

Dead in the Long Room

by

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Abstract

This thesis comprises a crime novel, *Dead in the Long Room*, and an accompanying extended critical essay. *Dead in the Long Room* is a novel written in homage to the Golden Age of crime and the many writers that genre represents. It embodies Gulddal & Rolls' (2016) notion of the creative-critical nexus - the idea that literary texts do not exist as distinct from critical endeavour, but are in themselves exercises in critical response. *Dead in the Long Room* is therefore to be conceived as what I have termed elsewhere (Green 2021) 'enacted criticism'. The critical essay that follows the novel offers an extended critical commentary on and engagement with my processes as a writer in the production of the novel. Drawing on critical resources derived from *inter alia* Bruner, Barthes, Bakhtin and Todorov, it engages in sustained critical fashion with the genre of Golden Age detective fiction - a form that is eminently self-reflexive and that is frequently marked by a deep awareness of its own 'constructedness' - and the ways in which textual interaction is conceived. Taken together, the novel and the critical essay are considered as examples of the kinds of 'poetics' envisioned by Lasky (2013).

Acknowledgements

I can with total honesty say that the completion of this PhD has been a pleasure and represents the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition to write a novel. I would, however, like to thank the following for their important support and advice in the completion of the work.

Max Kinnings and Sarah Penny, my supervisors, have throughout provided encouragement and expert guidance. I have immensely valued their patience in reading drafts of my work as the PhD has progressed and the quality of the feedback they have provided.

Roger Dalrymple, with whom I have collaborated on several publications related to Golden Age detective writing, has been another invaluable supporter, and I would like to acknowledge the importance of our critical conversations and shared love of all things Golden Age in the completion of my work.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Robert Curphey, Librarian at Lord's Cricket Ground, who has always been available and willing to assist me with documentary and other information regarding the setting and history of Lord's.

And finally, to my wife Nikki and my children - Nat, Ollie and Beth - who have put up with many hours of discussion about detective fiction and who have constantly reminded me how lucky I have been to write a PhD on something that I love so much.

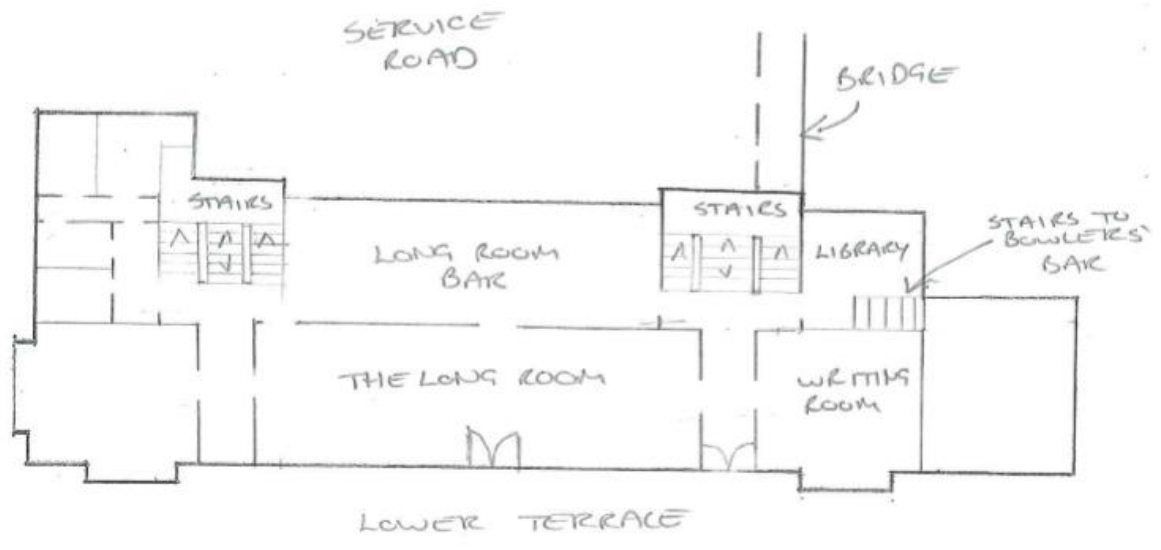
Dead in the Long Room

The Venue

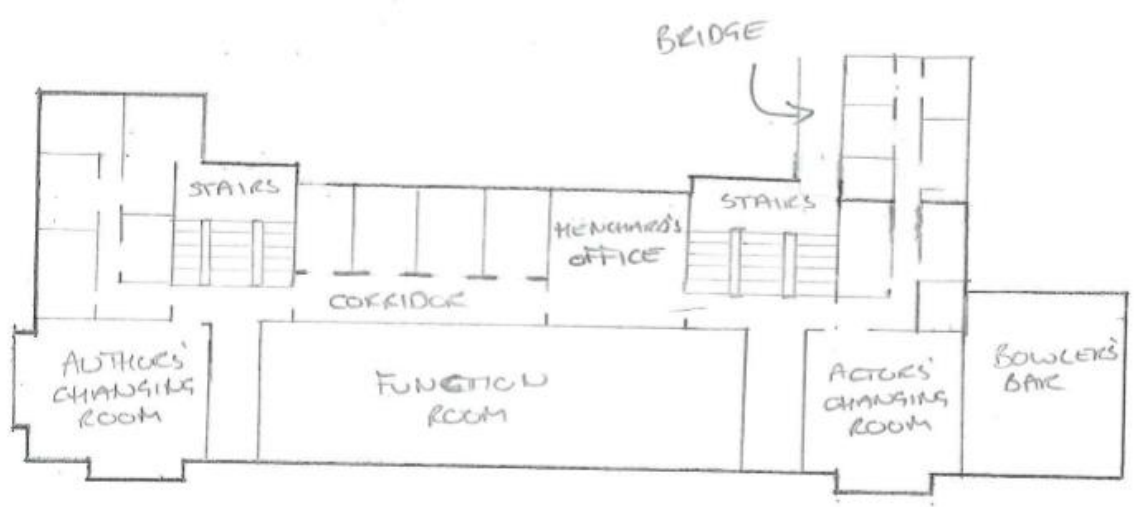
Lord's Cricket Ground, St John's Wood on Thursday 15th August 1907

The Pavilion, Lord's

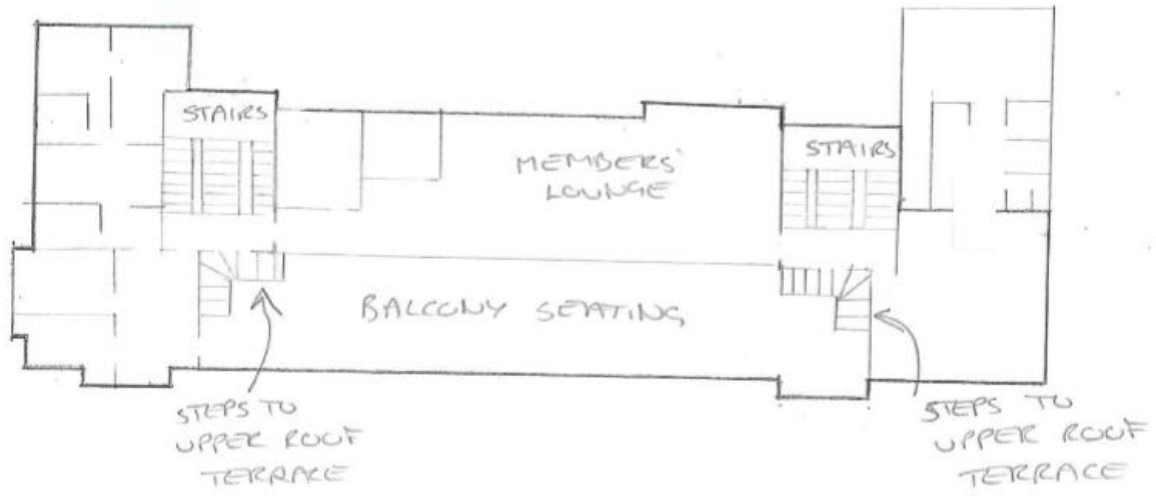
Ground Floor



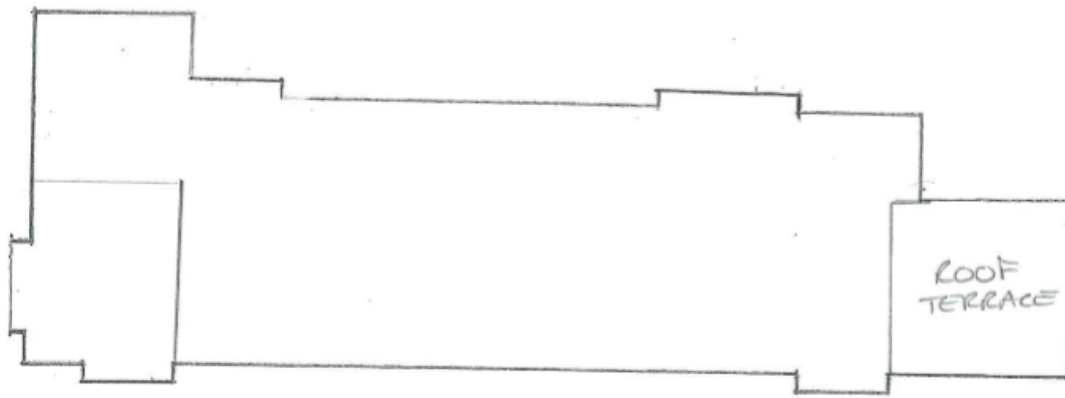
First Floor



Second Floor



Roof Area



The Fact and the Fiction

A match between the Authors' XI and the Actors' XI did indeed take place at Lord's Cricket Ground, St John's Wood on Thursday 15th August 1907, and the Scorebook as presented in the Prologue is a faithful reproduction of the actual match details and statistics. On the teams that day were the authors Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, P.G. Wodehouse, E.W. Hornung, A.A. Milne and the actor Harold Wilde.

The Allahakhbarries match played in Farnham on Monday 4th July 1904 and the meeting of the Crimes Club on the Sunday 17th July 1904 also took place as recorded.

This is where the facts end, and fiction begins. The presence of the other 'real-life' characters at the Lord's match—Jerome Kern, Raymond Chandler and Agatha Miller—is the stuff of fiction, as are all of the murderous events surrounding the two matches. All other characters have sprung from my own imagination, and any similarity to real persons is entirely unintentional.

Part 1
Various Beginnings

Chapter 1

Thursday 15th August 1907

St John's Wood Road Underground Station

There is nowhere more wonderful than Lord's. In the freshness of a London summer's day when the cool of the morning still lingers on a light breeze off Regents Park but when the sun, a lonely yellow spot on the uninterrupted blue of the sky, carries a promise of heat and pleasurable lethargy, it is finer still. It was the 15th of August 1907, a Thursday, as the young woman made her way up through the cramped foyer of the old station building from the Metropolitan and St John's Wood Railway train that had deposited her and the young man accompanying her, the day's edition of *The Times* rolled neatly under one arm, on the platform below. As they emerged from the station at St John's Wood Road preparatory to making their way towards the hallowed turf, they paused to take in the splendour of the day. From beneath came the rumble of their train departing on its way northward.

Any passer-by would immediately have guessed the young man who accompanied her to be her brother or some well-beloved and trusted family friend. The easy familiarity between them and the unconscious confidence with which he slipped her arm into his must have spoken volumes to any who cared to look. Had the girl and her brother, for her brother it was, known what that day would bring, would they have felt the same way? Who can say? Who can ever be truly wise enough to know how one would or would not react if the game of life played out differently? But on this glorious morning with the promise of the day's play between

the Authors—oh, how she longed to be an author herself, a published author—and the Actors, the earth held no finer spot than Lord's. And had she not been there that day? Well, had Agatha Miller not been there that day, the direction of her whole life might have been different.

The Authors v Actors fixture did not draw huge crowds, but a respectable number of people passed Agatha and her brother Monty in a steady stream as they stood there on the pavement outside the station, arm in arm. The air was filled with the buzz of breezy expectancy that always accompanies a sporting crowd. There is a unique sense of relaxation, too, with a cricketing crowd. The promise of a good day out is enhanced by the rhythm of the game with its repeated but constantly varied miniature six-ball confrontations between bowler and batsman. Space opens up as the game asserts its motion. Conversation, contemplation, reading, even sleep are possible, an ineluctable element of the pleasure of the day. Taking advantage of this, the vendor at the newsstand at the entrance to the station did a steady trade. The young woman pulled a purse from her bag and fished out a penny for a paper of her own. Open-handed in many respects, her brother had a peculiar aversion to sharing his daily copy of *The Times*. Today was her first visit to Lord's, and the opportunity to go to London did not often come her way. She was determined that today she would make the most of it, and a copy of *The Times* seemed somehow indispensable.

Agatha held her bag close to her. In it was her precious manuscript. A *Masque from Italy*. At seventeen this was her first attempt at writing, and she had brought it with her. Who knew what opportunities today might bring. With so many great authors around, she had at least to foresee the chance that one of them might take the time to look at her precious work. Also, she had with her copies of *The Woman in White* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Wilkie Collins had always been

one of her favourite authors. The villainous Count Fosco, his pocketful of white mice and his silent wife treading the streets of St John's Wood, prosecuting the evil plans of Sir Perceval Glyde, had been her company on the four hour train journey from Torquay yesterday. She looked around and shivered slightly as if the Count might even now be watching from some place of concealment in the park. And then, less than half a mile away was Baker Street, the home of Doyle's great detective.

Fosco. Glyde. Holmes. Watson. The ghosts of literature walked these streets. The respectable façades of the houses might belie who knew what murky criminality of the city.

The breeze ruffled her skirts as she stepped out on to the junction of St John's Wood Road with Wellington Road and Park Road, clutching her paper to her side, the mirror image of her brother's. Regents Park behind them, she looked across to where the imposing Members' Pavilion stood.

The streets around the park were busy already. It was not yet 10-30, but the certainty of a fine day had encouraged hundreds of London's wealthier citizens to the open spaces of the park with the promise of picnics and entertainment. This mass of wealthy humanity was a world away from the sedate streets of Torquay.

Releasing her brother's arm, Agatha looked on at the distant life of the park. A kaleidoscope of colourful dresses, hats, ties, cravats and handkerchiefs dotted the sun-drenched lawns, a rainbow scene at odds with the monochrome world of the photographs one so often saw of the Edwardian world at leisure. The colours faded where some groups had taken already to the shade beneath the spreading branches of the trees. Heads nodded and arms waved to the accompaniment of silent conversation.

'Well, Aggie,' said her brother.

'How many times must we go over this, Monty? I know you have been out of the country for some time, but you know that I cannot and will not bear that name. Agatha I was christened, and Agatha I wish to remain.' As she spoke, she seemed to grow a couple of inches taller, as if some new and serious moral fibre were expanding her frame. Her brother might be ten years her senior, but that was no reason for her simply to accept his calling her whatever he wanted.

'I'm sorry, Agatha,' he said. Did she detect an underlying irony in his tone? He had always enjoyed trying to goad her, even as a child. 'Shall we go?'

'Very well, Monty,' she replied, deciding to take his words at face value.

Turning her back on the park, she fell quickly into step with her brother as he moved along the pavement in the direction of the ground, and at the first opportunity they stepped into a gap that opened in the steady stream of traffic passing along Park Road. From time to time the voices of the crowd were drowned by the clanging of a bell as an omnibus tried to cut out a path between the horses and carriages that were not yet ready to give up the roads of the city. The noise, so far from ruining Agatha's anticipation, served rather to heighten it. The sudden bursts of sound were a mental counterpoint to the anticipated, steady unfolding of the day's play. Cricket held a favoured place in her heart. She loved the game. She had had no choice. As president of Barton Cricket Club in Torquay, her father had taken her along to matches for as long as she could remember. At first the pleasures of the game had been lost upon her, but over the years the boredom and resentment she had felt as a little girl had evolved into acceptance, then appreciation and finally a deep-seated love of the game.

Shutting her eyes, she summoned at once an image to her mind's eye of Cricketfield Road, the home of Barton Cricket Club, where she had spent so many

hours watching as her father played. The tang of the salt air flowing in off the English Channel was in her nostrils and throat as she replayed the sight of a batsman stepping out to an elegant cover drive or pulling away to make room for a late cut, followed a second later by the muffled report of willow on leather and the sight of white-clad men scampering in pursuit as the ball bobbed across the uneven outfield. Her ears heard again the polite and oh so English ripple of applause to celebrate the runs.

The crowd, accumulating from tributary streets, thickened further as they approached the ground, and they joined the inevitable queue as people shuffled patiently forward to pass through the turnstiles. Any sporting event boasting the talented array of authors and actors this match promised was likely to draw in a core of eager followers, and especially so when one of the authors on show was none other than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of the world's most famous consulting detective, Mr Sherlock Holmes. The reading public, young Agatha amongst them, could not consume its fill of Holmes. So, the opportunity to see the great man in action was not to be missed. She had suggested the day out to Monty, and he had been only too willing to comply. For Monty, Doyle had the added attraction that he was also an accomplished cricketer. Since 1900 he had played in several first-class matches, mainly for the Marylebone Cricket Club, coming in as a lower-order batsman and occasionally bowling an over or two. On one occasion at Crystal Palace he had even managed to dismiss the great W.G. Grace himself. So momentous was the occasion that Doyle had taken to verse to commemorate it. Not one of his better literary efforts, if Monty remembered rightly.

Chapter 2

Thursday 15th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

The Authors' changing room in the pavilion was a place of good spirits. Match day and the freedom it offered from the routine demands of daily life and work always generated a certain level of enthusiasm and excitement. There might be a domestic price to pay in the days and weeks that followed, but the day of the match itself was a small oasis; a time and place where the concerns of the everyday could be forgotten. Still there were several members of the team to arrive, but the majority of the players were already settled into their places and were preparing for the match. A collection of pads, gloves and bats was already beginning to litter the floor and benches of the room.

On the balcony outside the window looking out on to the field of play stood Doyle, his bother-in-law Ernest Hornung and Pelham Grenville Wodehouse, a young up-and-coming author fresh out of an unfulfilling job in The City. It might have been a few years since he had left his *alma mater*, but Dulwich College was still writ large in his demeanour.

'We could hardly have picked a better day for the match, Arthur,' said Hornung.

'The cricketing gods are smiling, Ernest,' replied Doyle. 'All we need now is for that imbecile Wilde to arrive and we can make a start.'

As he passed this opinion of the captain of the opposition, a distant knock was heard at the changing room door.

‘And that, unless I am much mistaken, is probably the imbecile in question,’ said Wodehouse.

