other musicians were also expected at the house.

Arthur gave her a sympathetic smile.

'I expect Miss Elsa will perform beautifully as always, Miss Jane.' Benson had a straight face, so she wasn't one hundred per cent certain of his exact meaning.

* * *

Arthur and Benson left the house before the arrival of Antonella's housekeeper. Arthur had memorised the route from the old map Jane had shown him the previous evening. The morning air was cool but not unpleasant and he realised it was the most time he had spent outdoors since their arrival at Westwood.

His days at Antonella's had previously consisted of journeys to and from the former quarry with a brief excursion to Lady Tolland's house. Daffodils bloomed bravely in the hedgerows and hints of green now adorned the previously bare branches of the hedgerows as the houses gave way to fields.

The entrance to the quarry was beyond the ventilation shaft which fed air down into the storage facility and the part of the former mine now used by Enfield to manufacture machine parts. It was strange and somewhat bizarre to realise there was a whole factory beneath their feet.

Benson strode along at his side, and Arthur suspected he had adjusted his stride to fall in with Arthur's slower pace. The houses changed to cottages and were more spaced out now the village centre was further behind them. Fortunately, the tunnel entrance wasn't sited near the temporary buildings on the outskirts which had been erected to house the Enfield workers.

The footpath had gone and they were walking along the road near the verge. Up ahead he could see a large tree which he guessed must be the oak

Sanford had referred to in his notes.

‘There should be a turn soon.’ He looked across to Benson who inclined his head in acknowledgement.

The path mentioned in the journal was barely visible, leading away from the road. They passed the round brick-built shaft with its robust ventilated capping. The path wound on through some scrubby woodland and on towards the base of what seemed to be a small mound covered in furze bushes. The flowers showed hints of yellow against the dark-green leaves.

‘It should be somewhere around here.’ Arthur looked around as he carefully picked his way forward through the rather prickly bushes.

‘I think someone has been through here before.’ Benson pointed to a dried patch of mud on the floor revealing a portion of a footprint.

‘Possibly Sanford or maybe whoever else has been using this way in. Can you see the entrance yet?’ Arthur’s heart rate speeded. It appeared they were drawing closer.

The bushes and shrubs were thicker with brambles that caught at the legs of his trousers as he looked for the grill.

‘Here.’ Benson’s voice was low as if concerned that someone inside the facility might be close to the entrance and might hear them.

Arthur picked his way over to where Benson was holding back the low, leafy branch of some sort of evergreen shrub. Set in the base of the mound was a metal grill, like the ones he had already seen and examined inside the storage facility.

He hunkered down next to Benson after looking around to ensure no one was about.

‘This has been cleaned up. No moss or ferns. The others I found inside the facility all had plants growing through. The screw heads are clean too.’ Arthur looked at the large screws set in each corner of the metal grill.

There were faint scratches visible in the metal. He reached out and tested the grill to see if it moved at all. There was no give, so he assumed it had been screwed back in place. He took out a screwdriver from his pocket and carefully undid each fastening while Benson stood watch.

Once the screws were out he handed them to Benson for safekeeping and together they quietly lifted the heavy grill clear and set it to one side on the grass.

‘Stay here. I’m going to go in and see where this comes out.’ Arthur dropped the screwdriver back in his pocket and took out a compact rubber-handled torch.

He gave Benson no time to argue as he slid his legs through the aperture and slipped down into the tunnel below. Once inside he paused in the gloom and listened. Just above him he saw Benson’s anxious face blocking some of the light into the tunnel and he gave him a nod to signify all was well.

The entrance appeared to open into a narrow stone tunnel. The floor was of hewn stone rather than the concrete which had been poured onto the floor in the main chambers of the old quarry. It was dark ahead of him and he couldn’t hear any machinery, which led him to believe he was in the storage facility rather than the factory side.

Arthur switched on the torch and made his way cautiously along the corridor. The roof was low in places, and he was forced to duck to avoid some low parts of it. He wondered if Sanford had made the same journey.

The tunnel seemed to curve around before making a tight twist. Ahead of him now he saw the faint glimmer of electric light, and he snapped off the torch. He tucked it in his coat pocket and edged carefully to where he could peek out to gain his bearings.

Once at the end he could see why they hadn’t noticed the tunnel entrance before. The exit was set some four feet or so up the wall with the opening concealed behind a lump of unquarried stone that projected out like an uneven fold into the chamber below.

He realised he was in the room they rarely entered, the one containing Kitty Hawk, the airplane once used by the Wright brothers and now stored safely below ground, away from the bombs.

Satisfied he now knew where he was, he shuffled around in the tight space, took out his torch once more and headed back to Benson.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Benson extended his arm into the tunnel entrance to assist him out. He squeezed himself through the narrow gap and staggered out onto the rough grass.

‘Thank you. I followed the corridor all the way along. It comes out in the room where the plane is stored. The exit is not at floor level but it looks easy to jump down and to scramble back up to get out again,’ Arthur explained as Benson helped him to lift the metalwork back in place.

He refastened the screws to secure the grill and between them they ruffled up the flattened turf. Satisfied everything appeared to be back to normal they arranged the branches of the shrubs and carefully picked their way back to the path.

‘I take it you didn’t see anyone inside the facility?’ Benson asked.

Arthur shook his head. ‘It was all quiet. They don’t go in that part of the store much since all the care is given over to the artworks or more fragile items. It’s not like anyone can steal an airplane unnoticed from there.’

Which probably made it the ideal site to get in and out of the facility unnoticed.

* * *

Jane was sipping a cup of black coffee and going through the notes she’d typed the previous day when Arthur and Benson returned. Antonella’s housekeeper was upstairs, noisily sweeping the carpets.

‘I take it you were successful?’ she asked Arthur quietly, while Benson went to the kitchen to make Arthur a cup of tea.

‘Yes, we located the entry point exactly where Sanford said it would be.’ Arthur quickly told her what he had found when he’d entered the tunnel.

‘Ideally I’d like to get that sealed off but for the next day or so it will be our door. We need to keep this operation as covert as possible until we are certain nothing of note is missing. I also want to find whoever is behind this.’ Jane stopped speaking for a moment as Benson re-entered carrying Arthur’s tea.

Once the sitting room door was safely closed once more she repeated her words to Benson.

‘We need to use our time at the drinks party this evening and at the concert tomorrow to discover more about Antonella’s colleagues,’ Arthur said as Benson handed him a cup and saucer.

‘One of them is definitely involved. We can’t exclude Antonella completely from suspicion either,’ Jane said. ‘I know it’s unlikely that she is involved directly but she may be unwittingly connected somehow.’

‘Sanford felt she required protection and someone has attempted to break into the house. I agree she is not responsible for Sanford’s death, but she may be in danger.’ Arthur looked unhappy as he spoke.

‘And Lady Tolland?’ Benson asked.

‘Marietta clearly couldn’t have used that entrance you discovered today but she could be working in partnership with someone. She knows what consignments are arriving. She issues the codes and arranges deliveries and transfers.’ Jane looked at Arthur.

‘She has all the right social connections, so if something was stolen, she could arrange a transfer to someone with the means to get it safely out of the country,’ Arthur said.

‘Lawrence Coombs, perhaps?’ Jane suggested. ‘He is her brother and he’s always hanging around the arts department talking to Antonella. He has the same connections, and he has transport to get into the village so he can enter the tunnels.’

‘Lawrence has to be considered. He was also working closely with Sanford so would have the opportunity to administer that injection.’ Arthur looked troubled as he sipped his tea.

‘There is also the young lady who assists Lady Tolland,’ Benson said.

‘Hannah, hmm, yes, she seems quite taken with Lawrence, although I’m not at all sure it is reciprocated or if, indeed, he has even noticed.’ Jane’s neatly arched eyebrows rose slightly as she spoke.

‘I wonder where she worked before she came to be employed by Marietta?’ Arthur mused. ‘She drives, has access to the catalogues and knows where everything is stored. She is also quite fit with having to physically assist Lady Tolland. She could easily get through that entrance and find what she needed.’

‘I asked her about her previous employment history. She held a similar post for an elderly lady that Marietta knew. When her employer died, Marietta offered her a job,’ Jane said.

‘How did her former employer die?’ Arthur asked.

‘A fall in the garden. She was by all accounts very elderly, frail and stubborn. It was declared an accident.’ Jane could see Arthur filing this new information away in his mind. It could all have happened quite innocently as Hannah had relayed it to her. Now though, in the light of Professor Watkins’s murder, everything became suspicious.

‘Interesting,’ Arthur said.

‘And then there is Betsy Peters. She knows the storage inside out, especially the art gallery works. She is fit, cycles everywhere and seems to get invited to various social events that Marietta hosts. She also has plenty of opportunity.’ Jane placed her empty coffee cup down on the tray.

‘She did mention the confusion over pictures being moved though. Which brings us to Dickie who was also bothered about the mix-ups in the cataloguing system. He also cycles, hauls those huge storage racks around and knows the inventory. Like Betsy, he also gets invitations to Marietta’s soirées and events,’ Arthur pointed out.

‘If I may, might I suggest you also consider the security guard?’ Benson asked with a gentle cough. ‘He holds keys and could enter at will once everyone has left.’

Jane frowned, she hadn’t even considered that possibility. ‘You’re right, Mr Benson. I suppose he would have a window between everyone finishing and the Home Guard relieving him a few hours later. Thank you, that’s a good point and now we have an extra guard there too.’

‘I believe the evening post is still being filled by members of the Home Guard. The new man is relieving the original guard for half of the daytime

hours so there is not a regular man there at night. Antonella said something about a rota,' Arthur said.

'A guard wouldn't know exactly where to look within the store unless he was working with someone. He also wouldn't have the contacts to ensure a stolen item was passed on properly.' Jane could see both the possibilities and the potential snags with Benson's suggestion.

If a painting by Constable or Turner were the target and a propaganda coup were planned, it would be imperative that no harm should befall the painting. Not only would the Nazi leadership not wish to be perceived as cultural vandals, they would want to present the painting in the best possible light. To show they could not only obtain a treasure but could be trusted with it.

'All the more reason to find out as much as we can this evening,' Arthur said.

'Speaking of that matter, what time is Miss Macintyre's train due to arrive?' Benson asked.

'One thirty. Lawrence is collecting me at one and we're going straight to Hartfield House afterwards. Mother will expect me to be ready for a run-through as soon as she has persuaded a maid to unpack her bags.' Jane smiled wryly. Her mother was perfectly capable of unpacking her own clothes, but despite the war she continued to behave as if having household staff was still a thing.

'I shall go and arrange an early lunch then, Miss Jane.' Benson glided away, taking the tray with the dirty cups with him.

'We shall need as much time as possible tomorrow inside the facility to check those stores for the paintings,' Arthur said.

'I know and we shall have to come up with a plausible excuse for our absence,' Jane agreed.

Lawrence arrived promptly at one o'clock to collect Jane on his way to the station. Arthur opted to remain at the house to wait for Antonella to return, before joining her at Hartfield House.

'Are you certain you won't come with us?' Jane asked as she settled her sage-green felt hat neatly over her brunette hair.

'I think I shall be of more use here. I want to go back through Sanford's journal.' The corners of Arthur's mouth tilted upwards as he replied.

She knew her mother wasn't keen on Arthur and that feeling was returned.

'I shall see you and Antonella later then.' Jane took a last quick look in the hall mirror to ensure she was her usual neat and tidy self before hurrying out to where Lawrence was waiting in the car.

She opened the front passenger door and slipped onto the seat.

'All set?' Lawrence asked brightly.

'As much as one can ever be for my mother.' Jane's tone was dry, but Lawrence appeared not to notice.

She saw he had carefully Brylcreemed his hair and was sporting what looked like a new tie in cornflower blue. A posy of spring flowers was ready on the back seat.

'I really am jolly grateful to you, Jane, you are an absolute brick for stepping in like this at the last minute. This concert should give the old coffers for the charity a much-needed boost. If Miss Macintyre had pulled out it would have been a complete catastrophe.'

Jane murmured something noncommittal in response. His praise made her uncomfortable. There were a million and one things she would rather be doing instead of accompanying her mother. Not least amongst those things was the very important job she had been dispatched to Westwood to perform.

Lawrence parked up at the station and collected the posy of flowers ready to present to Elsa. Jane clutched her plain brown leather handbag like a shield and hoped her mother would behave nicely. They waited patiently at the station entrance for the engine to arrive.

The train finally pulled in only two minutes behind schedule with a hiss of steam and the smell of smoke. The station porter bustled about, and passengers stepped out onto the platform, while others alighted into the carriages.

'Whoohoo! Janey pie!' Elsa Macintyre's voice sang out above the hubbub, her American accent and luxurious furs drawing the attention of virtually everyone at the station. The porter trailed behind her pushing an impossibly large case on his trolley as Elsa waved a gloved hand at Jane.

'Honey, do find some money to tip the man. I simply haven't any small change,' her mother commanded as soon as she exited the platform. 'Oh, flowers! How darling and rustic.' Elsa took the posy carefully between her fingers. 'You must be Mr Coombs.' Elsa bestowed one of her smiles on

Lawrence, while Jane found a few shillings from her purse and pressed them into the elderly porter's hand.

'Welcome to Westwood, Miss Macintyre, we are so honoured to have you here,' Lawrence stammered as he popped open the back of the car so the porter could apply the straps around Elsa's luggage.

'I'm looking forward to being here.' Elsa thrust the elegant patent-leather vanity case and the flowers she was holding at Jane. 'Honey, you look so pale. I do keep telling you that you should use a little more rouge.'

Lawrence opened the door behind the driver's seat and waited until Elsa was safely installed before closing it again. Jane hurried round to the front passenger door and hopped in before Lawrence could forget she had accompanied him. He appeared so starstruck by her mother she suspected he was likely to drive off without her.

'I told the others to make their own way to the house. That wretched cellist woman always has that huge case with her and, quite honestly, it's such a frightful squash otherwise. Then there is that woman and her harp. She will need a cart obviously.' Elsa settled her furs around her with a contented air.

Jane watched her in the rear-view mirror and suppressed a sigh.

'Of course, Miss Macintyre, I have arranged for the local taxi to meet them,' Lawrence said.

'Janey, darling, I have all my music with me. I do hope there is a decent instrument.' Elsa took out a silver compact and checked her reflection in the mirror as she spoke.

'It's a very nice piano, Mother, good tones,' Jane assured her.

'Then we'll rehearse as soon as my things are in my room.' Elsa closed the compact with a snap and returned it to her handbag, a tiny little velvet burgundy pouch with silver fittings and a chain handle.

'Of course.' Jane had expected nothing less.

'My sister, Lady Tolland, has arranged a small drinks party for this evening. Just for a few of our house guests and some colleagues,' Lawrence said as they started on the drive towards the house.

'That sounds delightful. Janey, you have got something suitable to change into for this evening I hope?' Elsa's gaze met Jane's in the mirror.

'I'm sure I shall look perfectly respectable.' Jane averted her gaze. She had no intention of changing clothes. It would have meant an extra journey

to Antonella's and much messing about just for the sake of a glass of indifferent sherry and a few canapés.

Lawrence pulled the car to a halt near the front entrance to the house and scampered to open Elsa's door for her to get out. Jane was left to open her own door. She collected her mother's vanity box and posy, while Lawrence escorted her mother inside the house where a nervous-looking young maid stood waiting to greet them.

Once divested of her furs, and with her luggage taken to her room, Elsa collected up her music.

'May I get you some tea, Miss Macintyre?' Lawrence trailed after them as they headed for the piano.

'Honey, please call me Elsa, and tea would be divine.' Elsa flashed another smile and he departed to do her bidding.

'I do hope that girl manages to press my gowns satisfactorily. I could do with that divine Mr Benson to assist me. I suppose he is here with, um, Arthur?'

'Benson is attending the concert tomorrow, I believe.' Jane took the leather music case from her mother and opened it to check which songs were to be performed. She suspected her mother had hoped that Benson would be at Marietta's house and could be diverted to do her bidding during her stay.

'The running list is right there on top, honey. There are just a couple of new ones since last time. By the way, this Arthur is around an awful lot these days. I hope you aren't giving him ideas.' Elsa looked at Jane.

Jane kept her attention fixed on the music as she ensured it was all in the correct order. Since they had been convincing everyone at Westwood that she and Arthur were walking out together she feared her mother was about to be very disappointed.

'You know Arthur and I are close. We work together a lot,' she edged.