All three men laughed and then, without another word, returned to the dressing room and were confronted with the round and smiling face of Harold Wilde himself, with his up-turned moustache and curling locks. Every inch the flashy showman even in his whites. ‘Well, Doyle,’ he said. ‘Are you ready for the toss?’

*

It was nearing five in the afternoon when Harold Wilde straightened up and watched as the ball flashed away through the covers headed for the boundary. The fielder vainly gave chase for a moment but then, realising that he would never be able to prevent the four runs, settled into an easy jog to retrieve the ball.

Wilde walked a few paces down the pitch and jabbed at the surface with the toe of his bat, repairing a small imperfection in the surface. That done, he looked up at the clock on the top of the pavilion. Four forty-three. The message had told him to meet in the Away team’s dressing room—the one to which the Actors had, as chance would have it, been assigned—at four forty-five, and that he would there hear something considerably to his advantage.

He had expected to be out by now, but somehow he had managed to amass a healthy forty-eight runs. It had been a lacklustre performance by the Authors, and the Actors had already won the match, but both teams had agreed to continue playing to make a day of it. Wilde took no small satisfaction from the healthy total his team had accrued and the round defeat they had dealt to the opposition, and he was especially pleased to have gained a victory over Doyle, who he had never forgiven

for his refusal to write him that role as Sherlock Holmes. None of that was relevant now, however, and he turned his mind to the matter in hand. Somehow, he had to make it to his *rendez-vous* in the pavilion, if only to say that he would have to postpone a fuller discussion of this news, whatever it was, until later on. 'Umpire,' he called. 'May I request a short break? Call of nature.'

*

It was only a few minutes later that Wilde emerged from the Away team dressing room, a look of puzzlement on his face. He had waited for as long as he could without arousing too much the suspicions of everyone else on the field, but nobody had arrived. He had definitely read the time correctly, so why had there been nobody there? He did not remain troubled for long, however, and smiled broadly at the thought of the defeat his team had inflicted upon the Authors. The direction of the match had never been in doubt. To top it all, he was batting fluently, and bowling Wodehouse out for just a single had made his day. He would simply return to the match and complete his half century.

'Where's Doyle headed, I wonder?' he said to himself. A glance through the balcony window just before he had decided to give up on the proposed meeting had afforded him a sight of the famous peer running towards the pavilion. 'Hmm. Probably just a call of nature, like me. Or else his pride has taken such a beating that he can't stand it any longer and is calling it a day.'

*

From the roof terrace of the pavilion, Alan Alexander Milne had noticed with interest that first Harold Wilde and then, a few minutes later, Doyle had left the field of play. He could not speculate as to what they may or may not be doing. All he could hope was that whatever was happening below it would not interfere with his appointment. The notification had been precise; he was to make his way down to the Bowlers' Bar at precisely four fifty-five.

He dropped the end of his cigar to the floor and ground it out with his heel before making his way to the steps.

*

Wilde laughed, slipping his gloves back on as he passed through the doors of his team's changing room. He was heading for the stairs and had just started his descent towards the Long Room when he heard someone call his name.

'Yes?' he said and turned to face his interlocutor. 'Ah! It's you.'

'Do you have a moment before you go back out?'

'Can't it wait?' asked Wilde. 'I'm forty-eight not out, you know, and pretty keen to put one over on Doyle, Wodehouse and the rest by making my fifty. Rub salt into the wound.'

'Of course, of course, but this will only take a moment. Would you mind stepping in here? I'd rather nobody else heard this.'

'Oh, very well,' said Wilde.

Quickly he followed into the room indicated. As he crossed the hallway, he heard hurried footsteps approaching down the stairs. 'Now let's make this quick,' said Wilde, turning to close the door.

No sooner had he turned his back than Wilde staggered as a length of some kind of heavy material was thrown over his head and, within a second, he felt the material pulled tightly across his face. The thick material was pressing into his nose and mouth. He struggled against the pressure applied by the relentless hands that held the material, but he could not gain a grip, his movements becoming more and more panicked as he gasped for air. He was on the verge of blacking out when, for some reason he could not comprehend, he felt the pressure released. In relief he tore at the material, trying to pull it away from his face so he could breathe again.

He never saw the glint of satisfaction in his assailant's eye as the raised bat descended on the back of his head. The first blow knocked Wilde to the ground, where he struggled and dazedly attempted to raise himself. 'What are you doing, ...?' But the name never passed his lips. The bat fell again and again in a sequence of vicious blows on the exposed back of Wilde's head.

*

Looking to left and right, Doyle entered the Long Room. Preparations for tea apparently over, the room was quite empty except for only one person, and Doyle saw her only for an instant as she slipped through the door into the Long Room Bar.

She had the most striking red hair.

Chapter 3

Sunday 17th July 1904

Meeting of The Crimes Club, Great Central Hotel, London

‘So to conclude, I am honoured that so many of you have deigned to pass this Sunday evening away from the bosom of your families, though I daresay that might be the very reason, for some of you, why this evening held such an appeal.’ A burst of laughter and applause. ‘This is a time of change gentlemen. We stand on the brink of a new age of crime, symbolic of the modern world. Crime, like the world around it, will only become more and more subtle, more and more creative, more and more technical. Unless the practices of detection change to reflect this, become themselves more imaginative, more nuanced, more technically proficient, then there can be only one victor. We on the side of the law and of right cannot afford to move more slowly than the criminals.’ He paused to allow a further round of applause to die away. ‘As I look out over this room, I see men of all walks of life; men of the medical profession, men of the law, men of the sciences, men of letters. But one thing unites us all: our interest in the world of crime and everything that word constitutes, as well as all the sciences that lie around its periphery. We are not interested only in the criminal; that word does not do justice to our endeavour. As members of the newly-formed Crimes Club, I propose to you our goal, and I propose it to you in a toast.’ Here Sir Arthur Conan Doyle rose to his feet and lifted his glass. A general shuffling of chairs followed as the assembled company stood. ‘Here is to our explorations of the criminous. To Our Society’

‘To the Criminous. To Our Society.’ The dining room rumbled its approval.

*

The crowd in the foyer of the Great Central Hotel was beginning to dwindle. The row of carriages and cabs gathered at the front of the hotel had steadily withered away as, one after another, they collected their passengers and disappeared into the Paddington night. Standing on the front steps of the hotel and savouring a cigar and the cool evening air, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was approached by a young man in impeccable dinner jacket.

‘Good evening, Sir Arthur.’

‘Ah. Good evening ...’

‘Wodehouse,’ supplied the young man. ‘Pelham Grenville Wodehouse.’

‘Ah yes, of course. Wodehouse. Remind me.’

‘Dulwich College, sir.’

‘Ah! An Alleynian, eh? And an up-and-coming writer, if I remember?’

‘Yes, Sir Arthur. *The Pothunters*, *A Prefect’s Uncle* and most recently *The Gold Bat*.’

‘A cricketing story?’ asked Doyle.

‘Crime really, sir. It’s a school story about the theft and recovery of a badge; that’s the gold bat of the title. It seems to me that crime takes its root early in life. Your average ten-year-old is, in my opinion, thoroughly equipped with all the accomplishments necessary for a life of crime.’

‘Explain yourself, Wodehouse,’ said Doyle, laughing. ‘In fact, why not join me indoors?’ He led the way back into the foyer of the hotel, helping himself to a glass of

wine from a nearby table and passing one to his companion as well. 'Now, you were about to enlighten me as to the criminal attributes of the average ten-year-old.'

'Yes. Well sir, they have the temper to commit acts of violence, the selfishness to steal, the deviousness and skill to blackmail as any parent will tell you, and the abilities of deception convincingly to deny all knowledge of any of the above.'

Doyle laughed again. 'And your evidence for this marvellous theory?'

'Why school, Sir Arthur,' said Wodehouse. 'The public school system is the perfect breeding ground for crime, spiced with all the petty rivalries and privations that are the inevitable lot of those subjected to the life of the boarding house.'

'I believe you're right,' said Doyle. 'I believe you may very well be right. Just look at Flashman. Hughes had the criminal type to perfection.'

'And your brother-in-law, Sir Arthur.'

'Ernest. Yes, of course. Raffles.'

'The Amateur Cracksman himself. The criminal offspring *par excellence* of the Public School in a nutshell. It is no wonder our school system is the envy of the world. Its alumni represent the best-trained elite of self-interestedly ruthless political schemers that any nation could wish for.'

Doyle laughed again and took a long draught of wine. 'You are right, Wodehouse. You are right. A more regular hot-bed for criminal...'

'Surely you mean *criminous*, Sir Arthur?'

'Doyle. Please call me Doyle. As you say, Wodehouse, the *criminous*. A more regular hot-bed for the *criminous* than Harrow, Eton, Marlborough, Wellington College and Dulwich I find it hard to imagine, now that you come to mention it. But tell me more about your writing.'

'As I said, Sir Arthur...'

'Doyle.'

'My apologies. As I said, Doyle, they are really just school stories with a hint of the comic and the criminous thrown in for good measure.'

'The comic?'

'Why yes. Life is far too serious a business not to laugh at it. All great literature, to my mind, must be humorous at heart.'

'Even writing about crime?'

'Especially writing about crime. All great crime writing is comic at heart.'

'So, what do you say about Holmes and Watson?'

'Holmes and Watson,' repeated Wodehouse and paused.

'Yes, come along, what of them?' said Doyle, reading prevarication in the young man's eyes. 'You amuse me, Wodehouse, and I'd like to know what you think. Do not worry, I shall take no offence.'

'Well then,' said Wodehouse, 'I think them the perfect comic duo.'

'And why is that?' said Doyle.

'Let us start with Holmes. A classic of his type, I would say. The violin-playing, the casual drug use and his regular urges to dress up suggest that he is a restless attention-seeker who, whatever he might say to the contrary, likes nothing more than to be constantly in the public eye. He is probably an actor *manqué* and he has all the thinly-veiled comic bluster that goes with that. Also, if I am not much mistaken, he suffers from what all great comic heroes have: a deeply-rooted schoolboy angst and inferiority complex that he systematically seeks to take out on the powers that be.'

'Inferiority complex?' asked Doyle.

'Certainly,' said Wodehouse. 'His brother Mycroft lurks like a stain on Holmes's mind. From the moment he first appears in 'The Adventure of the Greek

Interpreter', you can see that Mycroft has had a profound effect on his brother. The young Sherlock has pursued his maverick career as a consulting detective because he knows he could not, in public life, compete with his brilliant older brother.'

'And Watson?'

'Watson,' continued Wodehouse, 'is the straight-man counterfoil to Holmes' comic genius. Clever enough to act as a walking record book for his companion's *outré* brilliance but essentially living a life of confusion and misunderstanding.'

'The perfect recipe for comedy,' said Doyle.

'Precisely,' said Wodehouse.

'Well, I have never thought about my writing in quite that way before. And what about crime?'

'I do not believe that crime precludes comedy. Both are rebellions against the *status quo*. Crime and comedy both take as their starting point the principle that what is respectable and acceptable must be undermined. The difference is one of intention only. Crime is always selfish, whereas comedy is always generous; crime undermines by taking away, but comedy undermines by giving. Bringing the two together is a powerful combination, and the best crime writing is always comic and generous at heart. When it takes itself too seriously it begins to lose its purpose and its sense of direction. The last thing we want is to celebrate crime.'

Doyle stroked his moustache and laughed again. 'Well, Wodehouse,' he said 'I can see you have it all worked out. Good luck to you, young man. I shall watch your career with interest. And I will be certain not to allow Holmes to take himself too seriously.' He took another deep draught of wine and emptied his glass. 'You are not interested in cricket are you, by the way?'

'I am, Sir Arthur. I played for Dulwich firsts.'

'Bat or ball?'

'Ball and a respectably inconsistent bat,' said Wodehouse.

'Then I will mention you to a friend of mine, Barrie. He has a team, you know.

A group of authors and other sundries who get together from time to time for a match. He's always keen on gathering new blood.'

Chapter 4

Saturday 11th November 1905

Aldwych Theatre, London

'Hello, Plum,' said Kern as Wodehouse entered a small room to the rear of the Aldwych. Kern was slumped into a down-at-mouth chair, one of a number that huddled in the darkness at the back of the room. A stack of tables, a selection of old and dusty flats, a hanging rail of lifeless costumes, the normal detritus of a theatre, cluttered the room, but there was still space for a piano. Kern was never further away from a piano than circumstances forced him to be. In the dull light of a single unshaded electric bulb it was a dreary place. A lonely clock ticked away its lonely seconds and pronounced to anyone who wished to look that it was 11-30 pm. Late nights were the only time that they could find to work together on the songs they were paid to produce for the Aldwych. 'Late even by your standards.'

'I'm sorry, Jerry,' said Wodehouse, relentlessly cheerful even at this late hour. 'I finished early at the paper today and decided to check out the competition.'

Wodehouse walked across to the window. It was hot in this room. It was at the very top of the theatre and seemed to be that room there is in every building where all the surplus heat of the day gathers. The humidity clung to him, a damp cloak. 'Do you mind if I open the window?'

'Go ahead,' replied Kern. Rising from his seat he went to the piano. Gently he tapped the top of the keys and a moment later a shower of notes flowed from his fingers.

Wodehouse undid the catch and raised the window, then stood there for a moment breathing in the cool night air. Below him the roofs of the theatre and other buildings spread away. The naked bulb cast a yellow rectangle out on to the tiles. At the edges, darkness digested the light and plunged into blackness where the ridges of the roof formed channels. Here and there small doors opened out on to the tiles. These doors, too small for anyone to pass through in an upright position, always intrigued him. Leading from them would be narrow staircases winding their way down to other doors somewhere below, corridors strewn with the forgotten memories of old shows. Doors often passed, rarely opened. Invisible as it seemed to the people who came and went in the passageways below. No-one ever noticed these doors; doors into nothing, doors with no significance, until one day...

Who knows where an unknown door comes from or where it goes to? A barrier, but at the same time a point of access. A connection between adjacent but separate worlds. A denial, but at the same time a promise of opportunity. A story waiting to be discovered. There had to be a song in that somewhere, he thought as he listened to the music flowing so easily from Jerry's hands. Or maybe it was a murder mystery. It was not hard to imagine Holmes and Watson rushing off to solve 'The Secret of the Green Door', or some penny dreadful detective investigating 'The Door in Chancery'. Promising things, doors.

But he proceeded no further with his thoughts. From behind him came Jerry's voice. The music had stopped. 'You said you'd been checking out the competition. What have you been to see?'

'First I went to see *Dr Wake's Patient* at the Adelphi.'

'Any good?'

'A straightforward romance really. The doctor of the title is a farmer's son. He falls in love with one of his patients who comes from a wealthy aristocratic background. There is trouble with the father, that goes without saying; but the worthy doctor wins through in the end, marries the girl and they all live happily ever after. You know how it goes. Nothing that we have not seen before. Nothing that I think we could not do better.'

'Well that didn't take you all evening. Where did you go to then?'

'The Savoy.'

'*The Yeomen of the Guard?*'

'Yes, Jerry. I spent the rest of my evening in the company of the inimitable Messrs Gilbert and Sullivan. Wonderful lyrics. W.S. Gilbert is a genius, even if he can't bear the sight of me.' Wodehouse pulled a comic guilty face, an invitation for his companion to ask for the details.

'Really?' asked Kern, rising to the bait.

'Yes. Ever since I ruined one of his favourite anecdotes when I was lucky enough to dine with him at Grim's Dyke. I laughed before he had delivered the punchline and killed the whole thing stone dead. No, young P.G. never received another invitation. But Gilbert is a model for me, Jerry.'

'It's what the singers do with him that drives me to distraction.'

'I'm with you Jerry. Especially when it's sung by operatic types like Wilde who have an over-inflated sense of their own talent and importance.'

'*Harold Wilde?*'

'Yes,' replied Wodehouse. 'He's riding the D'Oyly Carte wave and the audience, damn them, lap it up. If you ask me, Gilbert and Sullivan are at their best when performed by honest amateurs who admit up front that they can't really sing.'

Unlike Mr Wilde, who in spite of all the evidence to the contrary, firmly believes that he is God's gift to the musical stage.'

Kern laughed. 'There really is no love lost between you two is there?'

'None, Jerry. Whatever love there might have been must have gone missing somewhere between Charing Cross and the Aldwych. It's one of those things; I will keep losing things along The Strand. A few months ago it was my wallet, and now I seem to have lost my love for Harold Wilde and I'm damned if I can find it. Ever since Wilde fell out with Doyle because he refused to write him the libretto for a musical version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, he has become utterly unbearable and hasn't a good word to say about a writer anywhere. And he seems to have taken a particular dislike to anyone who is a friend of Doyle's, yours truly included. Because I've play cricket with Doyle in Barrie's team, the Allahakbarries, Wilde has taken against me.'

'What do you plan to do about him?' asked Wilde. The Allahakhbarries meant nothing to him, but Wodehouse did not need to know that.

'To tell you the truth, Jerry, I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that desperate measures might be called for. Whenever I see him walking down The Strand with his ridiculous long dark curls (I ask you, what justification can any man have for long dark curls?) hanging down over his collar I feel like taking an axe to them. What would you say to good old-fashioned, honest murder?'

'Doyle could use it as the plot for a new Holmes story,' said Kern and the two men laughed as he poured them both a drink. 'But seriously, it could be huge,' he continued. 'Anything with the name Holmes on it will sell.'

'You are right, Jerry. It would. And that is largely why Doyle refused Wilde. He's fed up of it. He wants to be known as a serious writer and can't bear the fact

that nobody wants anything from him but Holmes, Holmes, Holmes. When Wilde suggested the opera, Doyle simply saw red and Wilde's pride has never quite recovered from the rejection.'

'Oh well. In that case I suppose we need to look elsewhere for our own big success,' said Kern.

'Yes,' said Wodehouse. 'It is an unfortunate fact that we all have to start somewhere. Down at The Savoy Harold Wilde's playing to full houses decked out in the full regalia of a beefeater while you and I burn the midnight oil at the behest of Mr Seymour Hicks of The Aldwych. I tell you, I can turn a lyric as well as W.S. Gilbert. But can I pull the crowds like that? Not yet. Not my day.'

'And me?' said Kern.

'Same for you, Jerry old boy. Here we are, resident composer and lyricist at the jolly old Aldwych Theatre, knocking out additional songs for the shows, but one day if we play our cards right the world will be humming along to the latest hit by Jerry Kern, lyrics by the great Plum Wodehouse. Move over Gilbert and Sullivan.'

'Well, maybe you're right. Perhaps we'd better get down to work, then.'