'You work closely with Stephen, and he is a much better catch. Darling, please don't make the same mistake I did and fall for an academic,' her mother cautioned.

'I am not you, Mother.' Her reply came out more sharply than she had intended. Her gentle, scholarly father had been very close to her.

Elsa raised one elegantly arched pencilled eyebrow but for once refrained from responding. No doubt the expression on Jane's face warned her that it would be best to say nothing.

‘Here we are, ladies, a cup of tea before you get started,’ Lawrence announced cheerily as he wheeled in a gilt and marble trolley set out with finely painted floral china.

‘How very kind.’ Elsa immediately switched her attention to her host.

Jane set the music up ready on the piano.

Her mother arranged herself to her best advantage on a nearby chaise longue while Lawrence poured tea for her and for Jane.

‘My sister had the piano retuned recently and Jane played for us a few evenings ago so it should all be in order,’ Lawrence said.

‘That’s good to know. Honestly, honey, some places have no clue what an artiste needs from an instrument. Some of the pianos that have been provided elsewhere have been absolute brutes.’ Elsa accepted her tea.

‘This room will be cleared tomorrow, and we have chairs being delivered any time now so it will all be set up for the concert. The double doors over there push back to enlarge the space so there’ll be bags of room.’ Lawrence nodded towards a set of white painted folding doors which Jane suspected divided the lounge from what would normally be the ballroom.

‘I’m sure it will all be splendid.’ Elsa looked around for Jane. ‘Honey, do come and have your tea. We shall need to be done before the others arrive. I’m sure they will want to get set up and we won’t be able to rehearse properly while they are clumping around with drum kits and cellos.’

Jane finished setting up the music and came to take her cup and saucer from the trolley. She could hear noises now from behind the closed double doors. Banging and scraping sounds were accompanied by the sound of masculine voices. It sounded as if the promised chairs were indeed arriving.

‘I’m sorry, ladies, please excuse me. I must go and check what’s happening. My sister will be furious if things aren’t done the way she wanted.’ Lawrence rose from his seat and hastily set his cup down on the trolley, before scurrying off through the doors to supervise the delivery.

Elsa watched him depart with a thoughtful air. Jane knew that look all too well. ‘Right then, Mother, we had better begin before the others get here.’

‘Of course. I do hope you haven’t lost your touch, Janey.’ Elsa stood and smoothed the skirt of her delicately patterned floral dress.

Jane swallowed the last of her tea and headed for the piano.

There was just enough time for a full run-through before Marietta and Hannah arrived, accompanied by Betsy and Dickie.

‘Lawrence is collecting Arthur and Antonella,’ Marietta announced as Hannah steered her towards the piano. ‘You must be Elsa Macintyre, I’m delighted to meet you. Jane was so charmingly reticent about your connection.’ Marietta extended her hand.

‘Lady Tolland, I assume. Thank you so much for inviting me and for your generous hospitality in letting me stay here in your charming home.’ Elsa smiled at Marietta before flashing a sharp look in Jane’s direction.

‘I do so adore having house guests. Before the war Lawrence and I used to host such wonderful gatherings. Artists, poets, musicians, it will feel a little like old times this weekend,’ Marietta said. ‘I have a few other people staying over. You may know a couple of them, Lord and Lady Metcalf and Mrs Frobisher-Kyte. She is Chair of the Westminster Arts Group so it’s a real coup that she is honouring us with a visit.’

‘It all sounds charming, and do please call me Elsa.’ Jane’s mother’s smile widened at the mention of prestigious fellow guests.

Jane’s palms suddenly grew sweaty at the mention of the Metcalfs. She wiped her hands discreetly on the sides of her skirt and hoped no one had noticed.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Arthur followed slowly behind Antonella as they entered the drawing room. He immediately saw Elsa holding court near the grand piano, with Marietta explaining something with her hands. Jane was still seated on the piano stool. She looked pale and he thought there was tension in her narrow shoulders. He hoped there hadn't been problems during the rehearsal and that her mother hadn't been too demanding.

'Ah, Antonella, do come and meet Miss Macintyre. Elsa, my dear, Antonella is one of our curators. I presume you already know Arthur, of course,' Marietta explained as she noticed their approach.

Antonella held out her hand as Marietta completed the introductions. 'I'm delighted to meet you, Miss Macintyre. We are all such admirers of your talent,' Antonella said.

There were loud voices and the noisy sound of furniture being moved coming from behind the closed set of double doors. Elsa shook Antonella's hand and nodded briefly at Arthur. Her gaze seemed to assess the suit he had changed into ready for the evening's drinks and found it wanting.

'I assume the other musicians are all still setting up. I've asked Lawrence to arrange for us to take drinks in the orangery while they finish getting ready.' Marietta looked at Hannah for her assistant to move the wheelchair.

Hannah dutifully stepped up and led the small procession from the drawing room out into the hall and down a side corridor to the orangery. Arthur fell into step beside Jane.

‘Is everything all right?’ he murmured as they walked behind Dickie and Betsy.

‘Yes, well you know how Mother can be.’ She gave a tight smile.

The orangery was a large glass and wrought-iron structure attached to the side of the house. Arthur guessed that in the past it would have been used for growing peaches, grapes and delicate plants like orchids. Now it contained mainly ferns and some bonsai trees in Japanese pots probably to economise on heating. Wicker furniture had been arranged in the centre of the space and Lawrence was already waiting for them with a small bar cart.

He too had changed into more formal attire for the evening and was brandishing a silver cocktail shaker.

‘We should be fine in here for a little while, then when it’s time for the blackout we can move back to the drawing room.’ Lawrence added ice to the shaker and prepared to make and dispense drinks.

Elsa seated herself daintily on a large chair shaped like a throne and graciously accepted a martini from Lawrence. Betsy and Dickie both appeared a little overawed by their surroundings and sat with Antonella on one of the rattan sofas.

Marietta ensured that Hannah placed her beside Elsa where she could command the attention of everyone in the room. Jane and Arthur took a chair each near one of the side tables. Lawrence continued to serve the cocktails, while Hannah handed them out to everyone.

A maid appeared bearing a silver platter laden with canapés which she handed around before setting the tray down on a table.

‘I expect the others will join us shortly once they are set up.’ Marietta shooed the maid away.

Across the hall in the distance Arthur could hear the sounds of the band tuning up and running through a few short pieces. Betsy was discussing the work they had been completing, restoring gilding on one of the picture frames with Antonella. Dickie cradled his cocktail and glanced around at the potted palms as if half expecting someone to jump out at him.

‘We were so surprised when Jane told us of your connection to her,’ Antonella said to Elsa. ‘Arthur had never said a word.’

‘Oh, so you are a *friend* of Arthur’s?’ Elsa raised an enquiring eyebrow, and Arthur resisted the urge to fidget in his seat at the emphasis she put on friend.

‘My late brother, Sanford, and Arthur were friends for many years but, yes, several of us know Arthur through the Crossword Compilers’ Club. It was a lovely surprise when we discovered he had met Jane and that they were so close,’ Antonella said.

‘Crossword compilation?’ A tiny frown puckered the delicate skin on Elsa’s forehead.

‘Yes, it started before the war. A little club my brother organised while he was at Oxford. We all enjoy setting and solving puzzles,’ Antonella babbled on innocently.

‘Professor Watkins was a close friend of mine. His death recently has been a dreadful shock,’ Arthur said.

‘I’m so sorry, Miss Watkins, my condolences on your loss.’ Elsa drained her glass and Lawrence immediately collected it from her to refill it. ‘Janey, honey, I never knew you had any interest in crossword puzzles. I wouldn’t have thought you had the time. That little typing and administration job of yours at the ministry keeps you so busy these days.’

‘It does,’ Jane agreed. ‘The puzzles are Arthur’s hobby.’

Heat prickled under his collar as the spotlight seemed to skip back onto Arthur.

‘Jane is here to do a spot of auditing for the ministry. It all worked out rather splendidly with Arthur knowing Antonella and his being free to help me for a week or so too. Such spiffing good luck. We would have been jolly stuck otherwise.’ Lawrence helped himself to another of the canapés.

‘Janey does a lot of that kind of work. Typing, running errands, counting tins of Spam, that kind of thing. That was where I first met Arthur and his man, dear Mr Benson, when he was in Kent at our family home.’ Elsa’s gaze rested on Arthur, and he automatically placed his hand on his tie to loosen it slightly.

‘I think you mean my house in Kent, Mother.’ Jane’s voice sharpened.

‘I had bomb damage at my little place in London and had to move out. It is so difficult to get repairs done these days,’ Elsa said.

‘It is quite awful, the shortage of materials and manpower,’ Betsy agreed.

‘And when you do manage to get hold of anything, timber or bricks, you need eyes in the back of your head or someone will have them away before you can blink,’ Dickie grumbled. ‘Honesty is in short supply these days.’

There was a general murmur of consent at this.

* * *

Jane glanced around the group after Dickie spoke. She wasn't sure if she was imagining things, but it felt to her as if a note of tension had stolen into the room. There was a clatter in the hall outside and then several of her mother's fellow musicians were escorted into the orangery by the maid. Lawrence resumed his cocktail duties, and conversation turned back onto the upcoming concert.

Soon the room was awash with chatter and cigarette smoke as the band members talked and joked with Marietta and her other guests. Betsy appeared to come out of her shell as she mingled with the artistes.

Jane took care to keep her own cigarette well away from Arthur as he leaned in towards her.

'Your mother didn't appear to be impressed by the Crossword Compilers' Club,' he remarked quietly.

The corners of her lips twisted upwards. 'I rather think that is the least of your worries so far as Mother's approval of you is concerned. She will just add that to her list of reasons to object to our friendship.'

Jane wasn't sure how to classify their relationship. Clearly to everyone at the party she and Arthur were considered to be walking out together as a couple. She remained technically Arthur's superior and, although they had worked together closely now for a while, she wasn't sure if friendship was the right designation.

Arthur smiled at her and she relaxed a little. 'That's true, she is not my greatest admirer.'

Hannah hovered nearby and Jane noticed the girl looked uncomfortable. 'Is everything all right, Hannah?'

'Oh yes, Miss Treen, Jane, I mean. I always find these social affairs of Lady Tolland's a little tricky. I have to be on hand to assist her, of course, if she needs anything but, well...' The girl's voice trailed away.

'I understand. You can't be seen to socialise too much since you are her employee but at the same time you are expected to be sociable to guests.' Jane stubbed out her cigarette in one of the many glass ashtrays that Marietta's staff had so thoughtfully provided.

‘That’s exactly it. I suppose I am neither fish nor fowl at these things,’ Hannah agreed.

‘Marietta said that Lady Metcalf would be staying this weekend. Do you know when she and her husband are expected?’ Jane asked. She tried to keep her tone casual, but she was aware of Arthur glancing quickly at her.

‘They are arriving tomorrow morning before lunch, I think.’ Hannah looked at her employer.

Jane nodded but said nothing more on the matter. At least the next time she saw Lady Metcalf she would be more prepared.

The maid reappeared, accompanied by a tall, lanky youth dressed in gardening clothes. The boy waited nearby while the maid went to speak to Marietta.

‘It’s almost time to put up the blackout I’m afraid so shall we all adjourn to the drawing room? Our guests have kindly agreed to give us a little taster of what to expect at the concert tomorrow before the end of the evening,’ Marietta announced, her cut-glass tones cutting through the chatter.

Hannah immediately scurried over to her mistress ready to steer the chair at the head of the procession once more. Elsa fluttered her eyelashes at Lawrence who promptly proffered her his arm to escort her back along the hall.

In their absence the room had been transformed. The double doors were now wide open and fastened back revealing rows of chairs all facing towards the piano. Near the piano the furniture had been moved and a drum kit, stands and instruments had all been placed ready. The elegant sofas and armchairs of the drawing room had been regrouped and now clearly formed seating for special guests.

Marietta directed people into position, and the band took the stage while everyone else seated themselves in the drawing room portion of the room. A male vocalist in dapper evening attire sang a few songs while also playing piano along with the band.

Jane sipped her cocktail and quietly observed the rest of the audience while waiting for her turn to be summoned to the piano. Betsy looked rather flushed and giggly murmuring behind her hand to Antonella who was nodding in agreement with whatever Betsy was saying.

Dickie had finished his drink but was still holding tightly to his empty glass, staring into it as if expecting to discover it had magically refilled

itself. Hannah stood near Marietta and kept stealing glances at Lawrence when she believed no one was looking. Lawrence had taken the seat beside Jane's mother. He looked very pleased with himself, she thought, as they applauded politely when the vocalist finished his number.

'Miss Macintyre, could we possibly persuade you to give us a couple of songs?' Marietta asked.

Elsa inclined her head graciously. 'Sure, it would be my pleasure. Janey pie, we can do the first three numbers.'

Jane jumped up and went to the piano while her mother took her position beside the piano. The room quieted as Elsa sang. The tunes were popular ones and as Jane glanced up from her music from time to time she could see the expressions on the faces of the listeners had softened.

'Oh bravo, Elsa.' Lawrence led the applause as they finished the last song. 'That was simply marvellous. Tomorrow will go down a storm.'

Elsa smiled and took a bow. Jane flexed her fingers and straightened up the music ready for the following day.

The evening ended shortly afterwards before it grew too dark outside. Lawrence offered to run Antonella, Arthur and Jane home. Dickie and Betsy had their cycles and said they would be fine to return to the village that way.

Jane kissed her mother's cheeks and said goodnight while Arthur waited for her nearby.

'Now, honey, don't forget, make sure you wear a nice frock tomorrow. Nothing drab or schoolmarmish. And do something with your hair.' Elsa gave her a swift appraisal from top to toe. Her nose wrinkling slightly in distaste at Jane's restrained tweed suit and neat bun.

'Of course,' Jane agreed automatically. She had a couple of dresses with her, but she hadn't packed for Westwood anticipating she would be appearing in a concert.

'Good night, Arthur, and do tell Mr Benson I'm looking forward to seeing him again tomorrow.' Elsa transferred her attention to Arthur.

'He's looking forward to the concert with great anticipation,' Arthur said.

Jane wondered what errands her mother had in mind for Benson. Whenever they met she always seemed to find him little jobs to do for her. Making drinks, pressing her clothes, cleaning her shoes. She suppressed a sigh and followed Antonella and Arthur out to Lawrence's car. The most

important thing they had to do the next day was to break into the storage facility using the secret tunnel.

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CHAPTER NINETEEN

Benson was waiting for them with cocoa and sandwiches when they returned to the house. Antonella excused herself saying she wanted to take a bath before bed and headed upstairs. Arthur, Jane and Benson settled themselves in the sitting room in front of the fire.

‘Did you find anything else in the professor’s journal while I was at Marietta’s this afternoon?’ Jane asked as Arthur adjusted the cushion on his armchair.

‘Nothing new,’ he said as he picked up his mug of cocoa. She sensed he was disappointed. He had probably hoped to find some kind of clue from Sanford that might help them.

‘What time are we setting off in the morning?’ Jane knew they wouldn’t have much time before their absence might be remarked upon and they had to get ready for the concert which was set to take place at two thirty.

‘Ideally we need to be on our way before the village wakes up to give us enough time to check out the store,’ Arthur said.

‘I suggest we would need to be back here by twelve thirty in order to eat lunch and prepare for the concert. Miss Elsa will no doubt expect Miss Jane to arrive early.’ Benson had sat himself a little apart as usual from Jane and Arthur on one of the wooden straight-backed chairs.

‘Six o’clock then?’ Arthur suggested as he glanced at his watch. ‘It’s about fifteen to twenty minutes’ walk from here to the entrance.’

‘What about Antonella?’ Jane asked. They could hardly all disappear and leave their hostess to wake to an empty house with no explanation.

‘If I may suggest, Miss Jane, you could leave a note saying that Mr Cilento has been called to a medical examination? It would account for all of us being absent and if phrased correctly shouldn’t unduly alarm Miss Watkins,’ Benson suggested.

She considered the suggestion. It was pretty thin, but it could be plausible. Antonella was aware of Arthur’s health issues. He had appeared to be remarkably well, however, just lately. The faint wheeze which usually troubled him had more or less vanished since they had been at Westwood.

‘Very well,’ Jane agreed. She couldn’t think of another excuse. She drafted a note explaining that they had gone to Bath to see a specialist for a regular check-up for Arthur’s health but would be back around twelve.

With that done they retired for the night and arranged to meet downstairs at five thirty the next morning.

Benson and Arthur were ready in the kitchen at the appointed time. Benson placed a cup of black coffee and slice of toast in front of her, while Arthur continued to check through the contents of a small green canvas workman’s bag.

‘I’ve packed a few things we may need,’ he said as she quickly ate her toast.

‘Very good.’ She propped up the note they had prepared the previous evening against the teapot where Antonella would find it when she came downstairs.

Once set, they slipped quietly out of the front door and Arthur and Benson led the way to the secret entrance. It was still quite dark with pink and gold streaks lighting the sky as they walked swiftly out of the village. No one was about on the streets, and the only sound was the chirping of the birds in the hedgerow and the distant bark of a farm dog.

Jane had abandoned her usual tweed suit in favour of a pair of dark trousers and a dark-green sweater. She couldn’t afford to damage any more of her stockings and if the entrance to the tunnel was as Arthur had described it, then a skirt would prove impractical.

Before long they were on the outskirts of the village and heading towards a large oak tree. They fell into single file with Arthur leading the way and Jane bringing up the rear. They passed the ventilation shaft and soon they were at the mound that Arthur had described to her. She followed

the two men through the scrubby bushes and brambles to the concealed entrance.

‘I can’t believe we didn’t see this grill before,’ she murmured as Arthur took out a screwdriver from the tool bag.

‘It’s not marked anywhere on any of the blueprints and the opening is higher up the wall hidden behind a fold in the stone in the room where the airplane is stored. It’s not easy to see even when you’re looking for it.’ Arthur lifted the metal grill clear with Benson’s help and took out his torch.

‘If you follow Mr Cilento, Miss Jane, I’ll come after you and place the grill back over the hole,’ Benson said.

Jane nodded and waited as Arthur lowered himself into the opening.

‘Righto, Jane, you next. Be careful, there’s not much room.’ Arthur’s voice sounded distant and slightly echoey.

She took a breath for courage and followed him into the tunnel. It was dark once she was inside, the only light coming from the opening behind her and the faint gleam of Arthur’s flashlight further ahead.

‘Ready, Benson,’ she called back to the manservant as she set off to follow Arthur along the narrow passageway.

Behind her she could hear Benson following while just in front of her Arthur was moving as swiftly as he could through the space to the cavern containing the plane. All the while they were moving she kept listening out for any other sounds or indications that someone else might be inside the storage facility.

She knew that the staff often worked weekends but since it was the concert later she thought it unlikely that anyone would be there. Marietta and Lawrence would have enough on their plates hosting their guests and getting ready for the afternoon. She could hear or feel the faint thrum of the air-conditioning plant as she followed Arthur.

Antonella had said she wanted to tidy the garden since the weather was fair and the weeds were taking hold. Betsy had seemed quite tipsy last night after Lawrence’s cocktails so was unlikely to venture into work. Dickie was the only one she wasn’t certain of.

He had appeared out of sorts she thought, as if he had something on his mind. He could just be feeling tired she supposed. Everyone was tired. Tired of the war, tired of the blackouts, tired of the bombing raids, tired of rationing. It was why moments like the concert were so important. Something normal and pleasurable in a bleak world.

Arthur halted and she almost bumped into his back. She had been lost in her own thoughts.

‘We’re here. I’ll jump down then give you a hand,’ Arthur said.

She heard a scraping noise of his boots on the stone walls then a soft thud. He shone the light from the torch up towards her.

‘Sit on the edge, Jane, and lower yourself down,’ he instructed.

She could see the drop to the floor was not too bad so followed his advice. He caught and steadied her when she landed. Benson followed soon afterwards. He moved with remarkable agility for a man of his age, she thought.

‘I can’t hear anyone else moving around inside the facility, but I think we should leave the lights off until we are certain there is no one other than ourselves in here.’ Arthur’s breath was warm against her ear.

He led the way with the torch moving through the rooms and passages until they got to the office area and the art store. Once they were sure they were the only ones in the facility he snapped off the torch and flicked on the light switch.

She knew that no light could be seen by the men outside at the guard post. The thick pairs of metal doors which closed the place off and made it bombproof prevented any light from escaping.

‘I’ll get the master list from the files. I know where Marietta keeps it.’ Jane opened the office door and went to the filing cabinets.

Hannah had shown her the master catalogue during Jane’s first visit to the storage facility. It was a carefully compiled document listing everything that had been received at Westwood and where it was stored. It also said who the owners of each piece were and who had sent the artefact or artwork. There were also notes made on the condition of the piece when it had arrived.

Jane opened the cabinet and flicked through the meticulously ordered files until she found what she was looking for.

‘Right, I have it. Now let’s check the Turners and the Constables.’

She turned on the desk lamp and started to search the file for the relevant pages. She took a pencil from the pot on Marietta’s desk and quickly began to note down the codes for the racks where the relevant paintings should be.

Arthur and Benson waited patiently for her.

‘Here is the list of Constables. Go and make a start while I compile the list for the Turners.’ She gave the piece of scrap paper containing the list to Arthur, before taking another scrap of paper from Marietta’s stash to start the next list.

Arthur and Benson disappeared off into the gloom outside the office to begin their search. Jane forced herself to concentrate on jotting down the codes for the racks for the Turner paintings. All the time she was conscious of faint sounds coming from the direction of the art store where Benson and Arthur were checking the catalogue.

She finished the list and double-checked the catalogue in case she might have missed something. Satisfied that all was in order she filed the catalogue back in the cabinet and replaced the pencil in the pot, before snapping off the lamp and the overhead light.

Arthur and Benson were busy in the racks that Dickie had constructed to help hold the paintings. The wooden frames were housed amongst steel shelving to take the weight of the hundreds of pictures now housed in the bowels of the old quarry.

‘How is it going?’ she asked as she approached.

A faint sheen of perspiration gleamed on Benson’s brow as he read off a code to Arthur who ticked it off on his list.

‘We’re doing quite well. There is some disorder however within the store,’ Benson said.

‘What do you mean?’ Jane asked. She knew Dickie and Betsy were very methodical with how they looked after the pictures.

‘It’s as if someone has been going through the works and hasn’t returned them all in quite the right place,’ Arthur explained. ‘See, this piece is coded PG22 but is amongst the NA pictures. It’s slowing us down checking that everything is here.’

Jane blew out a breath. This sounded very much like what Dickie had been grumbling about. It had also been something that Sanford had referred to in his journal. ‘I’ll start on this list while you finish those off. If you can make a note of the anomalies, that may prove useful later.’

Arthur nodded and returned to his task, while Jane set to work locating the pictures on her list. She was a third of the way through when Arthur and Benson joined her.

‘The Constables are all present.’ Arthur looked at her list. ‘We’ll help you locate these. Time is growing short, it’s almost eleven already.’

With the three of them working, the search for the remaining Turner paintings speeded up, although once again there had been some disruption in the racks.

‘Everything is here, so nothing has been stolen yet that we know of,’ Jane said as they regrouped at the back of the store.

‘Then why the disruption?’ Benson asked.

‘Preparation, perhaps? So, when the picture they want is taken no one will notice immediately. It’ll be assumed that it’s simply misplaced. By the time the alarm is raised it will be in Hitler or Göring’s hands.’ Arthur’s expression was grim.

‘Let’s get out of here. We need to return to Antonella’s to prepare for the concert,’ Jane said.

The words had hardly left her lips when they heard the unmistakeable sound of the security door starting to open. Jane darted forward and hit the light switch plunging them all into darkness while they waited to see who would appear as they hastily concealed themselves.

‘Thank you, I shan’t be a moment.’ A male voice presumably speaking to the guard.

Jane’s fingers gripped Arthur’s arm in the darkness and tightened. It sounded like Dickie, but why was he there at that time of day on a Saturday?

‘You sure you’re all right in there by yourself, sir?’ It was the voice of the new guard.

‘Perfectly. Just wait there and I’ll be out in two ticks.’ The light further down the facility snapped on and Dickie stepped inside the lobby.

Jane automatically shrank back against the rough cool stone wall of the cave. She knew they should be out of sight behind the racks unless Dickie turned on the other lights and walked down to the far end.

She tried to peep out to see what he was doing. He didn’t appear to be going further into the store. Instead, he seemed to have stopped at the entrance to the art cave and was muttering to himself as he appeared to be checking the first few rows of paintings in the racks.

Her heart pounded so loudly in her chest she almost thought it would become audible in the silence of the cavern. If Dickie ventured further in and put on the lights they would be placed in a very tricky situation indeed.

Luckily, he stopped at the far end and after a moment he turned and switched the light off before walking to where the guard must have been

waiting.

‘Everything in order, sir?’ she heard the guard ask.

‘Yes, perfectly. Thank you.’ The door began to close, cutting off the daylight and returning the store into pitch-black darkness.

She heard Arthur exhale, and she released the grip on his arm.

‘That was a little too close for comfort,’ he murmured.

‘I agree. Let’s get out of here.’ Jane’s pulse slowed and steadied back to its normal regular beat.

Arthur switched on his torch, and they rapidly made their way back through the galleries and caverns to the tunnel where they had entered.

‘Up you go, Jane, take the torch.’ Arthur passed her the flashlight, and he and Benson assisted her up into the tunnel entrance. Arthur followed her, with Benson bringing up the rear.

No one spoke again until they were all finally back outside, blinking in the sunshine and breathing in the faintly damp green scent of the grass and bushes.

‘If you would be so good as to hand me the screwdriver, sir,’ Benson asked as he dropped the grill back in place over the entrance.

Arthur stowed the torch back in the small canvas tool bag and passed over the driver.

‘What was Dickie doing there? Is he our man, do you think?’ Jane asked as Benson secured the metalwork.

‘If he went in there to take something, then the presence of the guard prevented an attempt.’ Arthur sounded thoughtful.

‘Did either of you catch what he was saying? When he was talking to himself, I mean?’ Jane asked. She had been listening intently but hadn’t been able to make anything out.

Benson straightened up and put the screwdriver back inside the bag. ‘I thought he was checking the codes on the smaller pictures. The same way we were.’

‘To see if anything had changed? Or to ensure that something he had moved was still in position to be removed either by him or an accomplice later on?’ Jane asked.

She helped Arthur and Benson to conceal the grill with branches and to brush the tussocks of grass back into place.

‘I don’t know. To me it looked as if he were checking something. The question is what and why,’ Arthur said.

‘He seemed bothered and annoyed by things being out of order in the facility the other day.’ Jane looked around to ensure that everything appeared undisturbed and that the entrance was concealed once more from any casual passer-by.

‘We need to speak to him,’ Arthur said as they started back along the lane towards Antonella’s house.

‘Perhaps we can catch him at the concert later? He has a ticket and he said he was looking forward to it,’ Jane suggested.

She knew they couldn’t let on that they knew Dickie had been in the facility, but they could find out more about the strange disorder in the art storage racks.

CHAPTER TWENTY

Antonella was in the sitting room when they returned, arranging some pale-pink tulips in a vase. The crossword she and Arthur had been working on together off and on over the last few days lay nearby, almost completed.

‘Arthur, is everything all right? I got Jane’s note saying you had a medical appointment.’ Her pleasant face creased with anxiety as they entered the room, and Jane felt a pang of guilt at their deception.

‘Yes, everything is fine. My consultant wanted me to be examined with some new equipment he’d discovered they had at the hospital in Bath. Since I was staying here it seemed the perfect opportunity. He was very pleased with the results. I hope we didn’t worry you. The arrangements were made with very little notice. A message was hand delivered to the house last night after you had already gone upstairs,’ Arthur said as Benson slipped away to the kitchen.

‘Oh, I see. Of course. I suppose one reads the word hospital or medical and immediately thinks the worst,’ Antonella said.

‘I’m so sorry we worried you. Benson accompanied us since he manages Arthur’s medications and well, naturally, I felt that I should be there.’ Jane took a seat on the sofa.

Antonella arranged the vase, so the midday sunshine highlighted the stiff beauty of the pastel-coloured flowers. ‘Naturally. I’m so glad it was good news. There is soup and sandwiches prepared for a light lunch before we go to Marietta’s later.’

‘Thank you, that’s so kind of you.’ Jane breathed a quiet sigh of relief that Antonella appeared to have believed their reason for their absence.

‘I do like your trousers, Jane. I’ve never been bold enough to wear them myself, but they suit you,’ Antonella commented, looking at Jane’s clothes.

‘I don’t wear them often but travelling on the train and then needing to change for the concert, well, it’s so hard on one’s stockings. Trousers are terribly practical.’ Jane could feel heat creeping into her cheeks at the lie.

‘Shall I serve lunch in the dining room, Miss Watkins?’ Benson reappeared in the doorway.

‘Thank you, Benson, that would be marvellous. Lawrence is coming at one forty-five to take us all to the house,’ Antonella said once Benson had disappeared back to the kitchen to manage his culinary obligations.

Once lunch had been served and eaten, Jane hurried upstairs to stare at her two evening dresses trying to determine which one would best please her mother. She knew that probably neither of them were what Elsa would deem appropriate, but since they were all she had with her there was not much choice.

* * *

Arthur changed and waited in the hall for Jane to come back downstairs. He knew she was not particularly looking forward to playing for her mother at the concert. He guessed she would much rather be in the audience trying to work out the best time to collar Dickie to find out what he had been up to in the storage facility.

Lawrence’s car pulled up a few minutes early, just as Antonella and Benson arrived in the hallway.

‘Jane, Lawrence is here,’ Antonella called up the stairs as she pinned her hat in place. Arthur, ready to leave, looked up.

Jane emerged and walked down the stairs in a dark-blue watermark silk gown he had seen before. She had taken time, however, to curl her hair, and it was pinned back from her face to fall in loose waves onto her shoulders.

Arthur swallowed. The style softened her features and made her appear younger and somehow more vulnerable. Not at all like the cool, composed slightly stern woman he was used to seeing.

‘You look lovely, Jane. Don’t you think so, Arthur?’ Antonella asked, as she looked at him.

‘Yes, you look quite splendid, Jane,’ Arthur agreed.

He helped her on with her coat and they hurried out to where Lawrence was waiting.

Lawrence's eyes widened in appreciation at Jane's altered appearance and Arthur suddenly felt rather annoyed when the other man emitted a low whistle of admiration.

'Careful, Lawrence, you'll upset Arthur,' Antonella teased as Jane murmured a polite thank you as Arthur assisted her into the car.

Lawrence merely chuckled and smiled at Antonella who had taken the front passenger seat. 'You know I've really only got eyes for my best girl.'

This comment brought colour into Antonella's cheeks and Arthur noticed she looked slightly pleased by the remark. She passed it off, however, and introduced Benson to Lawrence.

Once at the house, Lawrence parked next to a row of vehicles. It was clear the concert audience had already begun to arrive. Arthur offered Jane his arm.

'Thank you,' she accepted and appeared to square her shoulders almost as if preparing for battle before they made their way inside.

Once inside the house, Jane was swiftly whisked away to find her mother. Arthur checked his name off with Hannah who seemed to have been placed in charge of collecting tickets at a small, draughty table near the front door.

'Marietta has saved seats for you and Antonella with her and Lawrence at the front,' Hannah said.

He was slightly surprised by this considering the other guests Marietta had mentioned who were attending the concert. Benson stood slightly to one side before presenting his own ticket and taking his programme. He nodded to Arthur and headed off towards the rear of the room.

Benson would probably have a better opportunity to look out for Dickie since his seat was further back. Marietta hadn't kept seats for Betsy or Dickie at the front. Arthur's seat would give him an excellent view of the artistes but not the audience. Something which was rather annoying considering he wanted to look out for Dickie's arrival.

The large room was already more than half full when he made his way to where Marietta was busy talking to a couple of ladies and a gentleman he didn't know. Antonella had slipped away in the hall after presenting her ticket when she spotted an old friend.

‘Arthur, do come and take a seat. I assume Antonella is here?’ Marietta waved her programme at him.

‘Yes, she stopped to talk to someone she knew. She’ll be here in a minute,’ Arthur said.

‘May I present Lord and Lady Metcalf and Mrs Frobisher-Kyte, this is Mr Arthur Cilento, a close friend of Miss Jane Treen, our pianist today. And, of course, dear Jane is Miss Macintyre’s daughter,’ Marietta continued as Arthur shook hands with the others and took his place.