Turning to the piano, Kern shuffled through a pile of papers and placed them on the music stand. 'So, what's the plot of this infernal nonsense we're working on?' He looked at the typed front sheet of the manuscript on the stand in front of him. '*The Beauty of Bath*. The story of Sir Timothy Bun and his Lady and their twelve adoptive daughters otherwise known as the 'Bath buns'. Kern winced as he read the words. 'The things I do to earn an honest buck.' He held his head in his hands in mock despair. 'Remind me of the story, Plum.'

'At its heart it's a classic case of mistaken identity, old chap. Nothing more, nothing less,' said Wodehouse.

'Mistaken identity?'

'Yes. The heroine, Betty, also known as the Hon. Betty Silverthorne, daughter of Viscount Bellingham, is out for an evening's entertainment at the theatre.'

'Excellent,' interrupted Kern. 'The old 'play within the play' device.'

'The very same,' said Wodehouse. 'It's worked for donkeys' years. Shakespeare pulled it out of the hat over and over again. *A Midsummer Night's Dream, Hamlet, Macbeth, The Tempest*. It's a sure-fire winner.'

'Very good. Any winner is good by me and if it's sure-fire, so much the better.'

'Well, much to the disgust of Viscount Bellingham — let us call him the esteemed P — the Hon. Betty falls in love at first sight with one of the actors in the play, Alan Beverley.'

'The one who plays a sailor?'

'That's him.'

'So my memory has not completely failed me,' said Kern.

Wodehouse continued. 'As soon as he sets foot on stage...'

'Is that the stage in the play, or the stage in the 'play within the play'?' asked Kern.

'The 'play within the play',' said Wodehouse. 'But stop interrupting me.'

'Sorry, old man.'

'As soon as Alan Beverley sets foot on the stage in the 'play within the play' the Hon. Betty is smitten. Can't take her eyes off him.'

'And the esteemed P is not a happy daddy?'

'We can go further than that, Jerry. It would be safe to say that he is at once transformed into a steaming mass of Viscountly wrath. The Hon. Betty consorting with an actor. He fears for the family escutcheon.'

'Which is in imminent danger of blottage?'

'Precisely,' said Wodehouse. Rising to his theme, he began to stride purposefully from side to side of the room, waving his now empty glass around as he went on to expound his outline of the plot of *The Beauty of Bath*.

'So the long and the short of it,' said Wodehouse a few minutes later, his legs slung by now across the arms of a chair, 'to try to encourage young love Mrs Alington has sent her son a photograph of the Hon. Betty and he has fallen in love with it.'

'With a photograph?'

'Yes.'

'A bit implausible, isn't it?'

'Who knows what might happen to a man's emotions when he finds himself stuck on a ship for months at a time with only other johnnies in sailor suits to look at, Jerry. I dare say that under circumstances like that a photograph of a pretty young girl could be very ... inspiring. Besides which we are talking about musical theatre here. Anything goes.'

'I expect you're right, Plum. That's not a bad title for a show, by the way, *Anything Goes*.'

'Hmm. You're right, Jerry. I might have a go at that one day. *Anything Goes*. It has a certain ring.'

Chapter 5

Monday 4th July 1904

The Bat and Ball, Farnham

The parlour to the rear of The Bat and Ball in Farnham was typical of the rear parlour of most public houses. Adorned with a busily patterned flock paper, the walls seemed almost to advance upon the room, an impression enhanced by ranks of heavily framed portraits and photographs. One wall was dominated by a fireplace engulfed by a gothic mahogany surround that reached from floor to ceiling. The mantel shelf supported the obligatory clock, its top pitched like the roof of an alpine chalet, loudly proclaiming each passing second. Flanking the clock were two brasses, rampant riderless horses. A bureau and sideboard, both also mahogany, a large dining table and a scattering of wicker chairs and armchairs completed the furnishings. A pendant light hung over the centre of the room, but its light at this time of day seemed rather to darken than to lighten the atmosphere. To the casual guest entering the room, the two men seated in the chairs nearest the fire would have appeared as still and silent as if they were part of the room's furnishings themselves.

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Outside the rear of The Bat and Ball was a conveniently-located vine. Its branches and leaves, it is true, prevented the man from coming as close as he would have liked to the open window through which a moment or two before he had seen Doyle and Wodehouse enter the rear parlour of the public house, but he could make his

way close enough to hear their conversation, and close enough to the wall to escape observation. From within the room, at least.

But what was Doyle doing here? And why hadn't he been playing with Barrie and the rest?

It was chance that had brought him to the match himself. He was playing in a touring show at the Theatre Royal in Guildford and had heard of the match by chance.

How pleased he was, now, that he had decided to come.

When he had seen Wodehouse slipping away surreptitiously, unnoticed by everyone else, he had decided to follow him to see where he went, and now his innate curiosity was to be rewarded.

The Strand.

Farnham.

It was a small world.

*

'So what brings you here, Arthur?' said Wodehouse, inspecting the bowl of his pipe.

'I needed to speak to someone, and after careful consideration I decided you were the man for the job.'

'I don't know whether to be flattered or worried, Arthur.'

'Neither for the moment. Tell me about the match first. How fared the Allahakbarries?'

'Unusually well, in fact. Meyrick-Jones, Marsden and Pawling all batted a storm. Five of us, yours truly included who was down to go in at eleven, didn't even

wield the bat and we came out winners by 157 runs. I did nothing with the ball either. In fact, so insignificant was my contribution to the match that I appear in the scorebook simply as Unknown. I am beneath the scorers' consideration.'

'Barrie will be beside himself.'

'He is. I left him cavorting around the field like some over-excited child and slipped away unnoticed to meet you here. Why is it, by the way, that you decided not to play?'

'I couldn't summon the enthusiasm when Barrie asked me. Most unusual, but I am generally off my game at the moment.' Doyle looked at Wodehouse and sucked at the ends of his moustache in the way that only a truly dispirited man can.

'What is it, Arthur? Tell all.'

'It's my writing, Plum. That damned wonderful infuriating occupation we share. I have things that I want to do, but the publishers have little interest. What can I do?' he asked. 'The public wants Sherlock Holmes, not historical novels. Take the book I am working on at the moment. *Sir Nigel*, it is called. In my opinion it is the best thing I have ever written, but will the reading public take it to its bosom and welcome it like the prodigal son returned to the family home? Some will, no doubt, but the majority? No. Holmes with a dash of Dr Watson is what they want. An endless stream. It was only in February that *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* came out and already there is clamour for more.'

'So, what do you propose?' asked Wodehouse. 'I'm only just starting out as you know, and I have to say that I wish I shared your problem. If I were the author of Sherlock Holmes the reading public should have as much of him as they wanted.'

'That is easy for you to say,' said Doyle. 'You do not know what it is like. Wherever I go I have nothing but demands for Holmes. The pressure to produce is

immense. Touie, I believe, is driven half mad by it and she is not in the best of health. And then there is the insistence that Holmes is real. There is a solid core of readers who will not have it that he is mere fiction. As far as they are concerned, Dr Watson is nothing more than a thinly-veiled version of myself. I am the popular and necessary peddler of another man's tales. A mere mouthpiece. A pen-pusher behind whom hides a true, living and breathing, detective genius.'

'And you thought I could help you, Doyle?' said Wodehouse.

'I needed someone to rant at, I suppose.'

'Then rant away, Doyle. But why me?'

'Ever since we met at the first meeting of The Crimes Club, I have felt some sort of affinity for you, Wodehouse. Felt as if you somehow understand me and Watson and Holmes in a way that others simply do not. And I have never forgotten what you said to me that day: that crime writing should not take itself too seriously.'

'Well, I am flattered both that you recall our conversation that evening and at your confidence in me, Doyle,' said Wodehouse.

The two men fell silent and for a moment or two enjoyed the tranquillity of the evening, disturbed only by the song of the birds from the woods that stretched up the hill towards the cricket club.

When at last the silence was broken, it was Wodehouse who spoke. 'Perhaps I might even be able to help you, Arthur,' said Wodehouse. His voice was humorous, but curiously matter-of-fact at the same time.

'But how?' asked Doyle. 'I have already tried to kill Holmes off once.'

'Yes, a swan dive over the Reichenbach Falls,' said Wodehouse attempting to cheer his friend.

‘At the Reichenbach Falls, as you say,’ continued Doyle. Wodehouse’s humour had for once missed its mark.

‘But you brought him back.’

‘Yes,’ observed Doyle ruefully. ‘I bowed to public pressure.’

‘But *The Hound of the Baskervilles* has not had the desired effect?’ said Wodehouse.

‘On the contrary,’ said Doyle. ‘I tried to limit the demand by setting the story before Holmes fell at Reichenbach, but so far from allaying demand, the reading public is buying for more even louder than Baskerville’s blasted hound.’

‘You have succeeded only in throwing fuel on the fire; a juicy bone to the dog.’

This time Doyle managed to summon a wry laugh. ‘Precisely, Plum. They want more Holmes than ever. And to tell the truth, so does my bank manager. Sherlock makes him a very happy man!’

‘And Sir Nigel does not?’ said Wodehouse.

‘He does not,’ said Doyle. ‘The public’s taste for historical fiction does not keep pace with its love of crime. I have created an epidemic and I suppose I must live with it.’

‘It’s a bad day, Arthur, when the medics cause epidemics rather than curing them. “Physician, heal thyself.”’

Doyle drew an elegant silver case from his pocket, took a cigarette from it and tapped the end of it against the arm of his chair. Reflectively he put it to his lips and lit it. ‘What can I do, Plum? I suppose that I have made my own success and now must live as a victim of it.’

‘Well,’ said Wodehouse, a thoughtful look spreading across his face. ‘You may have to, and you may not.’

'Your meaning, Plum?' asked Doyle.

Wodehouse was silent for a moment, gathering his thoughts. The ticking of the clock asserted itself in the silence. 'I'm working, at the moment, with Herbert Westbrook. Do you know him?'

'I don't believe so,' said Doyle, shaking his head.

'Well, no matter,' continued Wodehouse. 'I am working with him on a novel. It is semi-autobiographical really. I want to get away from the school stories I have been writing. They are all well and good, but they are not where I want to keep going. I want to move on to something new, as I told you when we spoke at the first gathering of The Crimes Club.'

'Of course, Plum. Of course.'

'I told you then that I wanted to write crime novels. Comic crime novels.'

'Yes, I recall.' Doyle scrutinised the glowing tip of his cigarette.

'We're thinking of calling the book *Not George Washington ...*'

'Unusual, that,' said Doyle.

'Thanks, Arthur,' said Wodehouse, choosing to take this as a compliment.

'Well, the main character, James Orlebar Cloyster, wants to escape from what he now considers to be a hasty and ill-advised engagement.'

'A marriage engagement or an appointment, Plum?' asked Doyle.

'Marriage, Arthur. But have patience and you will see why I am telling you this. The said James Orlebar Cloyster is doing rather nicely for himself. He has managed to break into the London literary scene and is having his work published on a regular basis.'

'What kind of work?'

'Oh, stories, humorous verse, society stuff and the occasional novel,' said Wodehouse. 'He is enjoying the money and the success, but then he comes to a moment of terrible realisation. As time has gone by, he has come more and more to value his bachelorhood.'

'The appeal of marriage is waning?'

'Precisely,' said Wodehouse. 'He now considers his engagement to be something of a ... how shall I put it? An undesirable restraint. His increasing financial success, however, means that he no longer has any valid reason for delaying his marriage to the girl, a long-suffering and understanding girl called Margaret Goodwin who he has left to await his return on Guernsey. The only way in which he can delay matrimony is if he continues to appear an impoverished Bohemian hack.'

'Scraping together a bare living with an article here and a touch of light verse there, you mean?' said Doyle.

'I do,' said Wodehouse. 'But as I said, Cloyster is rapidly becoming a victim of his own success and he fears that his cover will be blown. So, he is now faced with an extraordinary challenge. How does he continue to build on his success and enjoy the lifestyle to which he is becoming accustomed but avoid the obligations of his engagement, without finding his name dragged through the mud and his body through the courts on a suit for breach of promise?'

'And, how does he?' asked Doyle.

'Well, Cloyster has a friend of the name of Julian Eversleigh. This Julian Eversleigh hits upon an idea of genius. What if Cloyster were to pretend his work was not in fact by himself, but was actually by two associates? Cloyster would hand them his work and they would sign it and sell it as their own.'

Sir Arthur leant forward in his chair. 'And what does he gain by the arrangement?'

'He strikes a deal with them,' said Wodehouse. 'His friends will receive the payments for the work they sell and pay it into bank accounts to which Cloyster has access. In turn he will pay them commission at a rate mutually agreed between the parties involved.'

'So, he maintains his outward appearance as a poor hack, avoids having to marry the poor unsuspecting girl in Guernsey, but still manages to reap a large part of the financial benefits of his success.'

'Yes,' said Wodehouse.

'He keeps much of the fortune and has none of the fame,' said Doyle, the light of understanding beginning to glimmer in his eyes. He rose from his seat and moved towards the open window stroking his moustache. Outside the leaves of the vine rustled as if disturbed by a sudden breeze.

'Do you begin to see?' asked Wodehouse.

'I believe I might,' said Doyle, turning back to face the room. His eyes had taken on a certain sharpness. 'But how precisely might Cloyster's situation apply to my own. I have my name already and a plentiful market for my work. And any new work including Holmes, no matter who wrote it, would still be attached to my name.'

'Your situations are in many ways the same when you think about it though, Arthur.'

'In what ways, Plum? Cloyster wants to keep on writing his stuff, and I don't. A large part of me wishes that I had never invented Sherlock Holmes, and I certainly do not want to go on writing stories about him, no matter how much *The Strand* keeps pushing me for more.'

'That is not the point, Arthur. Here is where the similarity lies. It is for different motivations, I grant you, but both you and Cloyster wish to create a distance between your person and your work.'

'He wants to keep his name off his work, whereas I simply do not wish to be connected with Holmes anymore.'

'Given, however, that your name is indelibly imprinted on the public imagination, you can never truly be separated from him. The best you might be able to achieve is not to have to write any further Holmes stories yourself.'

The keenness in Doyle's eyes redoubled as Wodehouse spoke.

'Keep satisfying the public's demand for Holmes, you mean, and it doesn't matter who is writing it,' said Doyle.

Wodehouse inclined his head. 'And you will have the time you would like to write all the *Sir Nigels* in the world. I suspect that nobody will complain if there are more *Sir Nigels*. They will only worry if there is less Holmes.'

'By jingo, Wodehouse. I believe you are in the right.'

'Elementary, my dear Doyle,' said Wodehouse. 'So how about if we were simply to reverse the proposition that I'm working on in *Not George Washington*?'

'Explain yourself,' said Doyle, crushing the end of his cigarette into an ashtray.

'In my novel, Cloyster wants to hide his success behind the names of others. I am suggesting that you find authors who want to hide their work behind your name.'

Conversation fell silent. The clock on the wall ticked with a heavier and heavier hand as if knocking the idea into Doyle's mind. The vine at the window moved again.

'And where might I find such a writer?' Doyle's voice was rough with doubt, hope and fear.

‘How would the present company serve?’ said Wodehouse. ‘What would you say, Arthur? Would you do it? Would you let me take on your name and a cut of the, let us be honest about it, substantial profits that Sherlock Holmes brings in by writing some stories that you could pass off to *The Strand*?’

Doyle stared at Wodehouse, his eyes wide with the enormity of the scheme. ‘And perpetrate one of the biggest literary hoaxes of all time?’

‘Bigger than the Chatterton hoax,’ said Wodehouse. ‘Bigger than “Forger” Smith.’

Doyle was suddenly fretful. He pushed back his chair and began to pace the room with a restless energy. His reputations as a cricketer, a writer and a gentleman were at stake. He was a medical man, but as far as he was aware the Hippocratic Oath said nothing about the perpetration of literary fraud. Then he was a pillar of the community and one of England’s most successful authors to boot. Could he really consider Wodehouse’s idea? And yet here he was, without a shadow of a doubt giving it his serious consideration. To be free of his ball and chain. To be free to write the historical novels he wanted to write, but still to reap the profits that Holmes would continue to bring in. It seemed too good to be true.

‘What do you say, Arthur?’ Wodehouse’s voice cut the silence.

‘I don’t know,’ said Doyle. ‘I don’t know.’ His mind was careering like Holmes down the Reichenbach Falls. His reputation. Touie. The children.

‘If the terms are your problem, we can talk about them later,’ said Wodehouse. ‘I’m merely suggesting a principle. What do you say, Arthur? Are you game?’

‘What about the style?’ said Doyle. ‘I’m not agreeing, you understand, but what about the style? Will the readers not realise?’

‘They will believe what they want to believe,’ said Wodehouse. ‘They want more tales involving Holmes, so that is what we will give them. It could be argued that, were we to do it, we would be performing an act of public service. We are simply pooling our resources in order to give the reading public what it wants. And provided the style is near enough ...’

The clock on the mantelpiece ticked loudly. Doyle slowly moved up and down the room, fitting his pace sub-consciously to its rhythm.

‘You could work with me at first, Arthur,’ suggested Wodehouse. ‘We could write together. And once we were both satisfied, I could write them all on my own.’

‘It is worth a thought,’ said Doyle. ‘It is certainly worth a thought.’

‘And besides, Arthur,’ said Wodehouse, ‘I have already made money from Holmes.’

‘You have?’ said Doyle. Bluster and outrage mingled with flattery in his tone.

‘Yes,’ continued Wodehouse. ‘“The Adventure of the Missing Bee”, *Vanity Fair*. “Dudley Jones, Bore Hunter”, *Punch*. “Sherlock Holmes”, *Strand*. “The Parrot”, *Daily Express*.’

‘Vanity, vanity. All is vanity,’ said Doyle, laughing wryly.

‘So, you see, Arthur,’ said Wodehouse. ‘I have already made profit out of your name. All I am suggesting is that we might consider formalising the process. And they do say that imitation is the greatest form of flattery.’

Doyle said nothing but went and stood at the window. He looked out into the darkness. A light breeze played across his face. The coolness was pleasant. ‘I cannot say now,’ said Doyle. ‘I need to think about this, but it is a most intriguing idea, Wodehouse. Most intriguing.’

Doyle moved away from the window and resumed his restless movement up and down the room. A tightness around his mouth and eyes showed that he was thinking deeply. Wodehouse contemplated the bowl of his pipe. The shadows of evening began to spread into the room, and then suddenly Doyle stopped. 'Let us suppose we were to try it,' he said.

'Yes,' said Wodehouse. He tapped the ash from his pipe into an ashtray, and began to scrape at its interior with a small penknife.