The others all greeted him politely and repeated the process when Antonella arrived to join them. He had noticed while shaking hands with Lord Metcalf that Benson was seated halfway down the rows and Betsy was at the far side. He didn’t see any sign of Dickie and wondered if the man had arrived yet.

The buzz of chatter in the hall grew louder as the sense of expectation and excitement rose. There was a rustling of bags interspersed with coughs and the scrape of chairs. Arthur wished he could turn around to see if Dickie was there, but he was trapped making polite conversation with Lord Metcalf.

The band came out to take their places, and Jane walked past to sit at the piano, her face pale as she checked her music. Arthur looked at his watch and opened the programme to check the running order. Lawrence appeared in formal attire and positioned himself behind a large, square, silver coloured microphone which had been placed at the front of the performance area.

‘Ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure on behalf of myself and my sister, Lady Tolland, to welcome you all to Hartfield House and this concert.’ Lawrence paused to beam expansively at the audience before continuing to outline the musical delights ahead and to thank everyone for assisting in raising funds for the convalescent home.

There was a polite round of applause as Lawrence finished speaking. He then handed over to the male vocalist and the band who it seemed were to play a few numbers before Elsa made her appearance.

The male singer and the musicians were very good. They played a few of the songs Arthur had heard the previous evening and a few newer songs. The audience appeared to know them all and clapped appreciatively after each one. Jane played on some of the songs and Arthur assumed she must have been asked if she could help out while she had been backstage.

There was a short intermission during which raffle tickets were sold with the promise of the draw at the end of the concert. The harpist provided musical accompaniment for the interlude. Arthur took advantage of the break to excuse himself to go and look for Benson. Jane had disappeared, presumably to prepare for the second half of the afternoon's entertainment.

'Have you seen any sign of Dickie?' Arthur asked when he found his manservant in the crush at the rear of the room.

'No, sir, not yet, but it is very busy in here,' Benson replied.

Arthur returned to his seat. He was concerned that Dickie hadn't been spotted among the crowd.

'I say, Mr Cilento, Marietta said that you knew the young lady pianist, Jane?' Lady Metcalf said once he was seated.

'Yes, that's correct.' Arthur didn't enlarge on an explanation about how he and Jane were connected.

'I met her when she accompanied Marietta to Ravenswood Park. She seems familiar and I can't think where I could have met her before. It's been bothering me ever since her visit.' Lady Metcalf's forehead puckered as if genuinely puzzled.

'She does accompany Miss Macintyre from time to time. You could have seen her at a concert or on a news reel,' Arthur offered.

'Where is she based?' Lady Metcalf persisted.

Arthur was reluctant to divulge much about Jane without her permission knowing she hated discussing her private life. 'She lives in London but has a house in Kent near the coast.'

'She isn't a professional musician though? Marietta said when she was at the house that she worked for the government?' Lady Metcalf continued.

'She does, yes, in an office.' Arthur felt that was as much detail as he wanted to give.

'Hmm.' Lady Metcalf didn't ask anything further as people were retaking their seats and Jane herself reappeared to take her place at the piano.

Lawrence also returned to the stage area to stand at the microphone. Once the hubbub had quieted once more he made his announcement. 'Ladies and gentlemen, I am honoured to present the star of our show this afternoon, the wonderful, glamorous Miss Elsa Macintyre.'

Applause swelled around the hall and Arthur could have sworn he heard some people stamping their feet against the hardwood floor of the ballroom

where some of the chairs had been positioned.

Elsa made her entrance in a pale-blue satin frock, a sapphire and diamond pendant around her neck and her hair carefully coiffured. In the surroundings of Hartfield House she appeared impossibly elegant and exotic.

She nodded to Jane and commenced her part of the programme. Arthur tried to relax and focus on the music. However, he couldn't help but notice Lady Metcalf's gaze drifting from Elsa to Jane and back again as if still trying to work out some kind of puzzle.

The applause for Elsa was rapturous, and she was persuaded to perform several encores before the floor was handed back to the band for a short sing-along section to close the programme.

Once the music was finished and the raffle draw had taken place, the audience moved to try to obtain autographs from Elsa. Jane had risen from the piano and was putting the sheet music back in its case when Arthur reached her.

'Well done, you played beautifully,' he said.

'I'm not sure Mother will agree. I definitely fudged a couple of places, but thank you anyway.' Jane fastened straps on the leather case. 'Any sign of Dickie? I tried to look but it was difficult while I was playing.'

Arthur shook his head. 'I checked with Benson at the intermission, but he hadn't seen him. Betsy is here though.'

'Miss Treen, Jane.' Lady Metcalf's crisp tones cut through the chatter going on around them.

Arthur saw the colour fade from Jane's face.

'Lady Metcalf, how nice to see you again. I do hope you enjoyed the concert?'

Arthur could see the rigidity in Jane's narrow shoulders as she spoke.

'Yes, indeed. It's just that, forgive me, my dear, but I think I have just recalled where I had seen you before. It was at the funeral, wasn't it? My son, Hugo, you were there at the service in the church that morning.' Lady Metcalf's gaze was fixed on Jane.

Arthur saw Jane swallow. 'Yes, I knew your son.' Her voice was low.

'You left straight after the service. You didn't come back to the house.' Lady Metcalf frowned then her expression cleared as if she was finally discovering the solution to something.

‘I really should go and help my mother.’ Jane held the leather music case like a shield.

‘Oh, my dear, you were the girl Hugo wanted us to meet. The one he was bringing home before he died.’ Lady Metcalf’s hand flew up to cover her mouth, and she swayed on her heels.

Lord Metcalf placed his hand on his wife’s shoulder. ‘Athene, my dear, this is not the place.’ His wife turned her head into her husband’s chest.

Arthur stepped closer to Jane and placed his arm firmly around her narrow waist to guide her away.

‘Excuse me, I must go,’ she muttered and threw a panicked glance at Arthur.

He steered her deftly around the crowd surrounding Elsa and walked her quickly out of the room, through the hall and out to the front of the house. Once outside he led her to a small stone seat tucked around a corner not far from the orangery where they had been the previous evening.

She sank down onto the bench, heedless of any moss getting onto her dress. She fumbled with the fastenings on the music case to retrieve her cigarettes. Arthur took the lighter from her shaking hand and lit one for her. It was only after she had taken her first couple of pulls of nicotine that she appeared to regain some of her equilibrium.

Arthur sat beside her and waited for her to be ready to speak.

‘I’m sorry,’ she said.

‘What for?’ Arthur could see she was still trembling. He took off his jacket and draped it around her shoulders, even though it wasn’t really cold.

‘For that.’ She waved the hand with her cigarette scattering ash onto the gravel in front of her. ‘It was terribly unprofessional of me.’

‘Jane, you are not a machine.’ Arthur took her free hand in his and was surprised by how cold she felt.

‘Hugo and I were engaged. We hadn’t announced it. He wanted us to go to Ravenswood Park, to meet his people. We were going to tell them.’ Jane blinked a few times.

‘Then he was killed?’ Arthur filled in the gap carefully.

‘Two days before we were due to go. A stupid car accident. I went to the funeral. It was so unreal and all his family and friends were there. It was at the start of the war. I couldn’t say anything to his parents, so I left after the service. No one knew who I was or what I had been to him. It was cowardly of me, I know. I intended to write to them later, but time kept moving on

and I couldn't cope with managing my own grief and having to carry theirs too.' She looked at him, her anguish clear in her eyes.

'I understand and I think Lady Metcalf will understand too.' He squeezed her fingers in tender reassurance.

'I didn't think our paths would ever cross again or that she would recognise me. Not from that one brief meeting.' She finished her cigarette.

'I expect it was a shock when Marietta took you to Ravenswood Park,' Arthur said.

She nodded and a curl of her chestnut-coloured hair fell across her cheek.

He brushed it back from her face with his free hand. 'The worst is over now. She has recognised you and it's done. You have no reason to hide or worry. You both share a loss.' Arthur's voice was gentle.

'Thank you, Arthur. You're right. I think it was just a shock after so much time. Losing Hugo and then my father...' Her voice trailed off before she shook herself. 'Well, it was all a bit much.' She raised her head and looked at him. 'I need to go back inside. We still need to establish where Dickie is.' Her tone was firmer and he could see the Jane he knew was back, her armour securely in place again.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

There was a constant stream of concert goers leaving the house now through the front doors. Jane felt a little like a fish trying to swim upstream as she weaved through the crowd. Arthur followed closely behind her as she made her way to the drawing room. His presence was both comforting and grounding as she scanned the room for Lord and Lady Metcalf.

She knew she owed Hugo's mother a long overdue conversation. At the very least some words of explanation about why she had never written or made herself known to them at the funeral. Elsa was still surrounded by a group of admirers near the piano. Marietta had moved and she could see no sign of Hannah, Betsy, Dickie or Benson.

'Miss Jane, Lady Metcalf has retired to the library. I have arranged for coffee to be served there. Lady Tolland asked me to inform you when you returned.' Benson appeared at her elbow as if her thoughts had conjured him up from thin air.

'Thank you, I'll go there now.' She glanced at her mother.

Benson followed her gaze. 'I shall look after Miss Elsa.'

Arthur went with her as she crossed the hall and slipped inside the library. The room was a pleasant one. Square shaped and not overly large, it was lined with oak bookshelves and Chinese-style wallpaper.

'Jane, my dear, do come and sit down. Athene was so concerned about you when you dashed off.' Marietta was seated in her chair near the end of one of the chesterfield sofas. Lord and Lady Metcalf were beside her. Athene looked red-eyed but more composed. Hannah was occupied serving coffee from a silver pot.

‘I’m so sorry. I hope I didn’t alarm you. I just needed some air.’ Jane took a vacant straight-backed chair and Arthur followed suit.

She noticed Hannah regarding her curiously as she handed a coffee cup to Lord Metcalf.

‘It had been bothering me. The feeling that I knew you. Why didn’t you tell me who you were?’ Lady Metcalf dabbed at her eyes with a lace-edged handkerchief, her voice still a little shaky.

‘When Hugo was killed in the accident, it was a dreadful shock. I knew he hadn’t said too much to you since he had wanted us to meet first. Then, when I came to the funeral, I didn’t think either of us was ready for that conversation. I fully intended to write to you afterwards, but time seemed to go by so quickly and the war intensified. I lost my father unexpectedly too, due to illness, and by then it all felt too late. I didn’t expect our paths would ever cross again,’ Jane said.

Arthur placed his hand gently on Jane’s knee and squeezed.

‘Thank you for telling me. I know that in the weeks before he was killed Hugo was the happiest he had ever been in his life. I can only put that down to you, my dear.’ Lady Metcalf glanced at Arthur. ‘And I’m glad you’ve found someone else to support you. Hugo would have wanted you to be happy.’ A tear rolled down her cheek, and she dashed it away with her handkerchief.

‘Well, this has all been most illuminating. Jane, you really are quite the dark horse,’ Marietta said. ‘Such a dreadful tragedy.’

‘Perhaps, Jane, Marietta, you would excuse Athene and I for a while. I think my wife would like some privacy to gather her thoughts.’ Lord Metcalf helped his wife to set down her coffee cup and saucer before leading her away.

She had only been gone for a moment when there was a small commotion in the hallway and Elsa breezed into the room clutching several bouquets of flowers and a box of chocolates, which looked as if they had been stored for a very long time.

‘Darlings, I wondered where you all were. Dear Mr Benson said you were in here.’ Elsa dropped the chocolates onto Jane’s lap and thrust the flowers at an unsuspecting maid who had followed her into the room. ‘Sweetie, pop those in some vases for me, won’t you?’

Elsa arranged herself decorously on the end of a couch and crossed her slim stocking-clad legs.

‘I take it your fans have now gone?’ Jane asked as Hannah poured another coffee and offered it to Elsa.

‘With reluctance, honey. I had to make excuses to escape. People really are too sweet,’ her mother declared with a note of satisfaction as she accepted the coffee from Marietta’s assistant.

Jane had felt Arthur withdraw his hand from her knee when her mother sat down. He sipped his coffee quietly as her mother rattled on about the concert and how she thought it had gone.

‘Yes, we seem to have had a very positive response,’ Marietta remarked when she could get a word in. Privately, Jane was amused that Marietta appeared to have met her match in her mother.

Lawrence sauntered into the room accompanied by Antonella. ‘I say, what a spiffing afternoon. The takings are all tallied up and locked away in the safe until Monday. The convalescent home will be delighted with the total. I don’t suppose there’s any coffee left?’ He looked hopefully at the pot as Antonella took a seat on one of the couches.

‘I’ll ring for more,’ Hannah murmured and moved to the embroidered tasselled ring pull beside the fireplace.

‘Has Betsy gone now?’ Jane asked.

‘I think so. I thought I saw her cycling away when Lawrence and I were in the study checking the receipts,’ Antonella said.

‘She could have stayed and joined us for coffee. Where is Dickie by the way? I don’t recall seeing him at all?’ Marietta said.

‘No, we didn’t notice him either and I’m sure Betsy said she wasn’t aware of him attending either,’ Antonella said. ‘I looked for them both during the intermission.’

‘How very odd. Dickie said he was looking forward to coming. He is a fan of Miss Macintyre’s.’ Marietta looked puzzled.

‘Perhaps he’s unwell,’ Arthur suggested.

‘Dickie is as strong as a horse. I’ve never known him take time off despite all his complaints about his back,’ Marietta said.

‘Perhaps we should call on him on our way home and just check that he’s all right,’ Jane said. ‘Does he live in the village?’

‘Yes, not far from me. He has a small cottage. He used to live with his mother, but she passed away about four years ago and he’s lived alone ever since.’ Antonella frowned in concern. ‘I do hope he’s all right.’

Benson appeared bearing a fresh pot of coffee and a jug of steamed milk. Jane wondered how he had managed to infiltrate the kitchens of Marietta's household quite so quickly.

'I can drop you off there after we've finished our coffee,' Lawrence offered as Benson quietly replaced the empty pots with full ones.

'Let's hope we are worrying unnecessarily,' Marietta said. 'Now, Elsa, my dear, I should love to get your opinion on perhaps holding regular artistic events at the hall.'

Elsa, who Jane thought had looked a little sulky during the previous conversation since it didn't concern her, brightened immediately. 'Sure thing, honey. I'd be delighted.'

After coffee, they said goodbye to Marietta and Elsa.

'Jane pie, do try and keep your hair this way. It fixes up that stubborn chin of yours,' Elsa whispered as she straightened Jane's coat collar in the hall.

Jane gritted her teeth and raised her stubborn chin to follow Lawrence and Antonella out to the car. Arthur and Benson accompanied them. Lawrence had agreed to drop them at the row of cottages where Dickie lived.

Dickie's cottage was quite close to Antonella's home. Lawrence pulled to a halt and jumped out to open Antonella's door while the others got out of the back of the car.

'Do you want me to come with you?' Lawrence offered.

'No, go back to Hartfield. Your guests will be waiting for you,' Antonella said and waved him off with a smile.

'It was kind of him to offer to accompany us, but I know he has lots to do back at the house,' Antonella said as the car pulled away. She shivered and pulled her coat a little more closely around her neck. 'Brr, it's growing cool this evening now the sun is starting to go.'

'Which house is Dickie's?' Jane asked.

There were three small cottages joined in a terraced row. Each had a neatly painted front door and small lead-paned windows. The exteriors were limewashed and she guessed that at one time the roofs may have been thatched. Now though, the roofs were a red pantile. The tiny front gardens were bordered by hedges and the entrance to the front doors was via a wooden gate in front of each property.

‘The middle one. There is smoke coming from the chimney so he must be home,’ Antonella said, looking upwards.

There was indeed a tiny plume of whitish grey smoke drifting lazily up to mingle with the silver clouds which had begun to gather overhead.

Antonella led the way, pushing open the front gate which emitted a tiny squeak of protest. She rapped on the dark-green front door using the brass fox head shaped knocker with Jane standing at her side. Benson and Arthur had waited on the other side of the gate, not wishing to overwhelm Dickie if he was simply unwell.

There was no reply, so Antonella knocked again. Jane stepped to the side, shading her eyes with her hand to peer in through the front window. The cottage, like so many of that style, had no hallway. The front door opened directly into the sitting room with the stairs rising straight up to the next floor. A small kitchen was usually at the rear of the house.

It took Jane a moment for her eyes to adjust to the gloom inside the house. She could see the fire smouldering in the grate. A pair of reading glasses left on an open newspaper beside the armchair. Then, as she scanned across towards the staircase she spied Dickie. Or at least Dickie’s foot, clad in a carpet slipper and lying at a strange angle at the foot of the stairs.

‘Good heavens! I think there’s been an accident. We need to get inside the house.’ Jane looked towards Arthur and Benson.

Antonella tried the door. ‘It’s locked and it seems quite sturdy. There is a way in around the back. You’ll have to go around and along the lane. It’s the middle gate.’

Benson and Arthur hurried away, while Antonella continued to wrench fruitlessly at the door handle. Jane returned to her post at the window waiting to see if the men had managed to get in via the kitchen.

‘I see Arthur.’ Jane rejoined Antonella at the front door.

A second later it opened and they stared at where Dickie was sprawled lifeless at the foot of the steep narrow staircase. Benson was crouched beside him feeling for his pulse.

‘I’m very sorry, I think he’s dead.’ The manservant looked to Arthur.

‘Antonella, you need to go back to your house and telephone the police and a doctor. There’s no telephone here,’ Jane said. ‘Benson, please go with her. Arthur and I will stay here until they arrive.’

‘What do you think happened? Did he fall on the stairs, do you think?’ Antonella’s face was paper white, and her gaze was fixed on Dickie’s prone

form as if she couldn't believe what she was seeing.

'I don't know, but we need to get help,' Jane said.

Benson rose and gently but firmly guided Antonella away, leading her from the scene back to her house just a street away.

'Do you think it was a fall?' Jane looked at Arthur.

'I can't smell alcohol and he was familiar with the stairs in his own house.' Arthur's mouth set in a grim line.

'Murder then, made to look like an accident?' Jane suggested.

Dickie was dressed in the clothes they had seen him wearing a few hours earlier. He must have returned home to prepare for the afternoon concert, then met his death.

'I'm going to check upstairs.' Jane didn't give Arthur time to protest before slipping around Dickie's body and making her way to the bedrooms.

The upstairs of the house was as compact as the downstairs. A miniscule room with a toilet and a sink. No bath. She guessed that Dickie probably managed with a tin bath in front of the fire. A small bedroom with a single iron-framed bed covered with a worn patchwork quilt. A wooden crucifix on the wall behind the bedhead, and air that smelt faintly of camphor.

Jane assumed that room must have been Dickie's mother's. She entered the last bedroom. It just about held a double bed. Wooden pegs were set in the wall to take clothes on hangers and there was a compact chest of drawers on one side of the bed with a lamp.

Everywhere was neat and tidy. She opened the chest of drawers and found a Bible, underwear and socks and a detective story with a library stamp. She headed back down to Arthur.

'Nothing significant up there.'

* * *

Arthur had been looking around the sitting room while Jane had been upstairs. The newspaper lying open on the table beside the armchair caught his attention. He took out the wireframed spectacles he kept in his jacket pocket and slipped them on to take a closer look.

'I think this may be important.' He glanced over to Jane who was carefully stepping over Dickie's leg.

'What is it?'

He indicated the discarded newspaper. 'Look in the margin beside the crossword.' Arthur was careful not to touch or disturb anything.

Jane frowned. 'Is that to do with clues in the crossword?' she asked, looking at the numbers which had been pencilled in along the narrow margin next to the partially completed grid.

'I don't think so. I think that's a time and if you look at the top of the page, he's underlined the date.' Arthur removed his glasses and refolded them to slide them back into their case.

'Today's date and eight o'clock tonight? Was he planning a meeting with someone?' Jane asked.

'I don't think so. I suspect this is to do with the stores.' He stopped talking as they heard the sound of male voices outside the cottage.

They both stepped away from the newspaper and returned to Dickie's body as a uniformed constable, his face flushed from exertion, entered the house. Benson was beside him, looking his usual unflappable self.

'The inspector and Doctor Lynch are on their way,' Benson said.

The constable asked them to wait outside the house as he took charge of the scene. 'It looks like a tragic accident. He probably fell on the stairs, poor gentleman. Are you all right, miss?'

Arthur watched quietly as the constable asked Jane in a solicitous tone if she would care for a seat or to perhaps return to Miss Watkins's house to await the inspector. He knew Jane would not be keen to be manoeuvred too swiftly off the scene.

'It has come as something of a shock to discover poor Dickie like this. I think there is a bench near the front door. Perhaps if I take a few minutes out there in the fresh air,' Jane murmured.

Arthur stepped forward to support her, guessing she was going to play the frail little woman role to her advantage in order to hear anything the inspector might say when he arrived.

There was a tiny, rickety wooden seat beside the open front door. Jane perched on the edge of it, appearing a rather incongruous sight in her blue cocktail gown. A tall, thin man with a tired expression was striding along the lane towards the cottage. He paused at the open gate and frowned at Jane and Arthur.

'I'm Inspector Martin, I've received a report of an accident at this address?'

‘Arthur Cilento, and this is Miss Jane Treen. We discovered the man, Dickie Flint, dead at the foot of his stairs. We’d called to check on him with some colleagues after he didn’t attend the charity concert at Hartfield Hall this afternoon,’ Arthur explained.

‘I see.’ The inspector entered the garden and continued into the house where Benson and the constable were waiting.

There was a buzz of conversation and Benson came out to them. ‘The inspector has requested we return to Miss Watkins’s address, and he will be with us shortly.’

Jane sighed and rose from her seat, brushing a few flakes of moss from the back of her gown. ‘Very well. I doubt there is much more to be gained here anyway,’ she agreed in a low voice.

Arthur offered her his arm as they left the garden to walk back to Antonella’s house. A sleek black car drove past them and stopped outside Dickie’s cottage.

‘I expect that will be the doctor,’ Jane said as a plump, self-important-looking man with a brown medical bag in his hand hopped out.

‘Let’s get back to the house. I think we need to think about what we do next,’ Arthur said.

Jane nodded. He could see she was already puzzling over the note left on the newspaper.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Antonella was waiting for them in the drawing room, her angular face pale and wreathed with anxiety.

‘I take it the police are at the cottage now?’ she asked as soon as they entered the room.

‘The inspector and the doctor had just arrived as we left.’ Arthur took his usual chair beside the fire.

‘I’m just going upstairs to change,’ Jane excused herself and slipped away.

Benson had already departed in the direction of the kitchen, Arthur assumed to prepare a tray of tea before the police arrived.

‘Oh, Arthur, whatever is going on? Was Dickie’s death an accident, do you think?’ Antonella sank down on the sofa, and he noticed there was a small crystal glass containing what looked like brandy standing on the side table.

‘I don’t know but it certainly appears suspicious to me. The timing of an accident coming so soon after Sanford’s death.’

Antonella picked up the brandy glass, her hand shaking. ‘Benson insisted I drink this. My nerves are all over the place. Poor Dickie. I don’t know how we shall manage at the store without him.’

‘Did he ever say anything to you about any worries he might have?’ Arthur asked.

‘Worries? What kind of worries?’ Antonella frowned as she looked at him.

‘I don’t know. Anything at all that had been playing on his mind or anything that seemed unusual?’ Arthur tried to frame his question as tactfully as he could. He didn’t believe Antonella was involved in whatever was happening, but he couldn’t be certain. He also didn’t wish to place her in any kind of danger if she was as innocent as he imagined.

‘Well, not really.’ Antonella’s brow puckered. ‘He complained about his back. As you know and, I’m not sure if it’s important, he was very cross that the art store kept being disarranged. He said that no one would admit to placing the pieces in the wrong order. He told Betsy about it. I think she is concerned too but we have all been so busy.’

‘I see.’ Arthur could hear Jane moving around upstairs.

‘Is that significant, do you think, his muttering about things being out of order? After what happened to Sanford?’ Antonella’s lower lip trembled. ‘It’s the only thing I can think of that was bothering him. Apart from his lumbago and rationing, of course, but those were just ordinary everyday things.’

‘I don’t know, the storage facility is a busy place with lots of items to keep track of. Perhaps we may know more after the doctor has examined him, we could be making something out of nothing. Inspector Lynch said he would call here to see us once he had spoken to the doctor,’ Arthur said.

‘Inspector Lynch? He was the policeman who was called when Sanford was found dead.’ Antonella’s face grew even paler and she swallowed the last of her brandy, shuddering as it went down.

‘That feels better. I felt a bit frivolous still wearing a gown,’ Jane said as she entered the room. She had changed back into her outfit from the morning. ‘There’s no sign of the inspector yet I take it?’ She took the chair opposite Arthur.

‘Antonella was saying that Inspector Lynch was the man who handled Sanford’s death.’ Arthur gave her a meaningful look.

‘Oh dear.’ Jane’s tone was sympathetic as she looked at their hostess. ‘This must be making a horrible situation feel even worse.’

There was a knock at the front door, startling all of them.

‘I’ll go.’ Jane jumped up and returned accompanied by the inspector.

‘Miss Watkins, it seems our paths have crossed again under tragic circumstances.’ Inspector Lynch removed his hat before extending his hand to Antonella who had risen to greet him. Without his hat, Arthur recognised the expression of an honest man worn down by too much work. He knew it

would do no good to raise any doubts about either Sanford or Dickie's deaths.

'I'm afraid so, Inspector. Please do sit down.' She indicated the end of the sofa before resuming her own position at the opposite end. She introduced Jane and Arthur.

'I believe Benson is preparing a tray of tea,' Arthur said as the policeman took out his notebook.

They had already given their names and addresses and that of Benson when the man himself carried in the promised tea tray. Antonella set about assisting him to distribute cups as the inspector went over their reasons for calling at the cottage and how they all knew Dickie.

'The doctor is of the opinion that Mr Flint's death was due to a tragic accident, a slip on the stairs leading to a fatal head injury,' Inspector Lynch said as he accepted a china cup and saucer from Antonella.

'A terrible coincidence coming so soon after the loss of Professor Watkins,' Jane observed.

The policeman narrowed his eyes at her as if uncertain if she were implying something.

'I've called Marietta – Lady Tolland – and informed her. I rang her just after I called you.' Antonella looked at the inspector. 'She knew we were checking on Dickie. She will need to arrange staff cover and she was frightfully upset. Lawrence, her brother, had just returned to the house, and he too was most distressed. He was the person who had dropped us off there.'

'Does Betsy have a telephone?' Jane asked, looking at their hostess.

Antonella shook her head. 'No, Marietta was going to send Hannah to tell her what had happened. She will be devastated.'

Arthur could see from the inspector's expression that he recognised the names, presumably from when he had been called to handle the professor's demise just a few weeks ago.

'There will be an inquest, I'm afraid. You'll be familiar with that process, Miss Watkins,' the inspector said.

'Will we all be called?' Antonella asked.

'That will depend on the coroner. It all seems straightforward, however, so once your statements are typed up and signed it may be that he will have sufficient evidence to confirm an accidental death.' The policeman finished his tea and placed his empty cup back on the tray.

‘I see, well, thank you for your prompt attendance today, Inspector. Poor Dickie. I know he has a cousin in Bristol, but I don’t know of any other relatives. I expect the vicar may know. Dickie helped out at the church sometimes with maintenance,’ Antonella explained as the policeman picked up his hat ready to depart.

‘Thank you for the tea, Miss Watkins. I hope our next meeting might be on a happier occasion.’ Antonella showed the policeman out.

‘I shall start to get the blackout in place, Miss Watkins. It is growing dark.’ Benson gathered up the other cups.

Antonella looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. ‘Goodness, yes, time is moving on. I’ll go and start the upstairs if you will do downstairs.’

Benson inclined his head in agreement and he and Antonella both left the room to go about their tasks.

* * *

The door had just closed behind them when Jane leaned forward in her seat.

‘That note Dickie left on the newspaper. Suppose it was something he had thought of or overheard somewhere?’

‘Today’s date and the time?’ Arthur scratched his chin thoughtfully. ‘Yes, I think it might be.’

‘When he was in the store this morning and he was checking that things were in order. Do you think he may have been anticipating something happening?’ Jane asked.

‘You think the theft is planned for tonight? At eight o’clock?’ Arthur’s gaze locked with hers.

‘It would make sense. All this preparation, mixing up the order of the paintings. Then eliminating the person who had started to voice concerns. If a picture is stolen then how better to get it away from here than with perhaps someone who has travelled to Hartfield Hall for the concert? They may not even know they are carrying something if it’s placed secretly in their luggage and then extracted at the other end. From there it’s a short step to the next courier to get it away overseas and into the hands of the enemy.’ Jane leaned back in her chair and looked at the time.

She could see Arthur considering her theory. ‘Are you suggesting we return to the storage facility tonight?’

‘I think we have to,’ Jane said.

‘We would have to enter via the tunnel again. It seems likely that is also the same way the enemy is entering.’ Arthur looked most unhappy.

‘We shall need to be there early. Probably around seven which gives us around an hour to make our preparations and to lie in wait.’ Jane knew what she was proposing was highly dangerous.

‘That’s not much time. Why did Dickie write eight o’clock?’ Arthur frowned. ‘Presumably our thief could enter at any time the same way we did.’

‘Unless it’s something to do with the handover of the guard post. The time the Home Guard take over from the regular guards.’ Jane could only think that might be a good time for a theft to occur. Perhaps when the regular guards were gone.

If the thief were someone trusted they might let them in before the handover. Then when they left the Home Guard might not question someone carrying a regular art case for instance. Especially if the picture they intended to steal was one of the smaller pieces.

‘Dickie may have worked out the same thing. He was clearly checking the pictures when he was in the store this morning. He may have intended to return and wait to see if anyone showed up tonight,’ Arthur said.

‘Something the murderer definitely wanted to prevent.’ Jane blew out a sigh.

‘We need to get ready and leave for the tunnels before it gets too dark outside.’ Arthur rose from his seat. ‘I’ll get the gun.’

Jane swallowed, her palms already felt sweaty. She wiped her hands on her trouser legs. ‘What about Antonella?’

‘I think it may be best if Benson remains here with her.’ Arthur didn’t explain any further. He turned and left the room.

Benson could ensure Antonella’s safety and if it turned out that they were wrong and she was involved, then he could stop her from alerting anyone else. Jane heard footsteps out in the hall. Benson entered the room ready to close the shutters and draw the curtains to comply with the blackout regulations.

Jane quickly explained what they had noticed at the cottage and their plan for the evening. Benson worked while he listened, his expression impassive.

‘I see, Miss Jane. Perhaps I should accompany Mr Cilento while you remain with Miss Watkins,’ he suggested.

‘Arthur and I know the layout of the store better,’ Jane said.

‘This will be very dangerous, Miss Jane.’ Benson finished his task and she thought she detected a flicker of concern in his gaze.

‘Arthur is taking the gun. If we are not back by midnight, contact the police. Once we know who is responsible for all of this, we can turn them in,’ she assured him.

He nodded in response as Arthur joined them already dressed in his hat, coat and scarf.

‘Antonella will be down in a minute. I’ve told her we are stepping out for a while.’ Arthur looked at Benson.

‘Very good, sir.’

Jane went to the hall and tugged on her black winter coat and a dark hat. ‘Right, I’m ready,’ she said.

Benson saw them out through the front door and she hoped they were doing the right thing.

It wasn’t fully dark just yet. The moon was low and full as they walked quickly along the lane leading out of the village. All of Jane’s senses were heightened as she listened out for anything untoward. With no streetlamps and no lights permitted on cars and bicycles she had no wish to be run over before they even reached the entrance to the tunnels.

By the time they were on the path headed towards the large oak tree darkness had fallen completely. An owl hooted from somewhere nearby and rabbits scattered into the long grass. By now her eyes had adjusted to the gloom and she could hear Arthur’s shallow breathing beside her as he tried to match her pace.

When they reached the bushes Arthur risked a quick flick of the torch to help them locate the entrance. Once at the grill he knelt down to unscrew it while Jane kept watch. The temperature had dropped even lower than before and the cloud cover now seemed to have mostly dispersed.

‘Here we go,’ Arthur murmured quietly as he lifted the grill to one side. ‘I’ll go in first, then you follow me.’

He didn’t wait for her to agree. Instead, he returned the screwdriver to one of his pockets and lowered himself into the tunnel. Jane waited a moment to allow him to clear the space before she followed after him. She paused to tug the grill back in place before continuing. Arthur had placed the screws in the holes and Jane used her slender pianist’s fingers to tighten them as best she could by slipping her hand through the slots in the grill.