'I'm pretty well known, and the reading public takes its Sherlock Holmes very seriously. We'd be taking a hell of a risk.'

'We would,' said Wodehouse. 'It's the kind of ruse that only characters in a detective novel would try to pull off. Any detective worth his salt would reject the idea in the blink of an eye. That's where its beautiful subtlety lies. Nobody will ever believe that anyone would try something like this out in real life. If this were to happen in a novel nobody would believe it. But what is it they say? Fact is stranger than fiction.'

'Hmmm,' grunted Doyle. 'It's true. I am amazed by the letters I receive every day from people asking me to have a word with Holmes for them. They will not believe the blighter isn't real.'

'So, what do you think, Doyle,' asked Wodehouse. 'Are you in?'

Without saying a word, Doyle made his way across the room and seated himself with his back to the parlour window in a wing-backed armchair. He reached into his pocket, took out his cigarette case and pensively put another cigarette to his lips. Automatically, he struck a match against his vesta case. It flared a brilliant orange in the darkening room.

Wodehouse knew better than to interrupt his thoughts, and quietly began to fill his pipe from a stuffed tobacco pouch, watching now and then as Doyle drew in a lungful of smoke and intermittently tapped the ash of his cigarette into a heavy ashtray on a small side table. 'Well, Plum,' he said after a minute or two, 'I have given your suggestion serious thought, and in principle I think it might be worth trying.'

'Excellent, Arthur. You and I could have our Holmes and eat it.'

'It is possible, but I never feel it is wise to make decisions of such magnitude on an empty stomach. Let us order some dinner. The landlord, I am sure, will be able to provide for us well.'

The vine outside the window rattled against its trellis.

'The wind must be getting up out there, Arthur,' said Wodehouse. He walked across to the window and glanced out. 'It seems to have died down now though. These sudden gusts of wind across the downs play havoc with my bowling, you know.'

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The room had darkened considerably and the remnants of a meal stood on the table. A fire was burning in the grate. The landlord had insisted on lighting it in spite of the men's protestations that the summer evening needed no such precaution. Doyle poured another glass of port for Wodehouse and then refilled his own glass. 'I am in two minds, Wodehouse. The world sees me as the creator of Holmes and nothing more, but I have much more and much better to give the world of letters than that. But as to literary fraud...'

‘What about your wife?’ Do you need to speak to her?’

‘She must know nothing about this idea,’ said Doyle firmly.

‘You are sure?’ said Wodehouse. ‘What if we proceeded with the plan and she were to discover you had deceived her?’

‘I cannot take the risk of discussing this with her,’ said Doyle. ‘She is in poor enough health as it is. You know that, and the idea would probably be enough to kill her. The poor woman has enough to bear. No, if I am to go ahead with this, I am determined to leave her in ignorance.’

‘If you are sure, Arthur. That is your business not mine.’

‘It is. It pains me to do this behind her back, but God knows I have suffered too. Between her illness and the demands of *The Strand* for Sherlock Holmes I have come near to my wits’ end, and I must have something for myself.’

‘*Sir Nigel*,’ said Wodehouse.

‘Yes. The blessed *Sir Nigel*,’ said Doyle.

‘When is it set?’

‘In the Middle Ages. It is not only Scott who can write a medieval romance.’

‘And it gives you the distance you need from Holmes.’

‘It does. I love the rigour,’ continued Doyle.

‘The pleasure of historical fiction, then, is its truth to life?’ asked Wodehouse. ‘Doesn’t that tie your hands?’

‘Not really,’ said Doyle. ‘Froissart and La Croix are a good enough start, but history is a different kind of narrative. It works to its own logic and compulsions.’

‘And you are not bound by those?’

‘Not entirely,’ said Doyle. ‘Art has its part to play. Events have to be moved around if the narrative is to preserve its continuity and pace. I hope, for the sake of

art, that so small a divergence may seem a venial error after so many centuries. For the rest, it is as accurate as a good deal of research and hard work could make it.'

'But you have only the past's word for itself,' said Wodehouse. 'History is written by the victorious, Arthur. They are telling their story for their own ends. It is not like the scorers at today's match, you know, who must record a player's inadequacies for all to see. What about the stories the past has not chosen to tell? Or hasn't been allowed to tell? Let us suppose that Moriarty had been allowed to narrate his version of his encounters with Holmes? What then? What if he as well as Holmes survived the plunge over the Reichenbach Falls?'

'Is that what you propose?' asked Doyle. Even his desire to be rid of Holmes could not prevent a look of horror spreading across his face. The flames of the fire flared as a log collapsed into itself, picking out the red strands in his beard.

'No, no,' said Wodehouse. 'I simply say that Moriarty's representation of events would not ... could not be the same. And who knows, he might have survived. No two people ever see the same event alike. It is doubtful whether they see the same event at all. You have never as yet allowed Holmes his own voice, for example. How would his cases appear if he were his own narrator?'

'Probably unbearable,' said Doyle, 'though it might be worth the experiment one day. I wonder. The brilliance of Holmes is in his ability to construct a tale from its end to its beginning; to take a seemingly random event or set of events and to see in them the seeds of the tale. That is the spark of genius.'

'And as you admit yourself, Dr Watson is no genius.'

'You told me so yourself, Plum, at the Great Central Hotel two years ago. If Watson had had genius, my stories would have been sunk from the start. To reconstruct Holmes' investigations requires a logical, pedestrian and fundamentally

unimaginative mind. Watson is far better suited to mediate the stories than Holmes would ever be.'

'Precisely,' said Wodehouse. 'The telling of a tale of mystery requires the reader to believe in the narrator's honesty and transparency. But let us be clear, that is nothing but another layer of deception on the author's part. Watson is not an idiot, a mere recorder. No, he is, in his own way, as cunning a deceiver and fabricator as the author himself. You know that better than anyone, Arthur. The narrator's omniscience has to hide behind the mask of knowing nothing. The reader needs to see every clue, every hint, every suspicious event but to see them in such a way that their significance is not appreciated until the brilliant detective comes along. This all has to emerge, however, through the apparently dull, but in some way even more perceptive eyes of the narrator. Without Watson, Holmes would be an impossibility. His truth to life lies in nothing more and nothing less than Watson's surface limitations. Holmes' brilliance can only shine because of Watson's deceptively oversimplified version of reality. And the reading public's willingness to be complicit in the deception, of course.'

'Detective stories, in other words, are nothing more than a kind of Faustian pact between writers and readers. A mutual agreement to deceive and to be deceived?' asked Doyle.

'You have it,' said Wodehouse. 'Though at the same time readers must be lulled into the belief that the writer is playing fair. No doubt one day somebody will write all this down and turn it into a proper theory of detective fiction. But never mind that for now. In this lies the beauty of our scheme. By writing Holmes on your behalf, I would be doing nothing more than adding a layer to the deception; a deception to which the whole world is already all too willing to turn a blind eye. Meanwhile I would

line my pockets with a steady stream of income, whilst allowing us both to continue to produce whatever else we wish as work of our own.'

Doyle was silent. He leant back in his chair and shifted to make himself more comfortable. Another log shifted in the fire, which had by now burnt almost to its end. 'It would certainly give me the time to work on *Sir Nigel*,' said Doyle.

'Do you have it with you?' asked Wodehouse.

'As it happens, I do,' said Doyle. He rose and walked to where his overnight bag stood in the corner. He pulled out a sheaf of papers and held them up proudly. 'It is nearly finished now,' he said.

'May I?' asked Wodehouse.

'Of course,' said Doyle, placing the manuscript on a desk to one side of the parlour. 'Help yourself.'

Wodehouse rose from his armchair and walked over to the desk. It was in a heavily-stained wood, its surface a rich red leather, studded with the brass heads of nails. He settled into the chair Doyle had indicated and pulled the papers towards him.

He began to read. A smile soon split his face.

'What is it?' asked Doyle, unsure whether to be offended.

'O nothing, Arthur. It is nothing. But I must read you this. You must know by now that wherever I can I look for the humorous in life.'

'But there is little humour in *Sir Nigel*,' said Doyle. 'It is a serious work.'

'It is,' said Wodehouse, 'but humour is in the eye of the beholder, and to the cricketing eye the second paragraph is full of humour. Transport yourself, if you will, to the Members' stand at Lord's and listen: "Always the same thick evil cloud flowed from east to west with the rain beneath it. None could see for more than a bow-shot

from their dwellings for the drifting veil of the rain-storms. Every morning the folk looked upward for a break, but their eyes rested always upon the same endless cloud, until at last they ceased to look up, and their hearts despaired of ever seeing the change." A situation to which we cricketers relate all too easily, eh Arthur?'

A moment longer and Doyle joined him in his amusement.

'And as to the business we have been talking about,' said Doyle, 'not a word to anyone, you understand. Not a living soul outside of this room must hear the lightest breath of this conversation. We'll arrange to meet again once I have had the time to consider.'

The foliage outside the window rustled for the last time.

'That breeze is getting up again,' observed Wodehouse

*

The man slipped silently away from the window and into the edge of the woods running up towards Folly Hill, a shock of dark curly hair tumbling over the collar of his jacket. Proceeding towards the road, he proceeded on his journey, unaware that he was pursued at a discreet distance by a second figure in the clothes of a working man slipping in and out of the deepening shadows of the evening.

Half an hour later, settled safely in the corner of a First Class carriage bound for Waterloo, Harold Wilde finally had the luxury of thought. Never mind the petty revenge he had determined for that louse Wodehouse. The conversation he'd just heard whilst crouching unceremoniously and increasingly uncomfortably for upwards of an hour beneath the window of The Bat and Ball had given him much bigger ideas.

A potential fraud on the reading public, eh?

Never mind the doubts Doyle had expressed. Those doubts, Wilde felt certain, would come to nothing and they would go ahead with the plan.

The Return of Sherlock Holmes.

By P.G. Wodehouse.

He would find a way to spoil their game, and he would find a way to make it play to his advantage as well.

Part 2

The First Innings

Chapter 6

Thursday 15th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

'I wish Wilde would hurry up,' said Mr Bean, the umpire presiding at the bowler's end. 'Rain halting play or bad light is one thing, but now we have to contend with calls of nature too.'

'Well, what's good for the batsman is good for the bowler, I suppose,' said Doyle, handing the ball to the umpire as he spoke. 'I'm afraid I must make my apologies and compound the delay, umpire.'

'Oh really, Sir Arthur?' said Mr Bean. 'Very well. You may go if you must.'

'Thank you, umpire,' said Doyle. 'Barring a sudden unexpected death or some other natural disaster, I will be back to complete my over forthwith.'

Bean laughed wryly. 'Please make it as quick as you can, Sir Arthur.'

'Anyone else, while we are at it?' called out Mr Richardson, Bean's fellow official.

'No, umpire,' came from various corners of the ground as the players converged on the wicket to talk for a few moments while play was suspended.

*

As he ran towards the boundary, Doyle waved at his friend Milne who seemed somewhat agitated, pacing up and down on the roof terrace to the right hand side of the pavilion, but the young man apparently didn't see him. As Milne turned and

looked for a moment directly in Sir Arthur's direction, the famous author detected that the young man was distracted or preoccupied.

'Promising young writer, Milne,' said Doyle to himself, thinking no more of it at this time. '*Lovers in London* was a decent first book. Not entirely my cup of tea, but a decent book nevertheless. Society pieces are all well and good, but his have a certain quality that is a cut above the rest.'

Without giving the matter further thought, Sir Arthur ran up the steps of the pavilion. He took the steps two at a time. A few seconds later he was in the Long Room. The place had evidently been a hive of activity since the drinks break. Tables laden with sandwiches and cakes, bottles of beer and pots of tea spread out beneath the windows, all neatly arrayed on immaculate white tablecloths.

Now that he saw the post-match refreshments all laid out, Doyle realised how hungry he was. Cricket always made him hungry, and for some reason his thoughts flew to Touie, at home on her own. He felt a momentary pang of guilt, but this lasted only a second as his attention was diverted by the sight of a girl, a girl with striking red hair and wearing a white apron, leaving the room. She must be one of the staff.

Other than himself, the Long Room was now deserted. There was no sign of Wilde as yet. What the devil was the man up to? It was now a good five minutes since he had gone off, so he should be on his way back to the game at any moment. It was surprising that he had not returned already. Wilde did not hold his attention for long, though. Doyle's stomach growled at the sight of the refreshments. He was tempted to help himself to a sandwich, but no, they were for later. In fact, it would probably be soon. The Actors had already won the match easily and were playing on only to give a few more players the chance to wield the bat. In fact, with the blighter Wilde on 48, the chances were that they were only waiting for him to score his half-

century and that they would then retire. No, it did not look as if it would be too long until he could enjoy his tea. So, without further ado, Doyle made his way across the Long Room to the door leading to the stairs at the Eastern end of the building and the Authors' changing room on the first floor.

*

Up on the roof terrace of the pavilion, Milne was preoccupied. He was vaguely aware of somebody leaving the field of play as he gazed distractedly in the direction of the park. It was that blister Harold Wilde. Something was not quite right, Milne knew it, but he could not risk missing his meeting. The message he had received this morning had been quite precise.

No, in his bones he sensed that all was not quite well, but having committed so far to the plan in his mind, he could not give up on it now.

As soon as Wilde passed out of sight below the balcony on which he sat, Milne rose from his seat and began to pace somewhat distractedly up and down the roof terrace.

*

It was only a couple of minutes after entering the pavilion that Doyle ran down the last few stairs and made his way back through the door into the famous Long Room.

At once he saw the body. It lay on the floor as if asleep, but the unnatural flatness of the back of the head and the ooze of blood beginning to seep on to the

well-polished floor told him immediately that Harold Wilde—nobody could mistake that shock of dark curls—would never sleep again. On the floor by his feet lay a bat.

Doyle approached the body and knelt at its side. Following the dictates of his doctor's training he felt for a pulse and checked for other vital signs, but he knew before he did so that this was in vain. He shuddered. This was all too uncomfortably like walking into one of his own stories. Still holding Wilde's wrist, he looked over his shoulder as if expecting to see the shades of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson emerge from the corner of the Long Room. Baker Street was, after all, only ten minutes' walk away from this very spot. But the literary gods produced nothing of the sort. Holmes and Watson, if they were there with him, looked on from another dimension. This was not the comforting world of a detective tale. He was alone in a very real Long Room at Lord's holding the wrist of a very real corpse.

He gently returned Wilde's arm to the floor and then turned his attention to the bat. At first, he had registered only its presence, but now the well-known willow stained to a deep umber by years of lovingly applied linseed oil told him without a doubt that it was his own. His bat used as a bludgeon? He shuddered for a second time. He did not like Wilde, but.... and his bat the weapon. It was all too obvious how this situation would appear to anybody entering the Long Room at this moment.

Appearances be damned, though. There was nothing to be gained by trying to conceal. So, decisive as ever, Doyle walked to the door leading out on to the steps down to the field of play to raise the alarm.

'Hi!' shouted Doyle. His voice carried easily across the outfield. 'Hi! I say!'

The fielders and the crowd distributed around the stands and on the mounds turned towards the pavilion. The urgency in Doyle's tone was palpable.

'It's Wilde. He's dead. In the Long Room.'

At once the fielders and umpires and the remaining batsman began to run towards the pavilion, but Doyle did not wait for them. He turned back into the room and approached again the crumpled form of Harold Wilde. As he did so, he heard the sound of a door clicking shut and looked instinctively in the direction of the door connecting the Long Room and the Long Room Bar. Any thoughts about this were quickly dismissed, though, as the first person ran up the steps in front of the pavilion. It was Wodehouse, breathing heavily. He surveyed the room and ran to his friend's side.

Doyle looked his young friend in the eye, and Wodehouse read the worry he saw there. 'My bat,' said Doyle quietly. 'It looks like he was killed with my bat.'

Any further conversation was impossible, however, as more and more people began to arrive in rapid succession from seemingly all directions.

Through the throng of people in the Long Room, crowding indecently around the body of Harold Wilde, came the bespectacled and moustached figure of Ernest William Hornung. 'Arthur, are you alright?' he asked, taking his brother-in-law by the arm.

'I am, Ernest. Thank you. At least I think I am.'

'Step back everyone,' said Ernest, taking control. 'Give Sir Arthur some room, please. He needs some space. And if you will not for his sake, at least do so out of respect for this poor devil here.' As he spoke, he looked at the body of the late Harold Wilde. The blood oozing from the ugly head wounds he had sustained was gradually flowering on to the floor. 'Poor fellow,' he said again. 'His head beaten in with a cricket bat.'

'Not a cricket bat, Ernest,' said Doyle. 'My cricket bat.'

'Yours, Arthur? Are you certain?'

'As certain as I am that you stand by my side now.'

'And you found the body?'

'Yes. I found the body, Ernest.'

'Were you alone?' asked Hornung.

'I was, Ernest. Quite alone.'

'Well, Arthur. A pretty situation you have found yourself in here. A counsel for the prosecution would say that this looked like an open and shut case.'

'Indeed,' said Doyle. He looked around him and was glad to see that, as Hornung had requested, the gathered players and a handful of the Members had retreated to a respectful distance. Beyond them, he noticed Milne just entering the room by the door opposite the Writing Room. He had no time to reflect on this now, however, as Hornung spoke once more.

'So, tell me, Arthur. What happened?'

'As you know, Ernest, I left the field a little after Wilde and made my way into the pavilion. I passed through the Long Room and made my way up to our changing room, where I obeyed Nature's call.'

'And the Long Room was empty when you made your way through?'

'Quite empty, Ernest.'

'You saw nobody and nothing?'

'I saw nobody and, more to the point no body. Except for one of the serving girls, a girl with the most striking red hair. She was going out through that door.' As he spoke these words, he indicated the door at the Western end of the Long Room, the door nearest to the main staircase of the pavilion, through which Milne had entered.

'She was still in the room?'

'She had her back to me, but she had evidently been in the room and was hurrying to leave it.'

'You are certain of that?'

'Yes.'

'And what was she doing?'

'Well, she seemed to be heading towards the bottom of the main staircase. She turned to the left as she left the room.'

'She was definitely moving? Not listening at the door? Or watching?'

'I would not have said so.'

'Very well, Arthur. And you are sure there was no body.'

'Come, Ernest,' said Doyle. 'I believe I would have noticed the poor unfortunate Mr Wilde had he been lying here as I passed, no matter how urgent the demands of my bladder.'

'Of course, Arthur. So you would. But you find yourself, from what I can see, in the most damnably awkward situation and we need to be precise as to our facts.'

'Of course, Ernest. I am sorry. I am not quite myself.'

'Never mind, Arthur. So, as you passed on your way to the changing rooms you would swear that the Long Room was empty?'

'Yes. Except as I say for the girl.'

'With the red hair.'

As the conversation had progressed, Doyle's features had become increasingly pale and now his brother-in-law was looking at him with some concern.

'I say, Arthur, you do not look too good. Why don't you step outside. A breath of fresh air will do you good.'

'I think you're right, Ernest. I will.'

They made their way out of the doors and settled into two seats on the terrace. Neither spoke for a few minutes as they surveyed Thomas Lord's famous cricket ground. Doyle's breathing became steady and calm in spite of the circumstances. 'Never mind the rolling fields of England, your Blake or your Wordsworth, Ernest,' he said at last. 'If there is a finer stretch of turf than this anywhere in the country, I'll eat my bat.'

*

The fresh air had done Doyle some good. The colour had returned to his cheeks. He and Hornung walked slowly down the steps towards the wicket gate and the boundary. 'A bad shock that, Ernest. And the poor fellow was beaten to death with my bat. He was a first-rate blister, of course. For years now he has been pestering me to write something for him. He wanted a musical version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* of all things. Can you imagine? He would not give up on the idea and approached me again and again. I always wondered what gave him the confidence and determination to come back to me time after time the way he did. But for all that, nobody deserves what happened to him.'

The room behind them was filled with the subdued hum of conversation. Theories and accusations no doubt hung thick on the air but blessedly, as far as Doyle and Hornung were concerned, the voices melded into one indecipherable hum.

'What do you make of it, Arthur?'

'I really don't know, Ernest, but I'll tell you something. The fact that my bat was used concerns me. Can whoever did this have known that I was in the pavilion?'

Perhaps they were watching very carefully and timed the murder to make it appear that I am the guilty party.'

'I can't see how they could have anticipated you coming in, Arthur, or how they would have had time to extract your bat and use it to kill Wilde. However, it is not impossible that they might have been able to do it,' said Hornung. 'And if I were wanting to incriminate you, I can't think of a better way of doing it. You and Wilde apparently alone together in the pavilion. No other witnesses. You're apparently the first on the scene once he's dead. The gambling man would have to say that you were also the one who did the dirty deed.'

'I say. You don't really believe I did it, do you Ernest?'

'Of course not, Arthur. But what is it Holmes always says? "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, ...'

"... must be the truth."'" Doyle finished his own aphorism.

'So that leaves you only one thing to do, Sir. You must prove your involvement impossible.' The young woman's voice came as a surprise to both men.

So engrossed had they been in their conversation that they had not seen her approach. She could not be much more than in her late teens and carried a bag and a rolled newspaper. Behind her was a young man, well-dressed and evidently somewhat abashed at the girl's effrontery.

'I'm sorry, miss, but Sir Arthur is not able to talk at the moment,' said Hornung.

'Oh, but he must,' she said, with the bright confidence of youth. 'Talk is precisely what he must do. He must exercise his grey cells in order to convince the world that whatever is so concerning him ceases to appear merely improbable, and therefore potentially true, and is shown instead to be impossible beyond a doubt.'

The young man at this point stepped forward and placed his hand upon her arm. 'Come along, Agatha,' he said. 'I am sure that the gentlemen have more important things to discuss.'

'Thank you, young man. I appreciate your concern,' said Doyle, his interest piqued. 'But this young lady—your sister, I presume?—has cut to the very heart of the matter. Wouldn't you say so, Ernest?'

Ernest nodded his agreement.

'Damned sticky situation you find yourself in, Arthur. If the words you have given to Holmes are correct, then you need to do exactly what the young lady says.'

'I say we need to act on her advice at the earliest opportunity, and there is no time like the present. Thank you, young lady,' said Doyle.

'It's Agatha, sir. Agatha Miller.'

'Well thank you, Agatha,' said Doyle, smiling at her from beneath his substantial moustache. 'I shall, as you say, employ those grey cells of mine in the cause of proving my own innocence. "Exercise the little grey cells." Hah. I like that.'

*

Agatha and Monty walked away from the boundary fence in front of the pavilion towards the outfield.

'You shouldn't have done that, Agatha,' said Monty.

'Why ever not?' asked Agatha.

'Interrupting like that. Had you any idea who you were talking to?'

'Oh, come along, Monty. Who worth their salt would not recognise Sir Arthur Conan Doyle when they see him? And Mr Hornung, come to that. The creators of

Holmes and Watson and Raffles and Manders? Of course I knew who they were. They are nevertheless humans, you know.'

Stuck as to how to reply to this, Monty contented himself with walking at her side as they passed the boundary rope and trod the pristine turf of the outfield; turf better than the wicket at many of the clubs she had been to, Agatha reflected. As they walked, Agatha turned and looked back towards the pavilion and as she did so a movement caught her eye. At first, she could not identify precisely where the movement had come from, but then she located it. Stood in the very corner of one of the windows of the Long Room was a youngish red-headed woman, evidently one of the serving staff. Even in the shade of the room Agatha could not help but notice the avid attention with which the young woman watched, unseen as she thought, the preoccupied crowd on the Lower Terrace.

'Come along, Agatha,' said her brother, taking her by the arm. Directing her back through on to the outfield, they passed a young man. His jacket and trousers were smart enough but at the same time crumpled enough to denote a public school boy; his tie, knotted too short and scarcely reaching half way to his waist, was of a simple spotted design.

'Excuse me, miss,' he said as they passed, 'but you were just talking to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his companion?'

'Mr Hornung? Yes,' said Agatha, enjoying the reflected glory.

'Did they happen to say anything about the whereabouts of a Mr Wodehouse?'

'Mr Wodehouse? No. Why?'

'Oh, no reason really. It's just that we were at the same school. Dulwich.'

'Dulwich. Really, what a wonderful school.'

'Thank you, Miss ...'

'Miller. Agatha Miller.'

'Well, as I was saying, we were at the same school, and I thought I might speak with him. I am trying to make my way, you know. In writing. And Mr Wodehouse has always been something of a hero for me.'

'As he is for me, Mr ... Sorry, do you mind me asking your name?' said Agatha.

'Not at all, miss,' said the young man. 'It's Chandler. Mr Raymond Chandler.'

'Well, Mr Chandler, I admire anyone who can make their way in the world of letters. My especial interest, however, is crime writing. Sherlock Holmes. Father Brown. The early detectives in Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. And let us not forget the women,' said Agatha. 'Anna Katherine Green is a particular favourite of mine.'

'Ah! That is interesting. *The Leavenworth Case*,' said Chandler.

'You know it?' asked Agatha.

'Crime writing is my interest, too. But English crime is all a little too genteel for my taste. Too parochial. My taste is for something with a sharper edge. Harder crime by harder criminals.'

'No country house murders for you, eh, Mr Chandler?'

'No. Hardly even the English city. I have a feeling that England and English crime is not ready for what I want to do. Maybe the Americans.'

'My father was an American, Mr Chandler, but he loved cricket. In fact, he was captain of the Torquay Cricket Club. I wonder whether the gap between the British and the Americans is quite so wide as you imagine?'

‘Perhaps you are right, Miss Miller. However, I don’t see why the truth of your view should necessarily negate the truth of mine. Perhaps I will put the theory to the test. But never mind that now. Please do not let me delay you. I will wait here and hope to catch Mr Wodehouse if he should come out of the pavilion.’

Agatha watched the back of the young man as he made his way towards the gate in the white paling fence. Raymond Chandler. A name to watch perhaps, though she was not sure she liked what he had said about crime writing. No, crime had to be altogether more genteel in her view. Altogether a more palatable affair. Even murder did not have to appear absolutely brutal.

*

The Long Room, as if by tacit common consent, fell silent as Doyle and Hornung re-entered the pavilion. On the floor, precisely as it had been when they left, lay the crumpled body of Harold Wilde and the incriminating bat at its feet.

‘Well,’ said Doyle. ‘We cannot very well all stand here wondering what to do next. Has anyone called for the Police?’

‘I have, sir.’ It was a girl with striking red hair. Surely, thought Doyle, the woman he had seen when he entered the Long Room on his way to the changing rooms.

‘Good. But tell me, didn’t I see you leaving by the door over there a few minutes before I found Mr Wilde dead?’ he said, pointing towards the door facing the Writing Room. ‘I am certain that I saw a young woman with hair of your colour leaving the room as I came through the Long Room.’

‘That is most likely, sir,’ said the girl, a slight flush suffusing her face as she spoke. ‘I was in here putting the finishing touches to the tea, and I saw you approaching as I did so.’

‘Ah. Very good,’ said Doyle, satisfied with her account and swiftly moving on. ‘Now, do we have everyone here? We need everyone. Players, umpires, groundsmen, pavilion staff, scorers. We must know where everyone was at the time when poor Wilde met his maker.’

‘Excuse me, Sir Arthur.’ It was Mr Bean, one of the umpires. ‘I hope you will pardon the impertinence, Sir Arthur, but do you think that it is really appropriate for you to take charge like this? You are, after all, surely the most likely suspect.’

‘Good Lord, man. You don’t seriously mean to suggest that I did this,’ said Doyle, looking down at Wilde’s body.

‘Far be it from me to suggest anything, Sir Arthur, in definite terms. However, until we know anything to the contrary, we have only your word that it was not you.’

‘And you doubt my word?’ said Doyle, his face reddening as his temper rose.

‘I neither suggest you killed Mr Wilde, nor that you did not, Sir Arthur,’ Bean temporised. ‘I simply say that until we have proof positive we cannot know one way or the other, and that until we do it is surely better that the next steps, whatever they are to be, are directed by a third and neutral party.’

Hornung placed a hand on his brother-in-law’s arm. ‘He is right, Arthur. It is in the interests of us all that we leave this to the Police.’

Chapter 7

Thursday 15th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

It was about twenty minutes later that a black carriage pulled up outside the gates by the Lord's Tavern. From the rear seat of the vehicle two men emerged. The first, tall and thin, a narrow dark moustache shading his upper lip, wore a simple black suit and mackintosh in spite of the heat that was still heavy even at this end of the day. The second he set foot on the pavement, he pressed a well-worn hat on to his head and stuffed his hands into the pockets of his coat, a shapeless garment no doubt used to such mistreatment. He was followed almost instantly by his companion, one Constable Oates. A huge man, Oates unfolded himself from the back seat of the vehicle, making even his tall, suited companion appear slight. He wore the distinctive uniform of the Metropolitan Police, and in his hand he clutched a helmet which he proceeded to place upon his head.

Without a word the two men walked up to the gates and were admitted by the gatekeeper. The shorter of the two men led the way through, observing as he did so, 'We are going to need more men here quickly, Oates. The first thing I want when we reach the pavilion is to check that they did as I told them when the news of the murder came through and locked all the gates so nobody could leave. Then I want you to put a call in to Scotland Yard to tell them to hurry up with the men I requested to guard the gates. I am going to want one man on each entrance to the ground. Nobody must be allowed to enter or leave without my say so. The quicker they can be here the better.'

'Very good, sir.' Oates' face took on the vaguely shocked expression it always wore whenever he needed to speak.

'I assume there is a telephone in the pavilion,' Cough said, turning to face the man at the gate.

'Yes, sir,' the gatekeeper said. 'I know for certain there is one in the Secretary's office.'

'And where is that?'

'First floor, sir. Top of the first flight of the main stairs and on your right hand side.'

'Thank you. So, Oates, as soon as we are inside that is what I want you to do. Find out the number of gates. Make sure they are all secured and place a call to the Yard. Tell them to send enough men to cover all of them. And I want you to reiterate that nobody, but nobody is to leave the ground without my express permission.'

'Very good, sir.'

The two men proceeded past the Lord's Tavern into the deeply shaded area to the rear of the pavilion. Even on the hottest days, this was a place of cool and shade, a refuge from the sun. In all his years with the Metropolitan Police, this was the first time Cough had ever been to Lord's. Thinking, no doubt, of the large open spaces he associated with the home of cricket he had expected the ground to be uniformly light and spacious, and he was therefore somewhat taken aback by the enclosed and dark, even claustrophobic space he now encountered.

The tall and imposing structure of the pavilion, designed by Thomas Verity and scarcely twenty years old, appeared all the taller and the more imposing at these very close quarters. The building would, Cough felt sure, seem very different if approached from the field of play when the full grandeur of the edifice could be taken

in from a distance; when its architectural symmetries and nuances could be appreciated as a whole. From the narrow roadway along which he now walked, accompanied by the large and taciturn Oates, however, the building appeared in a very different light. It could only be digested, as it were, piece by piece. A good metaphor for a criminal investigation there somewhere, Cough thought. No doubt one of the authors he was about to meet—so much he had been informed of before he hurriedly left Scotland Yard—would make something of that, but right now, as he approached the doors giving access to the rear of the pavilion, he did not have the luxury of working it out.

Indeed, even as he completed this incomplete thought, a figure stepped from the doorway and extended a hand of greeting. ‘Good afternoon, Inspector.’

‘Good afternoon, sir.’

‘I am afraid that I did not catch your name properly when I put my telephone call though to Scotland Yard.’ The man’s elocution was as pristine as his hair and attire. In spite of his outward urbanity and calmness however, Cough noticed that the man fiddled seemingly unconsciously with the knot of his tie.

‘It’s Cough, sir. Inspector Cough.’

‘Ah, very good. Frances Eden Henchard. Secretary of the club.’

‘Pleased to meet you, Mr Henchard. I am only sorry it is under such circumstances. And this is Constable Oates,’ said Cough, indicating the burly Police Constable standing obediently behind him.

‘Very pleased to meet you, Constable Oates,’ said Henchard. Again, he fiddled with the knot of his tie, aware that the social niceties of his greeting were necessary, yet also oddly out of place. He did nothing to correct this, however, and simply allowed the awkwardness to hang for a moment in the shadows that lurked

behind the building. 'Well,' he said, 'shall we go in? I am sure you must be keen to make a start.'

'Indeed, sir,' said Cough. 'By all means. I would be grateful first, though, if my constable here could use the telephone. I understand from the officer at the gate that you have one in your office. I need him to place a call to the Yard.'

'Of course, Inspector. Please follow me.'

Without another word, Henchard turned on his heels and led the way into the pavilion. He was wearing, Cough observed, trousers and jacket of the most impeccable neatness. Here was a man who would rarely be at a loss as to how to behave; a man who had reached the highest eminence of one of the most elite of social clubs. The slightly awkward fiddling with the tie struck an awkward note. Cough did not, however, have time to reflect on this. More pressing business demanded his attention.

'If you wait here for a moment, Inspector, I will take Constable Oates to my office and then I will return.' This said, Henchard led Oates up the stairs.

Left to his own devices momentarily, Cough took in his surroundings. Ahead of him were stairs running both up and down. To his left were steps leading downwards to he knew not what, and he made a mental note to look into where these led later. What most caught his eye, however, was the view of the hallowed turf of Lord's itself. This was just visible at eye level through the open doors at the front of the pavilion, leading out onto the lower terrace of the Members' seating.

The seating area and the outfield immediately adjacent to it were crowded with people. Such was human nature, Cough reflected. He had presided over enough cases of violent death to know that very few people could resist the morbid temptation to wait around when there was a corpse in the offing. From where he

stood, the indecipherable hum of their conversation came to him through the open door and wound its way through the corridors of the pavilion. He knew well enough the bent of their chatter; the speculation, some more idle than other, about motive, method and madness that always attached to such crimes.

It was the latter, the insistence that murder was always an act of insanity, that most intrigued him. He had investigated enough cases to know that murder was very rarely an act of insanity. On the contrary, it was, as often as not, the result of a most carefully considered train of thought, meticulously planned and, at least as far as the murderer was concerned, an entirely reasonable, even a justifiable act. The termination of another human life was not something to be undertaken lightly, and Cough always accorded to the perpetrators of the ultimate crime, the respect of believing that they acted rationally. Indeed, he had come to learn that this was always the most effective method of solving the crime. Insanity was irrational, unpredictable, difficult to trace. In a word, as far as the detective's job was concerned, insanity was utterly unhelpful. No, to solve a murder Cough knew, the detective needed to attribute sanity and logic to the act of killing, however perverse it might seem. It was only in unravelling the killer's underlying train of thought that purchase could be gained on the crime and a solution could be reached.

At the moment, however, that solution, that ultimate thread of logic lay in the future. For now, he could deal only with the present and the traces that that murderous logic, that deadly motivation had left in the clues surrounding the scene and in the perpetration of the murder.

He was interrupted in his thoughts by the sound of footsteps approaching. He looked in their direction and saw the Club Secretary returning. 'Very well, Inspector,'

said Henchard. 'Your constable is making his call and will find us once he has finished. I am sure now you would like to see the body.'

'Not right away, sir, please. I would prefer to understand something about the layout of the pavilion first.'

'Very well,' said Henchard. If he felt any surprise at Cough's reaction, he did not show it. 'Please follow me.'

As requested, Cough followed Henchard up the stairs.

The first thing to do was to gain a full sense of his surroundings. The body he knew from the initial reports he had received had been found in the Long Room by the creator of Sherlock Holmes himself, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It would be a mistake, however, to limit his initial investigation to this area of the building. At this stage of his inquiries, the entire pavilion must be his drawing board. The process of detection was always hampered by too early a focus on the specific location of the body. The movement must always be from the general to the particular, not the other way around. What he needed for now was to understand the building and its layout; what was isolated and what connected to what. He needed a mental plan of the space of the crime.

Immediately to his left stood a set of double-glazed doors. Cough pushed the doors open and looked into a well-appointed room. The walls were covered with bookcases and a number of sofas were spread around the floor. Directly ahead of him was a set of stairs, a door at their top and to the right.

'This is the Library, Inspector,' said Henchard, who had taken up a position just behind Cough's right shoulder.

'And the stairs?' asked Cough, extracting a notebook and pencil from the pocket of his coat.

'They lead up to what is known as The Bowlers' Bar.'

'And to nothing else?'

'Nothing else,' the Secretary replied. 'These stairs are the only access. There is a large window and a balcony looking out on to the field, but whatever goes up those stairs must come down them. There is no way out otherwise.'

'And this?' asked Cough, stepping back into the passageway and indicating a door on the opposite side.

'That is the Long Room Bar,' said Henchard.

'And is there any other way into and out of that bar?' asked Cough.

'Yes,' said Henchard. 'A door leads out of the other side of the bar where there is another set of stairs like this one which leads to all floors of the pavilion. There is also a door from the Long Room Bar connecting directly to the Long Room itself.' Cough nodded and drew a few swift lines in his notebook. The initial outlines of a plan of the building, Henchard supposed. Inspector Cough, whatever else he was, was methodical.