Once they were away from the entrance and Arthur was certain no light would show outside he turned on the torch. They moved quite swiftly to where the tunnel exited into the cave where the airplane was stored. Jane listened carefully as they moved, staying alert for any signs that someone might already have entered the store.

Arthur lowered himself into the cavern and turned to assist Jane. The vast room was pitch-black with only the beam of the flashlight penetrating the darkness. The wooden packing cases containing the parts of the plane formed rectangular shapes and shadows in the torchlight.

‘What time is it?’ Arthur asked.

‘Seven fifteen.’ Jane held her wrist in front of the torch to check the time.

‘Where should we wait?’ Arthur was already moving through the cave towards the art store.

‘Perhaps if one of us waits in the room with the statues. That way we can see who comes in if they use the entrance,’ Jane suggested.

‘I’ll wait at the back of the art store where we hid earlier. The pictures we know they are targeting are all close to the front of the storage racks,’ Arthur said.

Jane followed behind him until they reached the part of the store where the statues were kept. The vast majority of the statues were crated or wrapped in layers of hessian bound with cord to protect them. A few, however, had been unwrapped so they could be checked for damage before being rewrapped.

In the torchlight they gleamed, eerily white, with ghostly faces observing Jane and Arthur with blank unseeing expressions. Jane concealed herself under some hessian, adjusting the coarse material until Arthur was satisfied that she looked unnoticeable amongst the marble.

As soon as she was safely in place he gave her a quick squeeze on her shoulder for luck and she watched as he slipped away into the dark towards the art store.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

With Arthur in place the cavern fell back into complete darkness and Jane settled herself to wait. Even the dull, steady beat of her own heart sounded like a drum in the absolute stillness. She had just begun to lose feeling in her left foot when she heard the unmistakable sound of the heavy outer main entrance door opening.

Then the lights flickered overhead and came on. She blinked a few times to allow her eyes to adjust to the sudden brightness. The sound of voices echoed from near the entrance.

‘I’ll make a note in the files in case you aren’t out in time. The Home Guard take over from me at eight as you know. They’ll let you out otherwise. I can fix up the logbook tomorrow. It’ll be as if you were never here.’ Jane recognised the voice of the new, younger security guard.

She couldn’t hear the reply but then the guard spoke again. ‘They may have heard already about Dickie Flint’s death. It’s a good thing I warned you about him poking around, asking about security. Just act as if you’re upset. They won’t ask too many questions.’

Again, she couldn’t hear the response. Then she heard the guard. ‘You don’t have much time. You need to be in and out. I can’t afford to be caught up in this.’

Jane’s heart bumped and her blood froze in her veins. It sounded to her as if the new guard was part of this plan. That in itself added a new level of danger. The door rumbled shut again and whoever had killed Dickie was now inside the store with her and Arthur.

She tried to see who had entered the cavern, but she was afraid to move the hessian too much in case she was seen. She could hear footsteps crunching on the concrete floor and then the sharp click of the wall-mounted light switch in the art store.

She hoped that Arthur was well concealed in his position at the back of the racking system. If their calculations were correct, whoever was after the painting would be focused on the racks at the front. She knew those contained the smaller works by the two artists that had been referenced in the telegram.

Inside the art store she could hear the sound of the wooden racks at the front being dragged forward on their castors. Whoever was in there was busy searching for their target. Targets which they had moved to their proper places earlier that day. Jane risked adjusting the hessian covering her face so she could see a little better. The material was stiff, scratchy and itchy and she was surprisingly hot.

She glanced at her watch. One minute to eight. The Home Guard would have arrived at the post by now. No doubt the men would be exchanging information, perhaps having a smoke and a natter before the traitorous new guard handed over.

He would have told the Home Guard that someone was still in the store and to let them out and lock up after they had gone for the night. From what Antonella had told them previously about the odd hours that the curators worked, no one would think it strange that someone was still working.

The scraping sounds stopped and Jane stilled, as she tried to hear what might be happening. There was the sound of footsteps again on the concrete, swift and confident, heading now to the restoration area.

She realised that the thief must have located the picture they wanted. They probably intended to remove it from the frame ready to carry it out of the store, right under the unsuspecting nose of the sentries.

As she listened she thought she heard another sound, more footsteps, quieter, barely audible and she realised Arthur had left his post. He must have followed the thief to the restoration section.

Jane slipped out from under the hessian and quietly crept along behind Arthur. He was in her line of vision now, but the thief had already entered the conservation area. She hung back a little as she wasn't sure what he planned to do. She could see him ahead of her, his gun already in his hand, and her pulse kicked up a notch.

Much as she disliked using firearms she would have liked a gun herself so she could back him up. They had no idea if the thief had come armed too. Arthur paused at the entrance to the restoration area, flattening himself against the cold, rocky wall of the cavern.

He glanced back towards her and signalled with his hand for her to go round so they could act as a pincer to trap whoever was inside the room. She could smell the varnish and acetone now and heard a sound like fabric tearing.

Once she had moved into position, Arthur readied his hands on the gun and stepped forward into the room.

‘Stop!’

His voice seemed to echo around the chamber, the sound magnified by the stone. Jane remained in the shadows, only moving forward to see who was at the large table where Antonella and Betsy usually worked.

‘Arthur, what on earth... Why are you here? And with a gun?’ Betsy was frozen in position.

Jane could see she had a picture on the table in front of her and she had partially prised it free of its frame.

‘The question is why are you here?’ Arthur kept his gun trained on the woman at the table.

‘Hannah called at the house. I had the message about Dickie, about his accident. I couldn’t rest so I thought I’d get more work done.’ Betsy’s gaze skittered around the room as if trying to work out an escape route.

‘You killed Dickie this afternoon before you arrived at the concert. I suppose you called at his house to accompany him, and he would have told you all about his visit here earlier this morning. You knew he was worried about finding pictures and artefacts out of order, but he couldn’t work out what was going on. Then he mentioned talking to the new guard and his intention to warn the Home Guard.’ Arthur’s voice was level.

Betsy’s hands stilled where she was holding a sharp metal tool from where she’d been removing the frame from the painting.

‘That’s ridiculous. I’ve worked here since it opened and moved from London. I had no reason to hurt Dickie. He was my friend,’ Betsy protested but Jane thought her voice sounded thin and unconvincing.

‘You planned to steal that picture and smuggle it into the luggage of one of the musicians returning to London. There your accomplice would collect

it, and it would travel to Germany to be used as a propaganda coup.’ Arthur kept his gaze fixed on Betsy.

‘Arthur, really. I don’t understand what you’re saying. Dickie fell down the stairs. This is simply wild, pure conjecture. I’m a respected curator, an expert in my field.’ The woman shook her head in denial.

‘You pushed Dickie and killed him. Is that why you murdered Sanford too? Was he getting too close to your scheme?’ Arthur didn’t move.

Jane kept her eyes on Betsy’s hands as she waited for her to answer.

‘Dickie was asking too many questions, like Sanford. He wrote to you, didn’t he? Sanford, I mean. When he sent out his latest crossword I knew. That grid design and the format. Marietta’s and Lawrence’s both looked like mine, but I knew if he wanted to confide in anyone it would be you.’ Betsy’s tone was bitter.

‘You tried to make his death look like a heart attack. You got tablets and faked a doctor’s appointment with a specialist. Then you gave him that injection,’ Arthur said.

Betsy’s head snapped up. ‘He was snooping around, watching everyone. Just like Dickie. Asking all kinds of questions about what alarm systems could be added to the circuitry in the store. He had a notebook.’

‘You tried to find the book in case he’d written something about you in there. You wanted to discover what he knew. Is that why you were stalking Antonella at her house?’ Arthur continued to keep his gun trained on Betsy.

‘I looked for the book after the funeral. I knew he must have left clues to where it was hidden. He was used to using riddles, codes, cryptic clues. Antonella confided in me before Sanford died about how she thought something was wrong. That Sanford was worried about something. I knew it would be you he’d turn to. So I watched you. You and Jane.’ Betsy’s voice lost its sharp edge. Her tone became more conversational. ‘So, what are your plans now, Arthur? I’m in here officially, doing my job, signed in, accounted for. You didn’t enter here through the front door.’ Betsy’s lips twisted into a smile. ‘If you try marching me out of here at gunpoint, who do you think the guard will shoot if I shout for help?’

Jane’s blood chilled at this. Did the woman really have the audacity to think that even now she could stroll out of the store unscathed?

‘The man from the Home Guard knows me. He lives in the village, he sees me every day cycling to work. Two of my colleagues are dead and some unknown maniac has broken into the store and is holding me at

gunpoint. Really, Arthur, I thought you would have been smarter than this.’ Betsy made a tutting sound.

‘Why are you doing this, Betsy?’ Arthur asked.

A small crease appeared on the curator’s forehead. ‘Why? Because of the art, of course. I’ve devoted my life to caring for masterpieces, curating them. I never married, Arthur, these pictures are like my children. They deserve the best care, to be owned and looked after by people who really, truly appreciate them for the masterpieces that they are. Not allowing galleries to display worthless junk by talentless amateurs. No, these pictures and sculptures should be in the possession of genuine art lovers.’ A fanatical glint appeared in Betsy’s eyes as she ran a tender forefinger down the gilt frame of the picture lying on the table before her. ‘You are a logical man, Arthur, surely you must understand.’

Jane drew in a shaky breath, hardly able to comprehend Betsy’s twisted logic.

‘How can you believe that?’ Arthur asked, his voice still even and composed. ‘All over Europe, pictures have been stolen, museums and galleries looted. Families have had pieces forcibly taken from them. Other pieces burned and destroyed because they didn’t fit a perverse ideology. Are those the actions of people who will care for these pieces properly?’

‘They were removed for protection. Just as we are doing here. To save them from accidental damage. As for the ones removed from private homes, well, the people were compensated.’ Betsy virtually spat the words out.

Bile rose up into the back of Jane’s throat, and she saw Arthur’s lips tighten. It was not merely concern for the pictures in her care motivating Betsy. It was clear that there was something much darker deep in her soul which allied the curator to the Nazis’ twisted ideals.

Arthur stared at Betsy, unable to understand her. His expression hardened into one of distaste as if a cockroach had appeared in human form in front of him.

Betsy seemed unperturbed. A smile continued to play around her lips. ‘Think about it, you are an intelligent man.’

‘I think I’ve heard enough.’

The smile faded from the curator’s face and her gaze sharpened. ‘I can see you are struggling. Let me tell you what is going to happen now. I am going to walk out of here and go home. This conversation has not happened. After all, who will you tell? Who will believe you? You can leave

via whatever route you used to get in here and I suggest you do so quickly. For Antonella's sake I'll let you live. After all, your precious girlfriend won't wish to attend another funeral. I heard from Hannah that she has already buried one fiancé.'

Jane was conscious of her hands shaking as Betsy dismissed her grief and loss so easily, using it as a weapon against Arthur. She stepped forward out of the shadows, her heels ringing sharply on the hard surface of the floor.

'Arthur has a witness. I've heard everything you just said and there are others who know where we are right now and what we are doing here. I heard your little conversation with the new security guard too when you arrived. That was very enlightening,' Jane said as Betsy whirled around to face her.

'I should have known you'd be here. A Whitehall bean counter with no soul. A jumped-up little typist just floating in your mother's limelight.' Betsy slung insults at her like arrows.

'Save your breath for the police,' Jane advised.

She knew there was a telephone in Marietta's office. She could ring the guard post and the police and alert them to be on standby ready for when they took Betsy out. The curator's threat that the guard would believe Arthur was Betsy's assailant would be proven false.

'I'm going nowhere with you, either of you,' Betsy hissed.

Before either Jane or Arthur could move Betsy took aim with the heavy handled box cutting knife she had been toying with. She aimed it at the metal shaded light above the table with deadly accuracy. The knife clattered into the glass bulb shattering it into pieces and plunging that part of the cave system into darkness.

Jane heard the sound of footsteps rapidly moving away.

'Stay where you are for a minute, Jane. There's a lot of glass,' Arthur called out to her in the pitch-black darkness.

He snapped on the torch and scanned the beam around until he located her. Betsy had moved from her post and had fled into one of the other rooms.

'We have to find her.' Jane stepped into the beam of light and took the torch from Arthur so he could keep his hand more securely on the gun.

'We need to get to the office first to telephone for assistance,' Arthur said.

Jane focused the beam on the path out of that part of the cavern. Ahead of them the other lights gleaming in the distance switched off and the low background hum of the air-conditioning unit stopped.

‘She’s cut the main circuits.’ Arthur kept his voice low and his hand on Jane’s arm as they headed for the office.

‘Will that affect the telephone line?’ Jane asked.

‘I’m not certain. I think, according to Sanford’s blueprints, that it may be on a different system.’

Jane pushed open the office door. She automatically tried the light switch but as expected it was dead.

‘Nothing. She must have flipped up all the circuit breakers in the box.’

‘Try the telephone, Jane. Call the sentry if you can and ask him to apprehend Betsy if she tries to leave via the front,’ Arthur said as Jane picked up the receiver to dial.

‘At least Benson has instructions to call the police if we aren’t back by midnight if this doesn’t work. Wait, there’s a dial tone.’ Her hopes rose when she heard the familiar crackle telling her the line was open.

The number for the sentry post was taped to the front of the telephone. She inserted her finger into the dial, moving as swiftly as she could to insert the three figured number and waited for the guard to answer. She spoke as soon as she heard the guard pick up.

‘Hello, this is Miss Jane Treen calling on behalf of Lady Tolland. Miss Betsy Peters is inside the storage facility without permission. She is dangerous and is to be apprehended should she attempt to leave. Call the police and ask Inspector Lynch to be standing by. This is urgent.’

The line died before Jane could say anything more. She dabbed at the telephone trying to coax it back to life.

‘She’s found the switch to the telephone line.’ Arthur’s tone was grim. ‘We need to get to the circuit box. She could be hiding anywhere inside the store in the dark. She knows this place like the back of her hand and knowing Betsy she’ll have a torch of her own stashed away somewhere.’

‘She may also have a weapon,’ Jane warned as she held on tight to the sleeve of Arthur’s jacket. Together, they set off into the inky dark towards the main electric box.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

They tried to move quietly through the facility. Jane listened as they went for any sounds or rustling noises in the darkness that surrounded them. They made it back to the cavern with the marble statues where Jane had been hiding just a short while ago.

The beam of the torch played across the blank white marble faces and Jane stared into the shadows and the hessian bundles. She thought she heard a faint sound behind them and she whirled around, flicking the torchlight into the corners of the cavern. Not that the beam went very far, the space was too large and the darkness too complete.

Nothing moved and she took a breath to steady the uneven thumping of her heart. They continued on to the largest of the electrical boards next to the inner doors where Arthur had been assisting Lawrence. The doors were open wide enough to permit someone through to the outer pair but to her relief there was no sign of Betsy.

She wondered if the curator had changed her mind about trying to leave through the front door. Perhaps she had decided to escape through the tunnel Jane and Arthur had used to enter the storage facility.

‘Hold the torch steady, Jane, and I’ll try and get some power back on,’ Arthur said.

She let go of his arm and moved to the side so she could use the torch to full advantage to illuminate the fuses. As she did so there was a flash and a bang from the board accompanied by the unmistakeable whine of a bullet. Arthur threw his arm over her and knocked her down onto the ground.

Her knees hit the hard, cold concrete floor and she was glad she was wearing trousers. The torch light went off as she dropped it, the darkness briefly broken by the orange flames emanating from the circuit board. The acrid smell of burning filled the air. The electric board above them threw out a few more yellow sparks as the flames died away.

‘She has a gun, she shot the board,’ Jane murmured as she recovered her breath.

Arthur’s arm was heavy on her back. She scrabbled around on the floor until she could feel the rubberised handle of the torch. She dared not turn it on knowing that right now Betsy could be waiting for them to do exactly that.

‘Crawl off to the side, we aren’t far from the door. We can press the button on the wall for the guard to come and open up.’ Arthur’s breath was warm against her cheek.

She obeyed him, wriggling her way carefully in the darkness hoping they were headed in the right direction. He had released her, but she sensed him following closely behind her.

‘Arthur, do be sensible.’ Betsy’s voice rang out somewhere in the blackness behind them.

Neither Jane nor Arthur spoke. Instead, they paused and lay still for a moment. Jane knew if they reached the switch on the wall which rang the bell in the sentry post Betsy could well be poised with her gun to take another shot at them.

‘You know you can’t get out of here without me.’ Betsy’s voice seemed to be coming from a different direction now.