The Secretary allowed the detective time to finish what he was doing before speaking again. 'Are you ready, Inspector?' he asked.

'Yes. Thank you, Mr Henchard. Please lead on.'

Having received this permission, the Secretary moved on, heading towards the front of the pavilion

Without a further word, Cough followed the impeccably-dressed Secretary. They came next to another set of glazed double doors. This room backed directly on to the Library, though it seemed that no connecting door ran between them. As befitting a room at the front of the building facing on to the field of play, the frame to

these doors was much more ornate than those of the Library and stood directly opposite to an identical set of doors leading into the legendary Long Room itself.

‘This is the Writing Room,’ Henchard informed him. ‘Members are free to come and sit here whenever they choose during the match and it also affords a fine view of play.’

Cough walked up to the doors and leaned his face towards the glass. Unlike the Library, whose small windows afforded little in the way of light, the Writing Room was all brightness. The room was dominated by a huge plate-glass window which provided a glorious view of the field of play and the sunlight stretched into every corner of the space. Around the lower walls of the room were bookcases holding an array of massive leather-bound books and in the centre of the room stood an expansive leather-topped table. This room, Cough noticed at once, was totally isolated. Only one door led in and out. Like the Bowlers’ Bar. It intrigued him, but there would be time to investigate both of these rooms later on if he needed to. For the moment he reminded himself, his priority was to gain an overview. It was an error, he knew, to become caught up too early in the details of a case of murder. The specifics came later. What he needed for now was an understanding of the array of the broad possibilities. The people. The place. The atmosphere.

From experience he knew that there were things one noticed on first meeting a person, on first seeing a place, on first experiencing an atmosphere that were not possible later. In fact, as familiarity increased and as time progressed, there were essential matters to which one could become increasingly blinded. Capture the initial impressions of the moment, the pure unbiased experience. That was Cough’s way. Keep an open eye, an open ear and an open mind for as long as possible. It was the things that caught the corner of the senses early in an investigation that frequently

turned out to be the most significant. No matter what works of detective fiction might lead people to believe, murders did not happen in hermetically sealed worlds; they always happened in an observable and understandable context. It was this context that Cough always sought to capture in his first minutes on the scene of the crime.

'And only the Members have access to this room?' said Cough continuing his visual survey of the Writing Room.

'Members and their guests only are allowed in the pavilion, Inspector,' said Henchard.

'Except, of course, for the players.'

'Yes, the players, naturally.'

'And the staff.'

'Indeed. The staff, too.'

'Very good, Mr Henchard,' said Cough, turning to face his guide once more.

'Ah, there you are Oates,' he added as the constable returned. 'The men are on their way?'

'Yes, sir,' said Oates.

'Excellent. And now, Mr Henchard,' said the detective, returning his attention to the Secretary, 'I will be needing from you details of everyone present at the match today who would have had access to the pavilion. Members, guests, players and staff.'

'Certainly, Inspector. I will be happy to supply you with a full list.'

'Thank you. And this,' he said, indicating a set of matching double doors on the opposite side of the hallway, 'is the Long Room.'

'Yes,' said Henchard.

Cough added further details to the sketch of the pavilion unfolding on the pages of his notebook.

‘And Mr Wilde’s body was discovered exactly as it is now?’

‘Indeed, Inspector,’ said Henchard. ‘He was found there by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.’

Cough’s face split into an ironic smile. ‘So I understood from your initial call to the Yard, sir. I have Sherlock Holmes himself to contend with. Let’s hope he is on my side.’

Henchard led the way into the Long Room, followed by Cough and behind him the silent Constable Oates. To Cough’s surprise the room was not empty. His entrance into the Long Room had evidently been noticed by two distinct groups of men, all clad in cricket whites. These two groups, gathered at either end of the Long Room, were separated by the stark presence of a prone body, a cricket bat lying by its feet.

‘The players, I presume,’ said Cough. The remark was redundant, he realised, as he took in the array of cricketing whites before him, but some way of taking the conversation forward was necessary.

‘Yes, Inspector,’ said Henchard. ‘The Actors at this end, the Authors at the far end.’

Looking down towards the far end of the room, Cough recognised the famous face of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle looking in his direction. With his signature moustache and striking good looks, Doyle was almost as familiar to the public at large as his fictional creation Sherlock Holmes. Evidently the elder statesman of the group, Doyle was surrounded by his teammates. Ernest Hornung Cough also recognised, but otherwise the Authors team was a mystery to him; a combination, he assumed, of

young up-and-coming writers and the array of lesser-known 'worthies' that always made up the number on such teams.

Of the group at the nearer end of the room, Cough recognised nobody.

'Why have they been allowed to remain here?' asked Cough. There was a note of professional asperity in his voice.

'To be honest, Inspector, it never occurred to me to ask them to leave,' replied Henchard.

'I assume nobody has tampered with the body?'

'Not to my knowledge, Inspector, but as you know, I have not been in the room the entire time.' Henchard flushed, conscious perhaps that he should have known better.

'Well there's no use crying over spilt milk, as they say,' continued Cough. 'I want this room cleared now, though. Each team can go to their own changing room where I shall want them to stay until I give further instructions. Can that be arranged, Mr Henchard?'

'Certainly, Inspector. I shall deal with it right away.' Without further ado the Secretary approached the Actors team and passed on Cough's instructions.

'And you, Oates, I shall want to remain here with the body. You are to make sure that nobody enters the room, and if anyone tries, I shall want to know the full details.'

'Very good, Inspector,' said the constable, moving without further instruction to the centre of the room where he took up a position next to the body of Harold Wilde.

By this time Henchard had also passed Cough's directions on to the Authors and both sets of players were in the process of vacating the Long Room.

'That is much better,' said Cough once the last of the players had left the room. 'The door at the far end, I presume leads on to the other staircase to which you referred?'

'That is correct, Inspector.'

'And it leads to the Authors' changing room?'

'Correct again, Inspector,' said the Secretary.

'Thank you, sir,' said Cough, adding to the sketch in his notebook. His drawing completed for now, he pushed the notebook and pencil back into his pocket 'And now if you please, Mr Henchard, tell me, is that the door to the Long Room Bar?' He pointed, as he spoke, to a door in the centre of the rear wall of the room.

'Yes, Inspector,' said the Secretary.

The door connecting with the Long Room to the Long Room Bar stood open. The detective approached this door and passed through it out of sight. What he saw there did not detain him long, for a moment later he appeared again and stood framed in the doorway, facing the Long Room. To his left and in the centre of the room was Harold Wilde's body. He paused, taking stock.

Having gained a broad understanding of the immediate physical contexts of the Long Room, Cough now concentrated on developing a mental plan of the immediate *mise-en-scène* of the crime. Having seen the different ways in which the crime scene itself could be accessed, the place of the murder itself took on a new significance. Now he knew how the murder scene itself was placed, he could use the physical space of the crime as a point of access. He moved into the heart of the Long Room, silently taking in his surroundings. He scrutinised the area now, acquainting himself with its contours and connections. In the placing of a table or a chair, in the reflection of a particular mirror, in the location of a bookcase or painting,

he had often penetrated the psychological space of an investigation. It was the stage for the murder and defined the murderer's gaze, the murderer's movements, the murderer's actions.

Now that the room was empty, Cough was able to concentrate on the space itself. The impressive distances of the Long Room stretched away from him. Heavily-framed paintings adorned the walls, but the lasting impression of the room was its brightness. A succession of tall windows marched away to Cough's left, each looking out on to the lower Members' seating area and beyond that the hallowed turf. To either end of the Long Room were doorways leading on to passageways that could have provided access or escape for the murderer. Further doors were located at each end of the room on the rear wall.

'Where do the rear doors lead to?' asked Cough, indicating the rear corners of the long Room.

'On to staircases at each end of the pavilion,' said Henchard, who had now joined him. 'These ones lead up to the changing room the Actors' XI are using today.' As he spoke, he indicated the rear door of the room at the end by which they had entered. 'And the ones at the far end lead up to the Authors' changing room.'

Cough nodded his understanding. Without awaiting a reply, he walked towards where PC Oates now stood guard over Wilde's body.

Once there he looked up and down the room, taking in its expanses and distances, its lights and shades. Gaining the overview. 'It was Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was it not, who discovered the body?'

'That is correct, Inspector. He had left the field to go to the changing rooms briefly and discovered the body on his return to the field.'

‘And that, I presume,’ said Cough, indicating the door by which the Authors’ team had left the Long Room, ‘is the door by which he would have exited and entered the room?’

‘I presume so, Inspector,’ said Henchard.

‘Thank you.’ For a moment Cough continued his visual survey of the room, then he crouched down next to Wilde’s body. The feet, next to which lay the cricket bat, were towards the field of play, his bloodied head toward the Long Room Bar. Why would the murder weapon, if that is what the bat indeed was, be at the feet rather than at the head? To Cough’s experienced eyes this detail suggested something too composed. He removed the notebook and pencil from his pocket again and added a few hastily jotted notes to the drawing.

Apart from the pool that had gathered immediately around Harold Wilde’s body, there was no blood. No spatters that would suggest the fatal blows had been struck in the Long Room. But nor was there any trail of blood to suggest it had been brought here after the blows had been struck. It was as if the body had simply been dropped, dead, into the middle of the space.

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In the shady interior of the building, Agatha saw the outlines of three men. Now that the Long Room had emptied of its other occupants there was nobody else to focus upon. One of them wore the unmistakable headwear of the Metropolitan Police Force, the other two it was more difficult to differentiate, except that one seemed still to be wearing his overcoat, in spite of the late afternoon heat.

As she watched, the man in the overcoat made his way to the door of the Long Room and stepped out on to the terrace. For a moment he seemed simply to stare, his gaze unfocused, out into the centre of the ground, but then his eyes settled on her. He looked at her for an instant as if she were the most familiar figure in the world and took a step in her direction before appearing to realise some painful mistake. By now, however, he was somehow committed, and he made his way towards her.

Upon reaching the fence, he spoke. 'I am sorry, miss. I owe you an apology for what you must have thought great rudeness. I was taken aback for a moment. You reminded me so very much of somebody who used to mean a great deal to me, and I am afraid that I rather stared at you.'

'No apology is necessary, sir,' said Agatha.

'My name is Cough,' he continued. 'Inspector Cough. I am in charge of the investigation into the sorry events that have happened here this afternoon. You were, I presume, here watching the match?'

'Indeed, Inspector. And if there is any way that I can assist in your enquiries, I would be only too happy to do so. I have a great interest, you see, in detective fiction, and who knows, I might unknowingly hold the key to your investigation.'

'Indeed you might, miss. Indeed you might,' said Cough, laughing lightly. 'The solution to crimes often comes in the most surprising of shapes and sizes. Please, if there is anything that you think of that you believe might assist us in our investigations, do not hesitate to contact me at Scotland Yard.' And with that he turned away and began making his way back up the steps towards the pavilion.

'Inspector Cough, you said?' said Agatha.

'Yes. Inspector Cough,' he said, turning back to face the young woman.

‘Should I think of anything, Inspector, I will most certainly be in touch.’

‘Very well, Miss,’ he said, and he knew as he heard those words pass his lips that this would not be his last encounter with the young woman.

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‘I think I should like to see the rest of the pavilion now if I may, Mr Henchard,’ Cough said upon re-entering the Long Room. As he spoke to the Secretary, who remained standing near the door connecting the Long Room and the Long Room Bar, Cough saw a glint of red. Something was caught on the bottom of the door frame. ‘I am right behind you, sir,’ he said to Henchard, who had already disappeared back round the corner of the door and into the Long Room Bar. The detective stopped in the doorway and stooped down. Carefully he detached from a splinter at the base of the door frame a thread of red material. Thick material, as if it were from a set of curtains, perhaps. Without another word he pocketed it and moved on. This discovery was a piece of information he did not intend to share with his guide.

*

The tour of the First Floor of the pavilion satisfied Cough as to the location of the changing rooms of the two teams. It made every sense that the Authors would use the stairs to the left as one’s back was to the field of play and that the Actors would use those to the right. The remainder of this floor was occupied by a number of other changing rooms, none of which was in use today, the Members’ Lounge and a

variety of other rooms given over to the administration of the club, including Henchard's personal office. This was located on the first floor landing diagonally opposite to the door of the Actors' changing room.

'Were you in your office at the time of the murder, Mr Henchard?' asked Cough. The two men were in the Library once more, both settled comfortably in armchairs.

'No, Inspector. As it happens, I was not,' replied Henchard, adjusting the knot of his tie.

'Do you mind me asking where you were, sir?'

'Not at all. Not at all. I was taking a short break from my correspondence and I was watching the match from the balcony on the first floor.'

'So, you would not have seen Mr Wilde as he made his way to and from the changing rooms?'

'That is correct, Inspector. When play was interrupted for Mr Wilde and then Sir Arthur to leave the field, I remained on the balcony.'

'Is there anyone who can verify this, sir?' asked Cough, as he jotted down the relevant details.

'I am afraid not, Inspector. I was there alone.'

'Very well, Mr Henchard,' said Cough, adding to the information gathering in his notebook. 'Routine, you understand. But until proven innocent, I must treat everyone as a potential suspect. One of the more unpleasant aspects of my job, sir. Detective work ruins a man's faith in human nature.'

'Of course, Inspector. I understand,' said Henchard, who then led the way up to the second storey of the pavilion. This was dominated by a large roof terrace with banks of white seats and at either end a raised flat area accessible by a further set of

steps where the Members could take refreshments without the need to interrupt their viewing of the match.

‘Would there be any way of ascertaining who, if anyone, was up here at the time of the murder, sir?’ asked Cough.

‘Well, we can ask the staff, of course,’ said Henchard, ‘but my feeling is that it is unlikely they will be able to tell you anything very useful. The players on the field and the spectators are more likely to have seen if there were people up here. Otherwise there would be no way of knowing. Once someone is in the pavilion there are no restrictions on their movements, and anybody could have made their way up here if they so desired.’

‘Thank you, Mr Henchard.’ Cough leaned forward and rested his hand on the iron railings of the balcony. In accordance with his initial instructions as soon as he had received the telephone call at Scotland Yard, nobody had been allowed to leave the grounds, and the spectators attending the match were largely gathered on the outfield in front of the pavilion. ‘I’ll need my men to take statements from everyone who was here today in case they saw anything of significance,’ said Cough. ‘I, in the meantime, will want to see all of the players and the match officials personally. Where would you recommend for me to do so?’

‘The Library would seem eminently suitable, Inspector.’

‘Thank you, Mr Henchard. Then I would be most grateful if it could be made available to me as of now.’

‘Certainly, Inspector. I will ensure that you have everything you need.’

Descending the stairs, Cough recalled the thread of material in his pocket. He would have to ascertain where in the building it might have come from.

Chapter 8

Thursday 15th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, sir,' said Constable Oates, leading the eminent doctor into the Library.

'Sir Arthur,' said Cough, rising from the sofa on which he was sitting. 'Please take a seat.' As he spoke, Cough indicated a second sofa opposite to the one on which he was installed. 'Thank you, Oates. If you could please ensure that Mister Hornung is ready to see me next.' As soon as the door had closed behind Constable Oates, the detective returned his attention to Doyle. 'My name is Inspector Cough of Scotland Yard.'

'Thank you, Inspector,' said Doyle. He crossed the room and settled into the cushions of the sofa the detective had indicated.

'You will find me, I trust, a little more open-minded and imaginative than your Inspector Lestrade,' said Cough.

'I hope so, Inspector. I am most anxious to see this murder solved as soon as possible. Most unpleasant.'

'Indeed, Sir Arthur. Outside of the pages of a detective story, murder is an unsanitary business.'

'And you may depend on me, I assure you, to assist you in any way I can.'

'I do not doubt it, Sir Arthur,' said Cough. 'Cigarette?'

'Thank you, Inspector.' Doyle helped himself to a cigarette from the simple but expensive case Cough proffered to him and lit it from the match the detective now struck against the rough strip of his vesta box.

'Tell me about your relationship with Mr Wilde.'

'Well,' said Doyle, 'I did not know the man that well. Shall we simply say that on the occasions when we have met, we did not see eye to eye.'

Cough was silent for a moment and shifted slightly to make himself more comfortable. 'Enough so to want to kill him?' he asked.

'No, Inspector. Not so much,' replied Doyle. 'And certainly not enough to make me sufficiently foolish to do the deed with my own bat and to leave it beside the body for all to see in the middle of the Long Room.'

'Very well, Sir Arthur. Then perhaps you could tell me from your perspective what happened this afternoon.'

'Of course. Wilde had asked permission to leave the field to answer a call of nature, you understand. While he was gone, I felt the same need myself, so I also left the field of play.'

'Was the interruption likely to have much of an effect on the match?'

'No, Inspector. The outcome of the match was already a foregone conclusion. The Actors had already won, but we had agreed to play on to make a full day of it. Wilde was on 48 not out and fair set for his 50, and there seems no particular likelihood that our shoddy performance was likely to improve.'

'Once you left the field, did you encounter Mr Wilde alive?'

'No. I didn't see him when I went into the pavilion. It was not until I was heading back to rejoin the match that I came across his body in the middle of the

Long Room.' Doyle looked Cough candidly in the eye as he spoke and proceeded to draw deeply on his cigarette.

'And how much time would you estimate elapsed between you leaving the field and finding the body?'

'Five minutes at the most,' said the peer.

Cough nodded and said, 'Please go on, Sir Arthur. What happened as you were leaving the field of play?'

'I ran over the outfield and up the steps of the lower terrace.'

'Did you see anyone as you did so?'

'I did, as it happens,' said Doyle. 'Milne was up on the roof terrace of the pavilion. He'd gone off a short while earlier for some reason or other. I am not quite certain why. Perhaps it was just to allow everyone a share of the game.'

'And how did Mr Milne appear to you, sir, when you saw him up on the roof terrace?'

'Hard to say,' said Doyle after a moment's reflection. 'A little distracted, possibly.'

'Distracted in what way, Sir Arthur?' asked Cough. 'Preoccupied? Anxious? Inattentive?'

'I did not pay him too much attention, really. However, as you come to mention it, I would say that he seemed preoccupied. As if he had something on his mind. What that could be, of course, I could not say.'

So, the young man up on the roof terrace had seemed preoccupied. He would have to see about this when he spoke to Mr Milne himself. Cough made a mental note and proceeded.

'But he was up there alone?'

Doyle looked away for a moment, reflecting on the question. 'As far as I could observe, yes.'

'Thank you, Sir Arthur. And once you entered the pavilion?'