Jane turned and placed her hand on Arthur’s foot in a silent signal for him to stay where he was. She crawled up level with him, so they were lying side by side. She reached across and felt along his arm until she got to his hand. His skin was warm to her touch and just knowing he was so close gave her strength.

She tapped lightly against the skin on the back of his hand with her forefinger using the morse code her father had taught her when she was a girl.

What now

She knew Arthur knew the code well.

He moved his hand and tapped back.

Wait guard

If the guard at the sentry post had acted on her telephone instructions then he would open the doors with reinforcements. Even if he believed her message to be some kind of hoax or elaborate prank, he couldn't really ignore it. He had probably tried to call the telephone on Marietta's desk, and the lack of dial tone would alert him to a problem.

Inside the cavern all was quiet. The darkness was complete, covering them like a blanket. If it weren't for the warmth of Arthur's hand next to hers he may well have been on the other side of the room and she would not have known.

Can't hear She tapped another message onto his hand.

Too quiet he messaged back and she knew that he too was listening for any sound that could let them know where Betsy was.

The thought that she could have moved forward and might only be feet away from them made the fine hairs on the base of her neck prickle.

Then she heard it, a distant sound, faint but there. A car perhaps?

Outside she tapped again.

Perhaps help was finally coming. Or more danger.

There was a loud click and a rumble as the outer doors to the cavern were unlocked. Both doors were opening, letting in a rush of cold air as the narrow gap started to widen.

Move Arthur tapped on her hand.

She raised herself up, keeping her hand just touching him as he did the same thing. She didn't want to risk losing contact with him in the darkness, not now with relief possibly so close at hand. Arthur moved silently with Jane at his side. She couldn't see where they were headed. She hoped it was toward the doors or the wall at the side of the door.

There were male voices now outside as the first set of huge doors were swung open. The light inside the cavern changed. It was still dark, since night had fallen while they had been inside. The light outside, however, was different, softened by the stars and the full moon. It gave enough for them to see shadows and to make their way with more certainty.

'Betsy Peters! Where are you?' a male voice shouted.

‘Help me, there are dangerous criminals inside the store.’ Betsy’s voice came, tremulous from somewhere in the inky blackness behind them.

Jane could see the silhouette of not one of the Home Guards, but three, in defensive position and rifles at the ready. The khaki-clad men were looking into the darkness.

‘Betsy dear, come out.’ Jane stiffened. That was Marietta’s voice, what was she doing there?

Admittedly Jane had given Lady Tolland’s name when she had placed the call to the sentry box. She had thought it would add credibility to her request and that the guard could telephone Hartfield House to verify her identity. How on earth had the woman managed to get there so quickly?

‘Marietta, I’m scared. Jane and Arthur, they have been trying to sabotage the store. Arthur has a gun. He’s dangerous.’ Betsy’s voice sounded closer and she felt the muscle in Arthur’s arm stiffen under the thick wool sleeve of his coat.

‘Come out, Betsy, you’ll be quite safe. The police are here with me and the guard. They’ll protect you.’ Marietta’s voice held a note of anxiety.

Jane’s heart raced. Was Marietta trying to coax Betsy out so they could arrest her or did Marietta believe the curator? She could just make out the side of Arthur’s face now in the fainter light coming from outside. There was a faint sheen of sweat on the side of his temple and his expression was fixed.

He glanced at her and motioned to her to crouch down again, trying to make them a smaller target in the pool of darkness closer to the floor.

There was a scuffling noise from somewhere near the marble statues which were just visible now in the moonlight. The white alabaster and stone rose like half-drowned phantoms from the darker sea of hessian and packing cases.

‘Betsy, come forward so the guards can protect you,’ Marietta called.

‘Arthur will shoot me. He’s threatened me already. You have no idea of the damage he has done already. He’s gone mad, Marietta.’ Betsy’s response came from right by the statues. Jane fixed her gaze on the immobile shadowy figures searching for one that wasn’t made of stone.

‘Arthur, Jane, where are you? Give yourselves up and come out,’ Marietta called out again.

Jane knew if they moved then Betsy would shoot. She doubted that the curator would have given up her weapon.

The Home Guard men edged forward a little, and Jane shrank back further into the shadows with Arthur following suit. She wished they knew for certain whose side they would take if shots were fired. Did they believe Betsy? Or had Marietta realised who the real traitor must be?

Jane froze as the Home Guard soldiers looked around trying to work out where any of them were hiding in the blackness. She could see they had their fingers on the triggers of their guns. Their khaki uniforms were clearly visible in the moonlight. They had probably come straight from their training exercises, which took place each evening.

‘Betsy, come forward, you’ll be quite safe. The guard are here waiting to protect you,’ Marietta called again.

Jane could make out the silhouette of Marietta in her wheelchair near the black solid shape of the sentry box. Another figure, who she assumed must be Hannah, stood beside the wheelchair. On the other side of the chair, half hidden in shadow was another woman.

This woman was swathed in fur and the moonlight caught something sparkling on the side of her head. Jane suppressed a groan. What on earth was her mother doing there? There was a general muttering amongst the women. Jane could see they had their heads together conferring.

‘Miss Peters, we’re advancing into the store towards the statuary. Get ready to come and meet us and we’ll protect you,’ one of the Home Guard called out, looking to his colleagues for support.

The men stepped forward slowly, moving as one unit, their footsteps crunching on the concrete floor as they carried in the dirt and grit from outside on the soles of their boots. Jane could see the whites of their eyes as their gaze darted from side to side looking for her, Arthur and Betsy.

There was a movement in the midst of the statues. Jane felt Arthur move his arm slowly to keep his gun trained on that spot. He was being careful not to alert the soldiers to their position. Until they were certain if they were friend or foe they had to stay undercover.

‘Miss Peters, is that you?’ one of the guard called. ‘It’s Fred, you know me well, come on out, we’ve got you safe.’

Jane’s breath stilled in the back of her throat as the men moved once more, inching forward, ready to surround the statues.

‘Betsy, come out,’ Marietta tried again.

‘Oh, for goodness’ sake, enough already. Stop wasting time in there.’ Elsa’s voice rang out. Her sharp American accent breaking the spell which

had been cast over the people inside the store.

Without warning, a gunshot rang out and Jane gasped involuntarily as she saw her mother duck as a flake of brick dust seemed to shower down from above where Marietta, Hannah and Elsa were standing.

There was a sudden flurry of movement. Hannah screamed and took hold of Marietta's chair, pulling her further back out of harm's way. Elsa produced something that gleamed dully in the moonlight and Jane realised her mother had brought her own weapon with her. The infamous little silver coloured weapon she called her popgun. She also knew her mother wouldn't hesitate to fire it. Years of practice as a child and in later years at private gun clubs had made her mother something of a crack shot.

'See, that was Arthur, he's dangerous!' Betsy shouted and Jane realised the woman had moved deeper within the group of statues.

The guard were now wary and separated out. They had their focus on the statues since that was where the shot had originated.

'Miss Peters, where are you? Step to the side where we can protect you,' Fred, the guard who had spoken earlier, called out.

Jane wondered if he meant it or if by now the men had realised that it had to have been Betsy who had shot at Elsa. Her mother moved quickly considering she still seemed to be wearing her evening shoes and her pale-blue cocktail dress.

Elsa sprang forward and sideways, heading for the doors which would afford her some protection should Betsy try again.

'That was not Arthur who fired. He couldn't hit the side of a barn door. Betsy Peters, give yourself up right now,' Elsa snapped.

The guard looked unsure about whether they should try and stop Elsa or if they should be focusing on where Betsy was hiding. They were clearly unsettled by her mother's actions.

'Miss, please stay back,' one of the guard called to Elsa.

Another shot rang out clipping the edge of the door where Jane's mother was hiding. Jane heard the metallic zip and plink of the impact and wished that just for once her mother would stay out of sight before she got herself killed.

The Home Guard men moved again and another shot was fired. This time it sounded as if it had hit rock somewhere overhead. Jane couldn't decide who it had been aimed at. There was more scuffling and panting as

the soldiers moved quickly into the statues. She heard a woman screaming and male voices.

A minute later the men re-emerged. Two of them were holding Betsy securely between them. The other guard kept his rifle trained on Betsy as she wriggled and protested in their grasp.

‘Janey pie, are you in there, honey? They have her, you can come on out now.’ Elsa emerged from the side of the door and Jane saw her mother glare at Betsy as she was led past.

Jane straightened up and leaned on Arthur as he tucked his gun back inside his jacket pocket.

‘We’re here, Mother. We’re quite safe.’

Her legs were numb from holding a crouched position for so long and she and Arthur both stumbled as they walked towards the exit. He had his arm around her waist holding her up. Hannah wheeled Marietta’s chair towards them. Elsa smiled with satisfaction as she tucked her little gun back inside her satin evening purse.

‘My word, honey, that was quite an adventure there for a minute.’ Her mother’s perfume enveloped her as Elsa pulled her into an embrace.

‘You could have got yourself killed. What on earth are you doing here?’ Jane pulled back.

‘Nonsense, those men were taking forever in there. Besides, Lady Tolland said she thought you were in trouble so where else would I be?’ Elsa tutted, giving Arthur a cool nod of acknowledgement.

‘Oh, my goodness, Jane. The guard telephoned the house and said you had my authority. He said that Betsy was inside the store and the telephone line was dead. I knew that something was terribly wrong.’ Marietta caught hold of Jane’s hand and gave it an anguished squeeze.

‘We called the police and came straight here. Elsa insisted we bring her with us,’ Hannah said.

There was the sound of a car pulling up next to Marietta’s vehicle, followed by the slamming of doors.

‘That will be Inspector Lynch. I called him to meet us here before we set off,’ Marietta said. ‘Hannah, wheel me back. We must get the store secured.’

Inspector Lynch approached and took in the defiant figure of Betsy Peters being held under guard by the soldiers and then Jane and Arthur walking slowly towards him.

‘Could someone tell me what on earth has been happening here?’ he asked.

‘Please detain Miss Peters for treason.’ Arthur’s voice was clear and the guards holding her exchanged sharp glances.

Betsy scowled at him. ‘You have it the wrong way around. It’s those two who are the traitors. Marietta, Hannah, you know me. Would I do anything illegal?’

‘Considering you just tried to shoot me, honey, that argument isn’t gonna wash.’ Elsa joined them and gave Betsy a scathing glance.

Inspector Lynch scrubbed his hands across his face as if trying to erase the nightmare he appeared to have walked into.

‘Constable, please secure Miss Peters. We can sort this out back at the police station.’

The uniformed constable who had accompanied the inspector stepped forward and handcuffed Betsy who was still protesting her innocence.

Marietta and Hannah were already busy directing one of the guards to secure the doors to the store.

Another police car drove in and pulled up. Once the store was secure, Inspector Lynch and one of the Home Guards took charge of securing Betsy in his police car to head for the police station.

Hannah assisted Marietta into her vehicle and Elsa went with them, leaving Jane and Arthur to follow in the other police car. The remaining Home Guard men took up their places back at the sentry box.

Arthur assisted Jane into the rear of the police car before taking his place beside her. The constable closed the door and jumped behind the steering wheel.

‘For the record,’ Arthur said quietly as the car pulled away. ‘Contrary to your mother’s opinion, I’m pretty sure I could hit a barn door.’

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The local police station was a hive of activity when they arrived. Arthur kept his hand on Jane's arm as they followed the constable into the reception area. He took it as a good sign that neither he nor Jane had been handcuffed and taken to a cell.

There was no sign of the inspector or of Betsy as the constable who had acted as their chauffeur escorted them inside. Hannah, Marietta and Elsa were seated on the far side of the lobby. Elsa was busy touching up her victory-red lipstick in a small silver compact. A couple of young constables were hovering close by with starstruck expressions. He suspected they hoped for autographs.

'Arthur! There you are. The inspector has taken Betsy off somewhere.' Marietta signalled imperiously for him to join her.

The constable escorting them seemed to have no objection so Arthur steered Jane across the room. Jane took one of the somewhat battered wooden seats beside her mother. The harsh lighting of the police station showed up the dirt on Jane's trousers and a smudge of dust on her cheek. She had lost her hat somewhere in the store and her hair had come loose from its bun.

Arthur suspected that he looked equally unkempt after their exploits in the old quarry caves. His knees hurt from where he had pushed Jane down to safety and he longed for a cup of tea.

'I expect the inspector is hearing Betsy's version of events.' Jane's tone was even. She had been silent in the car, only raising a brief smile at his joke about the barn door.

‘Let’s hope she doesn’t lay her hands on any more guns,’ Elsa huffed.

Privately, Arthur thought this was a bit rich coming from a woman who had a weapon he was pretty certain was illegal hidden in her handbag.

‘What happened in the store? What was Betsy doing there? I know she shot at Elsa but what is going on? Is this to do with Sanford? Or Dickie?’ Marietta asked in a low voice.

‘We can’t go into details, Marietta, but Betsy is a traitor to this country. She is also a murderess, and, yes, she confessed to us that she killed Sanford and Dickie.’ Arthur kept his voice low since he was sure the constables standing not too far away were probably listening to the conversation.

‘Sanford was murdered then, after all? I thought Antonella said it was a heart attack.’ Marietta stared at him for a minute. ‘Although, I suppose it never did make sense, not really. And Dickie too?’ The frown lines on her forehead deepened.

‘I know it’s hard to believe.’ Arthur leaned against the grubby pale-cream limewashed wall and loosened the knitted scarf around his neck.

‘I can believe it. I was nearly victim number three.’ Elsa tucked her compact and lipstick away neatly inside her bag.

A door Arthur hadn’t taken much notice of before at the side of the reception desk opened and Inspector Lynch stepped out into the lobby.

‘Mr Cilento, Miss Treen, please come through.’ He held the door open for them and Jane stood and followed the policeman. Arthur and one of the uniformed constables brought up the rear.

Inspector Lynch led them into a small, square room, simply furnished with a desk and several plain wooden chairs. The cream coloured walls were devoid of pictures and a white-faced clock with black numerals was the only thing hanging on the wall. The constable took up his station at the door.

‘Please take a seat.’ The inspector gestured at the chairs.

Jane sat first with Arthur taking the vacant chair beside her. The inspector sat on the opposite side of the desk and placed his notebook in front of him.

‘I have just been listening to Miss Peters’s version of what happened this evening in the store. Now, I should like very much to hear your side of things. Perhaps by explaining how you got into the quarry caves and why

you were there?’ Inspector Lynch gazed levelly at them as he took the top off his pen.

‘Inspector, before we begin. Please can you telephone this number.’ Jane produced a rectangular, white card from a pocket inside her coat. ‘Ask to speak to Brigadier Remmington-Blythe.’ She passed it across the desk.

The inspector paused, recapped his fountain pen and took the card, leaving the room to place the call. Arthur noted that the constable remained at his post beside the door while he and Jane waited in silence for the inspector to return.

Five minutes passed according to the clock on the wall before the inspector stepped back inside the room and nodded to the constable that he was dismissed and could leave his post. Inspector Lynch retook his seat behind the desk.

‘Thank you, Miss Treen, that conversation was most illuminating.’ The inspector returned the card to Jane, and she replaced it inside her pocket.

Arthur assumed that the brigadier had given the inspector some information about their mission.

‘Betsy was responsible for the deaths of Dickie Flint and Professor Sanford Watkins,’ Jane said. ‘She confessed when Arthur challenged her whilst she was trying to steal a valuable painting from the secure facility.’

The inspector looked at her.

‘Professor Watkins received a fatal injection which brought on a cardiac arrest. His sister discovered the syringe Betsy used, she has it at her home. Betsy murdered Dickie because he had noticed irregularities in the store and had been determined to try and discover who was responsible and what they were doing,’ Arthur said.

‘Professor Watkins left us a number of coded messages and a journal indicating his life was in danger,’ Jane added. ‘We also have this in our possession.’

‘You didn’t mention any of this to the police previously. Neither did Miss Watkins.’ Inspector Lynch made a few notes in his book.

‘I expect the conversation you have just had with the brigadier may have explained why we couldn’t act sooner.’ Arthur knew the inspector would only have received a limited explanation about their mission. He gave more details about what had happened as Inspector Lynch listened intently.

‘You need to arrest the new security guard too,’ Jane added. ‘He was Betsy’s accomplice in the attempted theft of the Turner painting.’

‘I have already dispatched a man to his lodgings. We hope to have him in custody shortly,’ Inspector Lynch said.