'I saw just one person,' said the peer. 'In fact, let me be precise; I saw the back of a young woman. One of the serving staff, I presume from the fact that she was wearing a white apron. Fine red hair, she had.'

'Did you notice anything else about her?'

'No, nothing.'

Cough was busy as Doyle spoke, adding to the growing body of notes in his small, neat hand in a notebook. The young woman with the red hair would have to be traced and spoken to.

Doyle waited, as if to allow him to catch up. 'Shall I proceed?' he asked.

'Yes. Please do, Sir Arthur. Don't mind me. I like to take notes as I work. I find it of inestimable value to capture the impressions of the moment. I will ask if I wish you to slow down or to repeat anything.'

'Very well,' said the peer. 'After I had entered the Long Room, I made my way over to the door to the far left of the room, to the left of the Long Room Bar.'

'The left as it faces a man entering from the field of play?'

'Yes. That door leads on to the stairs and straight up to the changing room we were using. I met nobody on my travels.' Cough nodded. The information concurred with what he had been told by Henchard, the Club Secretary.

'Were there no "facilities" nearer to the field of play than those in the Authors' changing room, Sir Arthur? I am sorry to be indiscreet, but such details are important.'

'Indeed, Inspector. There may well have been closer "facilities", as you call them, but in truth it never occurred to me. I had simply decided to go to the changing room.'

'Very well, Sir Arthur.' Cough rose slightly from his seat and leant forward to crush out the stub of his cigarette. Smoke coiled in a shaft of sunlight between the two men. 'And how long would you say, Sir Arthur, that you were in there?'

'As I said, Inspector, it cannot have been more than five minutes,' said Doyle, a slight reddening visible on his cheeks.

'Thank you,' said Cough. 'And did you notice that your bat had gone missing?'

'No, Inspector. I didn't go to my kit bag. I had no reason to.'

'And there was no sign that anyone else might have been in the room whilst you were on the field of play?'

'Nothing that I noticed, Inspector. But then, I was not looking.'

'Very well, Sir Arthur. Of course. What happened then?'

'I returned to the field of play by exactly the same route, and when I re-entered the Long Room, I saw Wilde's body. I knew at once that something was wrong.'

'And what did you do when you saw him there?'

'Well, I'm a medical man as you may know.'

'Yes, Sir Arthur, I am aware of that. There can hardly be a man, woman or child in the nation who does not know it.'

'Sadly,' said Doyle, 'I believe you are right. Sherlock Holmes has given me a certain notoriety, as if I were Dr Watson himself.' He paused a moment, visibly fighting down his personal irritation. 'I am sorry, Inspector. Not your fault, but you have touched upon a particular raw nerve of mine.'

‘Please do not apologise, Sir Arthur,’ said Cough, noting nonetheless the peer’s reaction. ‘I understand that fame must come with its disadvantages as well as its pleasures. I am sorry to have caused you frustration.’

‘Quite alright. Quite alright,’ said Doyle. ‘Now, where was I?’

‘You had just re-entered the Long Room,’ Cough prompted him, ‘and had discovered Wilde’s body.’

‘Ah yes,’ said Doyle. ‘There was no-one else in the room. The tables had all been set out ready for after the match, and there was a separate table with bottles of wine and beer. Wilde was lying in the middle of the room, face down. I knew it for him at once. His hair, you know. Those curly locks of his are instantly recognisable.’

Cough nodded his understanding. ‘Please go on, Sir Arthur.’

‘Well, as I said, I’m a medical man, and as soon as I saw Wilde’s body, I ran to him to see what I could do for the poor fellow. I didn’t like the man, but when it comes to treating a patient ... Hippocratic oath, you know?’

‘And what did you discover?’ asked Cough.

‘Well, I knew at once the man was stone dead. I checked several times for a pulse, but there was nothing, and he was losing a substantial amount of blood from a wound to the head.’

‘Was losing, not had lost?’

‘Yes.’

‘Whatever had happened to him, then, was very recent?’

‘I would say so, yes.’

‘And the wound. What kind of wound was it, in your opinion?’

Doyle reflected for a moment before committing himself. 'The extent of the wound was not obvious at once because of his hair, but the flattening of the rear of the skull indicated that he had been severely beaten on the back of the head.'

'A single blow, in your opinion, Sir Arthur?'

'Oh no,' said Doyle. 'Whoever attacked Wilde must have hit him repeatedly with a heavy blunt object.'

'Your bat?'

'Yes, Inspector. At least I would presume so. It was the first thing I saw, lying on the floor next to Wilde's feet.'

'Very well. Let us assume so for now,' said Cough.

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A few minutes after Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had left the Library, Inspector Cough rose from his seat. Well, he certainly had plenty to consider now. He felt the need for some fresh air and some time alone with his thoughts. He stubbed out the cigarette he had been smoking and left the room.

A second or two after the door had fallen to, a red-haired head poked cautiously around the door to the Bowlers' Bar. Fear was written across her face. However, content that the Library was now empty, the girl emerged at the top of the stairs that connected the two rooms. There was nothing for it but to take the risk, otherwise she would be stuck where she was indefinitely. She ran down the stairs towards the door of the Library. Like Inspector Cough, she felt the need for some fresh air. She had only just reached the bottom of the stairs, however, when the Inspector returned to the room in search of his vesta case.

They both stood stock still, taken by surprise by the unexpected encounter.

Cough was the first to speak. 'Can I help you, miss?' he asked. 'You seem to be in something of a hurry.'

'I have been up in the Bowlers' Bar,' the young woman replied. 'Cleaning and making sure that the room is well stocked. There are several items needed and I have a lot of work to do before I am finished for the day.'

'And you were unaware that there was anybody in the Library?'

'In the Library, sir? Indeed. This is the first I knew of it. I have been occupied upstairs for the best part of half an hour.'

Cough's expression was neutral as he proceeded. He had been in the room only for about twenty minutes himself and so he had no means of disproving the young woman's statement. Her red hair, however, gave him pause. This, surely, was the girl to whom Sir Arthur had referred. It was unlikely that such another was also working in the pavilion today. 'Tell me,' he said, 'have you been working in the Long Room today?'

'I have, sir,' she replied.

'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle has told me that he saw a young woman matching your description leaving the Long Room just a few minutes before the body of Mr Wilde was discovered there. Would that have been you?'

'Oh yes, sir.' Her assent was readily given.

'And there is nobody else on the staff for whom you might be mistaken?'

The young woman smiled at Cough and took her fine red hair in her hands. 'There are not many of us, Inspector, who are blessed with hair like mine.'

'Indeed. Indeed,' said Cough, returning her smile. 'Were you alone as you laid out the tea in the Long Room?'

‘Yes. I was working on my own.’

‘And nobody else entered the room?’

‘Not while I was in there myself, Inspector. I was not there all the time though, of course. I had to go to and from the kitchens downstairs to carry up the food.’

‘Yes, of course,’ said Cough. ‘But you were in the room when Mr Wilde came into the pavilion?’

‘Yes, I was, sir. He came through a few minutes before I saw Sir Arthur leaving the field.’

‘And how did Mr Wilde appear to you? Was he at his ease?’

‘It is hard to say, sir. He went through very quickly. But I would say it was as if he had some important purpose in mind. He was in a hurry, as if he had to be somewhere. I don’t believe he even noticed me there.’ Cough pulled his notebook from his pocket and began to ruffle the pages thoughtfully.

‘Where did he go?’ asked Cough.

‘Straight to the doors the lead on to the staircase out there, sir,’ she said, indicating the stairs visible through the open door of the Library. ‘I don’t know where he actually went though, Inspector. Once he had passed through the Long Room he was out of sight.’

For a moment neither spoke. All that could be heard was the ticking of the Library clock.

‘Were you in there for long, Miss...’ Cough paused for her to supply her name.

‘Gooch, sir. Madeleine Gooch.’

‘Thank you, Miss Gooch.’ He entered her name in his notebook.

‘It must have been nearly half an hour, Inspector,’ she replied. ‘I was on my own and there was plenty to be done.’

‘And you saw nobody else while you were working there?’

‘Nobody, sir. The first person I saw was poor Mr Wilde, as I told you, as I was setting out the things for the players’ tea. Then I saw Sir Arthur approaching as I finished my work. Otherwise I saw nobody.’

The young woman made a favourable impression on Cough. There was an edge of nervousness to her manner to be sure, but then that was not surprising under the circumstances. Otherwise her answers were clear and precise.

‘And once you had left the Long Room?’

‘I commenced the job that I have just finished, Inspector. In the Bowlers’ Bar. It has taken much longer than normal, being interrupted by the death of Mr Wilde. I didn’t want to sit around idle while we were instructed to remain on the ground, and so I decided to return to the Bowlers’ Bar and finish my work.’

‘Very well. Thank you, Miss Gooch.’

‘Will that be all, sir?’

‘I believe so for now, yes,’ said Cough. He could see no reason to continue the interview at this stage, and he could always interview her again if necessary.

‘Your details, of course, are available should I need them, and you are to remain on the premises until instructed you may leave.’

‘Certainly, Inspector,’ she said, and without further word left the room.

*

As we have already had occasion to observe, Constable Oates was a stolidly reliable member of the Force. His years of service in the Metropolitan Constabulary had taught him the undesirability of using the imagination. Imagination was a

characteristic required of a detective but frowned upon in a mere constable. His role, and he was perfectly happy to accept it, was the role of the general factotum. When a body was needed to stand guard patiently for hours on end at a specified door, no more patient guard could be found than P.C. Oates. If a suspect needed to be chased, no more energetic a runner and more enthusiastic a criminal-apprehender could be desired than P.C. Oates. If the sobering “Allo, ‘allo-what-‘ave-we-‘ere-then” of the guardian of the peace was needed, no more imposing and upright a ‘what-‘ave-we-‘ere’er could be called upon than P.C. Oates.

And so when, later that day, having held his initial interviews with Mr Ernest Hornung, Mr P.G. Wodehouse and a steady stream of other authors and actors, Inspector Cough asked Constable Oates to scour the balcony and roof terrace areas at the top of the pavilion for potential evidence, he had no doubt in his mind that the job would be thoroughly and efficiently done. He had sent Oates there to see whether any trace remained to indicate the actions and movements of Mr. A.A. Milne, to whose presence on the upper levels of the pavilion Cough had been alerted by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and others.

As Cough emerged from the Old Library after his latest witness interview, he nearly bumped into Constable Oates returning to make his report.

‘Ah! Oates,’ said Cough. ‘You were looking for me, I presume.’

‘Yes, sir.’

If he expected further information to be volunteered, Cough was destined for disappointment. P.C. Oates remained silent, waiting it seemed for permission to continue.

‘Did you have anything you wished to say to me?’ asked Cough.

‘Yes, sir.’

Still, Cough was to discover, he had missed to mark. P.C. Oates said no more.

‘And what is it you wished to say?’

Permission thus granted to speak Constable Oates proceeded. ‘I have conducted as requested an investigation of the balcony and roof terrace areas at the top of the pavilion, sir.’

‘And what have you found?’ asked Cough, attuned now to his role in this particular conversation.

‘Evidence, sir, that somebody has been on the roof-top terrace at the western end of the building.’

‘The western end?’ said Cough.

‘Yes, sir. The end above the Writing Room and the Actors’ changing room.’

‘Mr Milne?’

‘I couldn’t say for certain, sir.’

Once again, Cough realised that he bore sole responsibility for the direction of the conversation.

‘Tell me precisely, constable. What have you found?’

‘Ash, sir.’

‘Ash?’

‘Yes, sir. Cigar ash.’

This was the first additional information P.C. Oates had offered and Cough was pleased to note progress.

‘Tell me about this cigar ash, constable.’

It was evidently the right note at last, and it elicited from the taciturn Oates a positively expansive response.

‘There is evidence, sir, that somebody...’

‘Who may or may not be Mr Milne?’

‘As you say, sir, who may or may not be Mr Milne. There is evidence that the somebody or perhaps somebodies in question, whether Mr Milne or not, smoked two cigars whilst at the top of the pavilion.’

Cough fell silent. He appeared to be scrutinising in depth a painting hanging on the opposite side of the hallway. His eyes were fixed and narrowly focused. After several moments ruminating on the information Oates had given him, he looked back to the constable who was standing quite at ease awaiting his superior’s next move. Years in the Metropolitan Constabulary had made Oates used to such prolonged breaks in conversation and he displayed no sign of discomfort.

‘Tell me more about the cigars. Were the two cigar butts found in the same spot?’ said Cough.

‘No, sir. That is a potential area of interest. One of the cigars had been smoked by somebody seated towards the front of the balcony area.’

‘But that is nowhere near the spot where Sir Arthur says he saw Mr Milne when he left the field. He was quite definite that Mr Milne was on the roof terrace.’

‘That’s right, sir.’

‘And yet Sir Arthur is equally clear that it was Mr Milne and Mr Milne alone who he saw as he left the field of play. Well, well.’ Cough gazed at the painting he had been looking at a few moments before. The depths of the canvas seemed to provide him with the space he needed to commune with his thoughts. ‘Well, there may be nothing in that after all, Oates. Sir Arthur may simply be mistaken. Even great men like Sir Arthur are only humans, after all. It’s worth bearing in mind, though.’

'Yes, sir,' said Oates.

'Tell me about the other ash you found.'

'It was from a cigar that had been consumed as the smoker walked up and down on the terrace area.'

'Is the whole of the roof terrace visible from the field of play?' asked Cough.

'From the majority of the field, certainly,' said Oates. 'However, I would imagine that for a player approaching the pavilion that the rear of the terrace would not be seen.'

'Let's remember that,' said Cough. 'So, it's entirely possible that Doyle could have seen Milne but not someone else at the rear of the terrace. So when we think about this smoker or smokers, we have to consider that a second person might have been present on top of the pavilion who was either invisible to or simply unobserved by Sir Arthur. What can we ascertain about him or them from what you found?'

'The smoker of the first cigar in question seems to have fallen into some kind of pattern, sir, walking up and down. The ash is distributed at various points along the path the smoker, whether Mr Milne or not, took up and down the roof terrace. The second cigar was smoked in one place on the balcony, I would assume whilst the smoker was seated.'

'And the cigars themselves. Do we know anything about them? A brand?'

'Yes, sir. I found the butts of both cigars. Henry Clays.'

'It should be easy enough to establish whether these cigars were Mr Milne's.'

'It should, sir,' said Oates.

'And Oates.'

'Yes, sir?'

'There is one more thing. When Mr Henchard first showed me round the ground floor of the pavilion, I found this thread of material caught in the doorframe of the Long Room Bar. I don't suppose you have seen any material similar to it anywhere?'

Oates took the thread and looked at it closely. 'From curtains, sir?'

'That is possible, Oates.'

Oates reflected for a moment, but the shake of his head showed that he had seen no such thing.

'Well, never mind Oates, but keep your eyes out and tell me should you find anything promising.'

*

'Milne's cigar ash. What of it?' asked Doyle as, seated an hour later in the Members' Bar, he spoke for a second time with Inspector Cough. A double measure of Laphroig and a steaming cup of black coffee (the latter, for Cough, being the only beverage he allowed himself whilst on duty) stood between the two men on a low table.

'Come, Sir Arthur. Surely after Holmes's legendary monograph on the subject of tobacco ash and its importance in the detection of crime you cannot need me to explain.'

'There is a world of difference, Inspector, between fact and fiction.'

'Not so much, Sir Arthur, as you might wish or suppose.'

Doyle laughed ruefully. 'You are right, of course. The reading public at large seems incapable of accepting that Holmes does not exist. Every day I receive letters to the great detective requesting his assistance in solving the most mind-boggling array of crimes and bizarre situations. They refuse to believe that I am not Dr Watson himself. 221B Baker Street does not even exist, but does this deter them? Most certainly not. The imagined address is no more to their minds than an elaborate blind to maintain Holmes' and Watson's true identities.'

'And do they not have a fair point, Sir Arthur? You are, after all, Holmes' faithful chronicler. A medical man. A hunter. A sportsman.'

'Am I to be reduced, then, to the role of a fictional literary accountant?' Doyle sucked angrily at his moustache.

'Elevated some might say, Sir Arthur. Literary adulation is not so easily achieved. Besides, you have done other things to encourage the idea of your status as a real detective.'

'The Edalji case,' said Doyle.

'Amongst others, yes,' continued Cough. 'And your establishment of The Crimes Club. Both of these things have done much to convince the public at large of the reality of Holmes. And who is to say that they are wrong? Sometimes a fictional character can develop such a life of his or her own that they may attain for their readers the status of reality. It would not, to go back to my original example, be so surprising a thing if a monograph on the subject of tobacco ash and detection were actually to exist.'

'But that Holmes is real, and that Watson is nothing more than a thinly-veiled *alter ego* for me?'

'There are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy, Sir Arthur,' said Cough. One of the things that frequently surprised those who did not know him was Cough's easy familiarity with the classics of literature.

For a moment the two men sat in silence. Doyle nodded as if in assent. He swirled his whisky and water, took a mouthful and then proffered Cough a cigarette. The detective took one from the impeccable ranks in the engraved silver case, nodding his thanks. His professional ethics forbade the consumption of alcohol but he did not extend the same embargo to tobacco.

Doyle leant back in his seat and massaged his eyes.

'Well, let that be as it may,' said Doyle. 'I dare say you may be correct. Perhaps writing about crime has a pleasure and a hold on reality that we writers do not fully appreciate. What do you need to know?'

'I need to know some more details about what you saw as you left the field of play, Sir Arthur,' said Cough. 'You have told me that you saw Mr Milne on the roof terrace at the top of the pavilion. The terrace above the Actors' changing room.'

'That is correct,' confirmed Doyle.

'He was not seated?' asked Cough.

Doyle contemplated for a moment. 'No, certainly not,' he said. 'When I began to walk off the field, he was standing on the roof terrace to the right as I looked in his direction. He was certainly not on the balcony, and he certainly was not seated.'

'You told me earlier that he seemed a little distracted, you thought.'

'Yes. He seemed rather restless and he was pacing up and down, looking at his wristwatch.'

'And you are certain that there was nobody else on the balcony or anywhere else on the top level of the pavilion?'

'Certain is a strong word and means many things. I am certain I did not see anybody, but that is not to say that there was nobody there for me to see. I am sure, however, that Milne was the only person I was aware of on top of the pavilion.'

'So, it is possible that somebody else was on top of the pavilion at the same time?'

'It is possible, Inspector. I could not say absolutely for certain that there was nobody else there,' said Doyle.

Cough took his notebook from his pocket and jotted a few more brief notes. He seemed lost in his own reflections for a moment and then continued. 'At first, when he was on the roof terrace, was Mr Milne visible to you?'