Arthur saw Jane’s immaculately shaped eyebrow rise slightly at this.

‘I presume Betsy attempted to convince you that we had illegally entered the store to steal a picture and she was the person preventing the theft,’ Jane said.

‘She tried, however she couldn’t satisfactorily explain her possession of the gun or why she took a potshot at Miss Macintyre,’ Inspector Lynch said.

Arthur exchanged a glance with Jane. ‘No, I don’t suppose she could. She shot the circuit board cutting off the lights too.’

‘An innocent person might have tried to telephone for help or to get the guard to open the door.’ Inspector Lynch looked at them.

‘She cut off the telephone line while Jane was talking to the man in the sentry post. She claimed that no one would believe us that she was the traitor,’ Arthur said. He watched as the inspector made more notes. He sensed that the policeman believed them but that the report and what to do with Betsy would need careful handling.

‘Which reminds me, we also need to seal off the other entrance into the store. We can’t afford for anyone else to use that entrance.’ Jane sat up straighter in her seat.

Inspector Lynch tapped on the table with his pen. ‘I shall need the evidence you have collected regarding Professor Watkins’s death.’

‘Of course,’ Jane agreed.

The faint sound of a distant commotion started somewhere in the building. There was the sound of heavy boots moving swiftly in the corridor, a bell, male voices shouting. The inspector jumped up as the door to the interview room opened.

‘Sir, you’re needed.’ A constable, red-faced and eyes wide with fright poked his head into the room.

The inspector dashed out, closing the door behind him.

‘What do you think is happening?’ Arthur looked at Jane.

‘I don’t know. Perhaps Betsy is trying to escape.’ She twisted in her chair to look at the door.

‘Or they have the guard. The one who was helping her. I doubt he would want to come quietly,’ Arthur said.

There were more voices in the corridor. A moment later the door reopened and the inspector came back into the room. His face was pale and his shoulders were slumped.

‘What’s happened?’ Jane asked.

‘I’m afraid Miss Peters is dead. It would seem that she had poison, a capsule, concealed in the heel of her shoe.’ The inspector sank down heavily on the chair where he had been seated before the commotion.

‘A cyanide capsule, I presume?’ Jane said.

Arthur knew that some of their own agents were issued with such things in case of capture, but he hadn’t thought for a moment that Betsy would have had access to such a thing.

‘It would seem so, Miss Treen. The doctor has been called, of course, but she is gone.’ The inspector rubbed his hands wearily over his face.

‘What an awful end. Antonella will be devastated when she learns the truth,’ Jane spoke almost as if to herself. Arthur knew she was right.

‘I’ll have you and Miss Treen taken back to Miss Watkins’s home. If you could give the evidence you collected to the constable, I should be most grateful,’ the inspector said.

‘Of course. You appreciate that the report into the events must be compiled with great discretion,’ Jane said to the inspector as she stood ready to leave.

‘Naturally, Brigadier Remmington-Blythe gave explicit instructions. He will need to be informed about Miss Peters.’

‘We can do that tomorrow,’ Arthur said. ‘He will be expecting our report.’

‘I believe Lady Tolland and Miss Macintyre are still in the reception area.’ The inspector opened the door for them to leave the room.

‘Lady Tolland will have quite a task on her hands now,’ Jane remarked to Arthur as they stepped back into the corridor.

Elsa was signing autographs for several policemen when they entered the lobby. Hannah was seated on a chair next to Marietta. Arthur could tell by the look on Marietta’s face that she had heard what had happened to Betsy.

‘We are all free to leave,’ Jane said, placing her hand firmly on her mother’s arm.

‘Is it true what we heard, about Betsy? That she’s dead?’ Marietta asked Arthur quietly as Hannah prepared to take her wheelchair out of the police

station.

‘Yes,’ Arthur confirmed as Hannah gave a small, choky sob of distress.

They saw Marietta and Elsa to the car and made sure Hannah felt safe to drive back to Hartfield. The constable who had driven them to the station then took Jane and Arthur back to Antonella’s house.

* * *

Benson was waiting for them in the hall. Antonella jumped to her feet as soon as they entered the house and came to meet them. The constable waited for a moment at the door while Arthur sent Benson to fetch the collection of evidence.

‘What’s happened? Is everything all right? Lawrence telephoned to say something had happened at the store,’ she asked as Jane removed her coat once the front door had been closed and the policeman had departed.

Benson assisted Arthur with his outdoor things as Jane went through to the sitting room, desperate to have a cigarette now the adrenaline of the evening had faded.

‘It’s been a long and difficult evening.’ Jane applied her lighter to the tip of her cigarette and sank down on the sofa. Antonella followed her.

Arthur took his usual place beside the fire while Benson waited quietly in the doorway, his keen gaze watching both Arthur and Jane.

‘Antonella, there is no easy way to say this but I’m afraid that Betsy is dead,’ Arthur said.

Antonella’s eyes widened and she gasped. ‘What? Why? How?’

Jane explained the events of the evening as succinctly as possible without going into too much detail.

‘She killed Sanford? And Dickie? I worked with her every day, she came to supper, gave me flowers. She was at the funeral consoling me.’ Antonella stilled in shock, tears rolling down her face.

Benson poured her a small glass of brandy and pressed it into her hand.

‘She had a cyanide capsule concealed about her person. The inspector said it was in the heel of her shoe,’ Jane explained, tapping her ash into an ashtray.

‘Wicked, wicked woman. Did she say why? Was she the one who was watching the house?’ Antonella asked once the brandy had restored a little colour to her cheeks.

‘She admitted she was looking for Sanford’s journal. The one we just gave to the constable,’ Arthur said.

Antonella blinked. ‘I suppose she thought it might mention her. But you managed to stop her before she could do whatever it was that she had planned?’

‘We did. I think there may be lessons to be learned for all of the art stores.’ Jane extinguished her cigarette.

‘I wonder what will happen now.’ Antonella looked at them. ‘How will we manage everything?’

‘I expect Marietta will soon have things sorted out. The electrics will need extensive work again though. Betsy caused a lot of damage,’ Arthur said.

‘I see. I’m glad you found out who killed Sanford.’ Antonella blew her nose on her handkerchief. ‘He would have been proud of your tenacity, Arthur.’

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

They left the following day after speaking to Inspector Lynch and to the brigadier. Benson arranged train tickets and transport for the afternoon. Jane was eager to return to Half Moon Manor to see her beloved Marmaduke. She also wished to leave Wiltshire without seeing Athene Metcalf again. She could only hope that Lady Metcalf had not said anything to her mother about Jane's connection to her son. Otherwise, she would never hear the last of it.

She was in no hurry to see her mother again, at least not for a while. Elsa's return ticket had been arranged for the morning. Lawrence had delivered her and her luggage to the station before arriving at Antonella's house. Jane was pleased that Antonella wouldn't be alone in the house after they had gone. Lawrence had promised that he would ensure she felt safe.

Arthur had looked completely dumbfounded when Jane had hinted that a romance was in the air between Lawrence and Antonella. She could only think that when Sanford had warned Antonella about becoming too close to Lawrence it had been because he didn't know who they could trust.

Marietta had already begun to badger the powers that be about getting repairs done to the electrics in the storage facility. She had also set about arranging for more staff and better security. The first priority had been to secure the opening into the tunnel which Jane and Arthur had used. Benson had given Marietta directions and she had dispatched her gardener and handyman to secure the grill. This time, welds were to be applied.

Lawrence took them to the station. The platform was busy with a new set of evacuees, small children clutching cases and teddy bears, labels

attached to their lapels like items of luggage. Matronly women with clipboards were sorting them into small groups preparing them for their placements in the village.

Benson obtained a trolley and steered their luggage through the melee while they said goodbye to Lawrence. Mercifully the departing train was quieter, and they were able to secure seats. As the train departed in a whoosh of steam and the chatter of wheels on the track, Jane started to relax.

The journey went smoothly and they were met at the other end by Arthur's housekeeper's son. He had borrowed a horse and cart from his employer to take them on the short journey through the village to Half Moon Manor.

Once they reached the gracious half-timbered black and white building at the end of the village, Arthur and Benson assisted Jane down from the cart. Smoke curled lazily upwards into the slowly darkening sky from one of the red-brick chimneys as she brushed bits of straw from her skirt.

Jane followed Arthur to the door of the house while Benson and their driver set down the luggage.

'Oh, Mr Cilento, I'm glad as you'm back.' Arthur's housekeeper bustled into the hall as soon as he opened the front door.

Her rosy cheeks bore a streak of flour, and she twisted her hands anxiously as they wiped their feet on the mat.

Jane's heart immediately leapt in alarm. 'Is Marmaduke all right?' she asked as she tugged at the buttons on her coat, anxious to check on her beloved pet.

'Oh yes, Miss Treen, that rascal is asleep in front of the fire in the drawing room. No, this is concerning Mr Benson really.' The housekeeper peered at Arthur as if trying to see past him to where the horse stood patiently in harness on the drive.

'Benson is just coming.' Arthur took off his coat and unwound the knitted woollen scarf from around his neck. 'Is something wrong, Mrs Mullins?'

The housekeeper glanced back quickly over her shoulder. 'I don't know if wrong is the right words, Mr Cilento. There's a young lady turned up here unexpected asking after him. I told her as you were due back and, well, I've sat her in the kitchen for now. She says she won't go without seeing him.'

Arthur exchanged a swift glance with Jane.

‘What is the young lady’s name?’ Jane had a pretty good idea what the woman was about to say.

‘’Tis a Miss Davenport. She says as it’s urgent and she must speak to him.’

‘Has she been waiting long?’ Arthur asked.

‘’Bout half hour,’ his housekeeper said.

Benson clattered into the hall carrying the cases. The housekeeper’s son followed behind with Arthur’s medical equipment and a large carpet bag.

‘You have a visitor waiting for you in the kitchen, Benson. A Miss Davenport,’ Arthur said as his manservant set the bags down at the foot of the stairs.

Jane watched Benson’s face as he slowly straightened up from where he had been placing the heaviest of the cases.

‘I see, sir. I do apologise for the intrusion.’ Benson’s gaze flickered toward the door at the far end of the hall that led to the kitchen.

‘Leave the luggage and go and attend to your guest.’ Arthur also appeared to be watching closely.

‘Thank you, sir. I’m sure it won’t take long.’ Benson walked swiftly down the hall with the housekeeper trotting after him.

‘I wonder what is going on?’ Jane said.

Arthur opened the door to the drawing room and stood aside to allow her to enter ahead of him.

‘I don’t know. It’s all very odd.’

Jane spotted her cat lying stretched out on the rug near the fire and darted forward with a cry of delight. Marmaduke opened his one good eye, looked at her, then closed it again immediately. He was clearly unimpressed that she had been gone for so long.

Much as she wanted to scoop her pet up for a hug she also knew if she did so she might well receive a scratch in punishment. She knew she would have to wait for her cat to forgive her before she could pet him. Instead, she took one of the fireside chairs opposite Arthur and wondered what was happening in the kitchen.

She debated offering to go to the kitchen on the pretext of requesting a tray of tea or coffee. Arthur also appeared to be listening as he slit open the small pile of post that had been placed ready on the table next to his chair.

The room was silent save for the crackle of flames in the grate, the rustle of Arthur opening his letters and the faint clatter of hooves on the

driveway as the cart departed back to the farm.

Marmaduke opened his eye and stretched, turning his head toward the door, and Jane knew someone was coming. There was a rattle of teacups and the door opened. Benson stepped into the room bearing a tray laden with cups. Behind him a young woman in her teens stood waiting shyly.

She was dressed smartly in a plain navy dress and matching top coat. Her dark hair was fashionably waved and caught back from her face. She carried a small black leatherette attaché case and seemed incredibly young. Benson placed the tray down on the occasional table and cleared his throat.

‘Mr Cilento, Miss Treen, may I present Miss Ruth Davenport. She is my late cousin’s daughter, and she has a matter which is causing her great concern. I have suggested that you would be well placed to advise her.’ Benson inclined his head toward the girl to encourage her to step forward.

‘I’m so sorry to disturb you as I know you must be tired from travelling but I didn’t know where else to go.’ The girl paused and bit her lip, looking towards Benson for encouragement. ‘Uncle Morty is the only person I know who is good at sorting these kinds of things out.’ Her face softened as she looked at Benson.

Jane struggled for a moment to mentally reconcile Uncle Morty and Benson as being the same person.

‘Please, Miss Davenport, take a seat. What seems to be the problem?’ Arthur set his letters aside.

The girl perched on the edge of the sofa, her case on her lap. She undid the strap and slid out some papers which she passed across to Arthur. Her hand shook as she rested it back on top of the case.

‘I contacted Uncle Morty a few days ago and he said I should try and gather some evidence before taking things any further. This is what I’ve put down so far.’ She moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue and looked at Jane. ‘I work at a pub used by some of the people at an airbase. I’m friends with some of the Attagirls.’ Her expression softened for a moment and Jane could tell the girl clearly admired the brave women pilots who delivered planes and parts around the country.

‘And something has happened to worry you?’ Jane asked.

The girl nodded. ‘One of them, Lucy, she’s missing and I think she might be dead.’

‘I suggested contacting the police.’ Benson looked at the young girl.

‘I was going to, but who would take any notice of me? Then this morning I heard they found out something bad. I came to talk to Uncle Morty again and he said to talk to you. I think I need some help before something terrible happens.’ Ruth looked at them with a hopeful expression.

Arthur had been studying the documents the girl had given him. He slid them across to Jane. ‘I think we need to notify the brigadier.’

Jane took the papers and looked at them. ‘I think you’re right. It seems we have a new case on our hands.’

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Dear reader,

I want to say a huge thank you for choosing to read the fifth book in *The Secret Detective Agency* series, *The Crossword Murders*. If you did enjoy it, and want to keep up to date with all my latest releases, just sign up at the following link. Your email address will never be shared, and you can unsubscribe at any time. You will also receive a free short story featuring Alice, from the Miss Underhay series.

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I hope you loved *The Crossword Murders* and if you did I would be very grateful if you could write a review. I'd love to hear what you think, and it makes such a difference helping new readers to discover one of my books for the first time.

This was a difficult story to write as there was a lot of contradictory information about what had been stored, where and when. Items were moved around and some information is still covered by the Official Secrets Act. Some information therefore was simply not available so best guesses had to be made based on probability. Real locations and events were used but some aspects of buildings, security, etc. had to be changed or guessed at to suit the story. I hope you will enjoy getting to know more about Jane, Arthur and Benson as the series develops.

I love to hear from my readers – and you can get in touch through social media or my website.

Thanks,

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When the local police inspector shows no signs of solving the shocking crimes plaguing the hotel, Kitty steps briskly into the breach. Together with ex-army captain Matthew Bryant, her new hotel security officer, she is determined to decipher this mystery and preserve not only the name of her hotel, but also the lives of her guests. **Could there be a cold-blooded killer under her own roof? And what connects the missing jewel to the mystery from Kitty's own past?**

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The local constabulary might have locked Matt up, but before they can throw away the key, Kitty hears the news and hies to his aid, determined to prove his innocence. And when her investigations lead her to the home of retired theatre impresario Stanley Davenport, and the local amateur dramatics society, Kitty uncovers a web of deceit that stretches far beyond the stage make-up. **But Kitty's digging is bringing her to the attention of the killer. Without her partner in crime-fighting, can Kitty expose them and clear Matt's name? Or will it be curtains for them both?**

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**Turning a manuscript into a book requires the efforts of many people.
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Dear Reader,

We'd love your attention for one more page to tell you about the crisis in children's reading, and what we can all do.

Studies have shown that reading for fun is the **single biggest predictor of a child's future life chances** – more than family circumstance, parents' educational background or income. It improves academic results, mental health, wealth, communication skills, ambition and happiness.

The number of children reading for fun is in rapid decline. Young people have a lot of competition for their time, and a worryingly high number do not have a single book at home.

Hachette works extensively with schools, libraries and literacy charities, but here are some ways we can all raise more readers:

- Reading to children for just 10 minutes a day makes a difference
- Don't give up if children aren't regular readers – there will be books for them!
- Visit bookshops and libraries to get recommendations
- Encourage them to listen to audiobooks
- Support school libraries

- Give books as gifts

There's a lot more information about how to encourage children to read on our websites: www.RaisingReaders.co.uk and www.JoinRaisingReaders.com.

Thank you for reading.



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