'Not at first, no,' said Doyle. 'It was only as I began to walk towards the pavilion that he came into sight, walking towards the front of the building.'

'The rear of the roof terrace is not visible from the field of play, then?' asked Cough.

'Not from all areas of the field, no,' confirmed Doyle.

'It is possible, then, that a companion may have been with Milne unbeknownst to you?'

'As I just told you, Inspector, I cannot say to an absolute certainty that nobody else was up there with Mr Milne,' said Doyle. 'All I can confirm is that from the moment I became aware of him on the roof terrace. I saw nobody else with him.'

'Thank you, Sir Arthur,' said Cough. 'And there is nothing more you can tell me about Mr Milne's movements?'

'Nothing, Inspector. As soon as I passed through the gate on to the lower terrace of the pavilion he was out of sight. All I could say is that I believe he was smoking a cigar.'

'Was Mr Milne a heavy smoker, sir?'

'No. I would not say he was a heavy smoker. I do not know him that well, you understand, but I do not believe he was a serious addict of the vile weed.'

'Was he likely,' Cough asked, 'to smoke one cigar fast on the heels of another?'

'I would not have said so, no,' said Doyle.

*

It was not until some twenty minutes or so after his latest conversation with Doyle that Cough entered the Library once more. He had sent the ever-efficient P.C. Oates to summon Mr Milne.

The time between the conclusion of his last interview and the present, he had spent investigating P.C. Oates' report about the cigar ash on the pavilion balcony and on the roof terrace. He had found the situation precisely as the constable had reported. What Oates lacked in imagination, he more than made up for in accuracy of observation. There was indeed evidence that two Henry Clays had been smoked in different parts of the roof-top area of the pavilion. This he had established within a matter of moments, and he had spent the remainder of his time in a combination of reflecting upon the state of affairs as it appeared to him at the moment, in looking for tangible evidence to demonstrate the presence of a second individual on the roof-top area, and finally in ascertaining what could and could not be seen of the upper areas of the pavilion from the wicket and from the path Doyle must have followed as he approached the building. All was just as Sir Arthur had said.

His search for evidence of a second man on the balcony had revealed nothing new either. Other than the detritus of the two cigars he found nothing that could prove either way whether there had been a second person up there, and it was certainly not possible to ascertain whether the two cigars had been consumed at or around the same time. Perhaps more information about this would be forthcoming when he spoke to Mr Milne himself.

If, of course, Milne had had a companion, beknownst or unbeknownst to him, on the top of the pavilion, this might well be of the utmost importance. He needed also to find something or somebody that could confirm the movements of Doyle and the unfortunate Harold Wilde within the pavilion at around the same time. There was the information he had received from Madeleine Gooch, of course, but she provided evidence only of the briefest of sightings of both men.

The door of the Library opened and Oates entered, but his face did not wear its customary placid expression. Concern was an emotion to which, Cough would have said, Oates was an almost total stranger. Now, however, concern was writ plain and large across his features. 'I cannot find him, sir,' said Oates. 'It seems as if Mr Milne has somehow managed to leave the ground.'

'Damn it, Oates. I gave the most explicit orders that all gates were to be manned and that nobody was to leave without my express instructions. Now, it seems, one of the primary witnesses has been allowed to escape from under our noses.'

'I'm sorry, sir. Yes, sir,' said Oates.

'Ah! It is not your fault Oates,' said Cough, tugging in frustration at the cuffs of his coat. 'We have at least his whereabouts documented, I suppose?'

'Yes, sir. I took the names and addresses of all of the players myself and have them here.' He accompanied his words by tapping smartly on the pocket of his jacket where could be seen the outlines of a substantial notebook.

'Very well. In which case, we will have to see him tomorrow. I want him here, though. It will be much better to see him here than at the Yard or anywhere else.'

*

Sitting back at his desk the man looked at the diagram he had just drawn. Yes, it was accurate enough. There would be no doubt where this was. He pulled back the cuffs of his shirt as he waited a moment for the ink to dry and then drew a neat cross in the middle of the diagram with the letters H.W. next to it.

It only wanted one thing more. Sow the seed of fear. Make the man feel his danger. In neat capitals he wrote the stark question beneath the diagram.

That would do. He folded his handiwork neatly and slid it into an envelope. He recharged the pen with ink then addressed the envelope before placing it next to two others, written in the same neat capitals. They would never trace the writing. Printed letters always gave away so much less of the individuality of a writer. And the stationery? Well that you could find in the writing room of every half-respectable hotel in the country. No, they would not trace him that way.

He had done what he could do. The efficiency of the British postal service would do the rest.

Tomorrow's breakfast would not be a comfortable affair for Mr A.A.Milne.

Chapter 9

Friday 16th August 1907

Pall Mall Club

It was scarcely eight o'clock as Doyle and Wodehouse sat down opposite one another in the breakfast room of the Pall Mall Club. Neither man could face eating, but two cups of coffee stood steaming before them. On the table also were two pieces of paper, identical in every respect. Each bore the same watermark; the kind of paper that was to be found in a hundred hotels across London and the home Counties. Each carried the identical message.

To kill Harold Wide with a bat a
Man must be as mad as a hatter,
But when Wodehouse toils
Writing stories as Doyle's
The truth doesn't very much matter.

Now please await further instruction
Don't engage in what Holmes calls deduction
Do not be too bold
Just do as you're told
That way we'll avoid more destruction.

You may say that the eagle has landed,

You can solve any crime single-handed,
 But the power is mine,
 So look out for a line
 In tonight's first imprint *Evening Standard*.

'Really Doyle,' said Wodehouse as the two men sat facing each other. Is that the best he can do? Why, I'll match him a rhyme here and now. I'll out-verse this blackguard, whoever he is, any day of the week,' continued Wodehouse. 'I'll show him what his threats are worth:

To write such a note as this a
 Man must be mad, or must miss a
 Link in his head
 For his mind is quite dead
 And he needs a hard smack in the kisser.

When he imposes so firm an injunction
 There's only one worthy conjunction –
 Not 'as', 'so' or 'when'
 Or 'however' or 'then'
 For him only 'whatever' will function.

Purchase the *Standard* as instructed,
 That much we have ably deducted.
 The paper is central

It's quite elemental

To see how this plot is constructed.

'Very good, Plum,' said Doyle. 'If all we needed to solve this problem were your verbal dexterity, I have no doubt that we would be clear of our dilemma in no time. But what are we to make of these notes?' he said. 'It seems clear, even though we decided long ago to proceed no further with the idea of you writing further Holmes stories, that whoever wrote this letter somehow overheard or has become aware of the conversation we had in Farnham. Furthermore, they believe that our putative scheme actually came to fruition.'

'So it seems,' said Wodehouse. 'And frankly, our decision not to proceed with any potential deception very little matters.'

'Precisely so,' said Doyle. 'The suggestion alone that Holmes is not all my own work would be sufficient and more than sufficient to damage my reputation irreparably. There would be national outrage.'

'We must presume, therefore,' said Wodehouse, 'that the author of these verses, and I use the word in its broadest sense, does not intend this to be his final communication. This is merely an initial shot across our bows.'

'A shot that we must answer with all of our wits about us,' said Doyle.

'What more do we have to depend upon than our wits?' said Wodehouse.

'Our wits are all very well and good, Plum, but I wish to goodness there were some way of our knowing who had sent these notes,' said Doyle, twisting his napkin ferociously as he spoke.

'You have no thoughts on that subject, Arthur?'

'Honestly, none,' said Doyle. He looked disconsolately at Wodehouse. There was more colour in his face, however, and his appetite was by now returning. He reached for a slice of toast and the butter. 'I racked my brains all the way here from Norwood, and I can think of nobody. Thank heavens that Touie was not yet awake and I did not need to dissemble for her sake. I fear it would seriously affect her health were she to know of this.'

'In which case, Arthur, we must move quickly. Like you, I can think of nobody. I have run over and over in my mind the names of the players on that day in Farnham, and none of them appears to me to be likely to have done this. As for who might have overheard some or all of our conversation in the Bat and Ball, however? Well, who knows who was in the bar and the vicinity that night.'

'So what means do we have at our disposal?'

'We could go at once to Inspector Cough,' suggested Wodehouse.

'A solution to which I do not wish just yet to resort,' said Doyle without hesitation. 'If there is any way of avoiding a public scandal over this, then I would prefer to do so. I would prefer not to go to him until we have at least tried some other means to avoid publicity.'

'Very well,' said Wodehouse. 'We shall try using our words, then, Arthur. We have at least between us the mastery of those.'

'You are right, Plum' said Doyle, replacing his mangled napkin on the table. 'As two writers, verbal dexterity shall be our first line of defence. Words and wits to be followed up with a dash of action if necessary. That has always been good enough as a method for Holmes.'

'And Auguste Dupin, M. Lecoq, Rouletabille, Sergeant Cuff and the rest,' said Wodehouse. 'We shall be in very good literary company. It seems to me that wit is

the better part of discretion and that good words make up for the rest. Wit lies at the very heart of all the best detective stories. Nobody knows that better than you do, Arthur. Holmes' greatest virtue, it seems to me, is that whilst he always retains a healthy respect for crime, he never forgets that at some level he is participating in a game or playing a role. However deadly serious the game may be, it is nevertheless always a game.'

'So, this situation that we face is a game?'

'A game of hazard,' said Wodehouse, reaching for his coffee. 'We must accord it respect, but if we forget that we are involved in a game, then we will lose our ability to control our own destinies. As long as we remember that it is a game, we are players; we are able to fulfil an active role. As soon as we cease to see it as a game we forfeit our part and become simply devices in a plot; become the 'done to' rather than the 'do-ers'.

'And so?' asked Doyle.

'And so,' continued Wodehouse, 'we match each move of the writer of these letters with a move of our own. For every limerick he writes, we must match one of our own. It is the way the game works.'

Doyle fixed his gaze for a moment on the rack of toast that stood between them. 'If this were a detective story,' he said at last, picking up on Wodehouse's lead, 'we would deflect narrative with a counter-narrative. Is that what you are saying?'

'Precisely, Arthur,' said Wodehouse. 'As the writers that we are, we must never allow a twist in the tale to stand in the way of a good story.'

'And today's *Evening Standard*...'

'As our correspondent so subtly indicates.'

'...will contain the details of what we must do next,' concluded Doyle.

'And so, until then,' said Wodehouse, 'we must bide our time.'

Chapter 10

Friday 16th August 1907

Thames Embankment

The new day had dawned with all the bright promise of its predecessor. Harold Wilde may be dead, but the world continued to turn. In fact, if anything the murder of the day before and the dramatic discovery of the famous actor's body in the Long Room accorded this morning an excitement for Agatha that it would not otherwise have had.

As soon as they had breakfasted in the shabby but respectable dining room of their hotel, she had cajoled Monty into heading out for a walk. 'To clear the head,' as Agatha had put it.

The morning sun glinted on the surface of the Thames and the air had a freshness that would not last long on what would be another hot day in the city. Agatha leant against the railings on the Victoria Embankment watching in silence as the barges and other craft on the river moved sedately up and downstream as if invisibly impelled by some submerged hand. A gentle river breeze ruffled the white linen of her skirts and tugged gently at the brim of her hat.

Beside her stood Monty. Nothing save the tie, a bolder check today instead of yesterday's conservative stripe, indicated that he had changed his clothes. He said nothing to his sister, but simply bided his time, enjoying the coolness of the early morning and the smell of the river. He knew better than to disturb Agatha when she was immersed in thought. Not that she would be angry. She was far from being the irascible type; it was simply that once she descended into thought, she became

somehow impenetrable. Nothing, it seemed (at least nothing that Monty had ever found) could break into the workings of her mind. All of her senses seemed somehow deadened until she was ready to emerge once more into the world around her.

And so the barges chugged past, the trams and carriages worked their steady way along the Embankment, and the sun, climbing by imperceptible degrees into the clear blue of the sky, sucked up the pleasant coolness of the early morning, building towards what would soon become a stifling heat.

Monty was peacefully regarding the opposite bank and the southern stretches of the city looking back at him when Agatha spoke at last.

'I cannot banish yesterday from my mind, Monty. I have tried, but it will not do. There is a story behind what happened at Lord's waiting to be discovered, and I have a part to play in it. I am certain that I do.'

'Come along, Agatha,' Monty replied. 'The fact of your presence at the match does not make you a central character in some kind of fiction of your own making.'

'No, Monty. You are wrong. That is precisely what my presence there yesterday does. I was there at Lord's when poor Mr Wilde was killed and when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle found himself thrown into the midst of a real-life murder investigation. I was there when young Mr Chandler walked by and shared with me his extraordinary notions about detective fiction, the thought of which make me shudder even now, and when the inspector from Scotland Yard emerged from the pavilion. You heard the conversation that I had with Sir Arthur and his brother-in-law Mr Hornung! No, I must repeat again, Monty, that you are wrong. I am involved. I am a part of the very fabric of this crime and its investigation. I feel a sense of purpose,

as if I were somehow called to the world of crime, and I will play my part in its solution.'

Monty looked his sister in the face. 'So you are all of a sudden some kind of detective?' he asked.

'If you like,' Agatha replied, 'yes. I am a detective. Look, here are my thoughts so far.' As she said this, she pulled from her reticule a small leather-bound book. As she flicked through its thick cream coloured pages she continued. 'I have already begun to commit some thoughts to writing. What else is the writer of an account such as this but a detective? A plotter of potential events? A sifter of possibilities? A gatherer of "what ifs"? A writer of detective fiction?'

Monty was on the point of replying but refrained. In spite of his love of baiting his little sister, the years had taught him that there were certain situations when it was best to admit defeat and simply to let a subject lie.

Content by his silence that she had on this occasion won Monty to her point of view, Agatha smiled at him sweetly, turned and proceeded with her walk. The rising heat of the day was already beginning to make itself felt on the wide open space of the Embankment and she and Monty soon took refuge in the narrower streets running uphill away from the river toward the Inns of Court. They took pleasure in an idle half hour losing and re-finding themselves in the jumble of cobbled streets and courts around the Temple and The Strand before winding around the Temple Church and eventually following Temple Lane back down to the river, heading for Blackfriars Station from where they planned to catch a District Line train.

They emerged once more into the open space of the Embankment. Opposite them spread the less salubrious sprawl of Southwark, an area of the city into which neither had ever ventured. They turned left now towards the station but came to a

halt outside the windows of Cassell & Company. Bookshops always held a fascination for Agatha. An array of publications new and old was attractively displayed. Agatha glanced over these, but one thing in particular caught her eye.

To one side of the display was a board exclusively dedicated to the advertisement of forthcoming publications. On this board was boldly displayed a name she had encountered only the day before.

P.G. Wodehouse.

The notice read:

MESSRS. CASSELL & CO. ARE DELIGHTED TO ANNOUNCE
THE FORTHCOMING PUBLICATION OF A NEW NOVEL BY
P.G. WODEHOUSE AND HERBERT WOTTON WESTBROOK:

NOT GEORGE WASHINGTON.

READERS OF MR. WODEHOUSE'S PREVIOUS WORK WILL BE
DELIGHTED BY THIS BOOK'S MOVE OUT OF SCHOOL AND INTO THE
ADULT WORLD, AND THE LIGHTNESS OF TOUCH AND ASSUREDNESS
OF THIS TALE OF LITERARY DECEPTION.

'Well, well, Monty,' said Agatha. 'Mr. Wodehouse seems to go from strength to strength.'

Chapter 11

Friday 16th August 1907

Scotland Yard

At around the time Agatha and Monty were reading the notice of publication of P.G. Wodehouse's newest work of fiction in the window of Cassell & Co., approximately a mile further west along the river Inspector Cough was arriving at his desk at Scotland Yard. Not for Inspector Cough, however, the public entrance on Great Scotland Yard. He entered through the main entrance on Whitehall Place after taking his habitual morning coffee at a coffee house near Drury Lane.

Routine was an essential element of Inspector Cough's working day, which was punctuated by a sequence of ritual events, the first of which was his morning coffee. In the detection of crime, he perpetually encountered the apparently random and unpredictable. In seeking to pull together the often-disparate threads of an investigation, his job was to construct the patterns, to piece together the seemingly diffuse clues. He had to listen to the multiple stories of the witnesses involved, to read the clues he unearthed and draw out possible connections.

In the face of all the uncertainties of a criminal investigation, he found the rigid adherence to pattern and rhythm in his own working practices and in his domestic life to be essential. His routine provided the solid ground he needed if he were to deal with the constantly shifting sands of an investigation. And so, every morning he took the 07:47 Hampstead Railway train from Highgate. He alighted at the British Museum and from there pursued a leisurely walk via his daily morning coffee near Drury Lane to his office at Scotland Yard.

Whenever he could, Cough began his day with a couple of hours at his desk, drawing together meticulous notes about the case upon which he was currently engaged. The walk from the British Museum allowed him the necessary time to prepare himself for the work of the day.

His early morning exercise taken and his caffeine consumed, Inspector Cough sat down at his desk. He pulled a sheaf of papers toward him and began to read through them, refreshing his memory of the details of the case as they had begun to unfold yesterday at Lord's.

Doyle was, of course, in one sense the obvious suspect, but something in Cough rejected the idea. Doyle was the one person that everybody agreed was in the Long Room at around the same time as Harold Wilde, and his bat that had been found lying at the dead man's feet, apparently the weapon. The story, if true, was certainly sensational enough: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the creator of Sherlock Holmes himself, as suspect in a case of first degree murder. But it was all too neat. Too off the shelf. He needed to speak with Sir Arthur again to ascertain more about the nature of his relationship with the dead man.

Cough reached into a drawer and took out a well-worn notebook. He turned to a fresh page on which he began an itemised list of people he knew were in the pavilion at the time of the murder and what he needed to do.

Item number one: further interview Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

Then there was Mr. A.A. Milne. How Milne had managed to leave the ground in spite of the men posted at each gate he did not know, and he should according to every protocol of Scotland Yard, have been seen yesterday. His presence in the pavilion at the time of the murder obviously made him a potentially material witness. Doyle testified to having seen him on the roof terrace as he was leaving the field, but

would Milne have had the time to come down and kill Wilde while Doyle was answering the call of nature? Had he the motive to do so? As yet, Cough was all too aware, he could not answer any of these questions. He did not even know whether any connection existed between Milne and Wilde. But one question about Milne bothered Cough more than any other. Had Milne been on the roof area alone or did he have a companion? He must hope to heaven that Chief Superintendent Frobisher did not get to hear of Milne's leaving Lord's before he was seen yesterday.

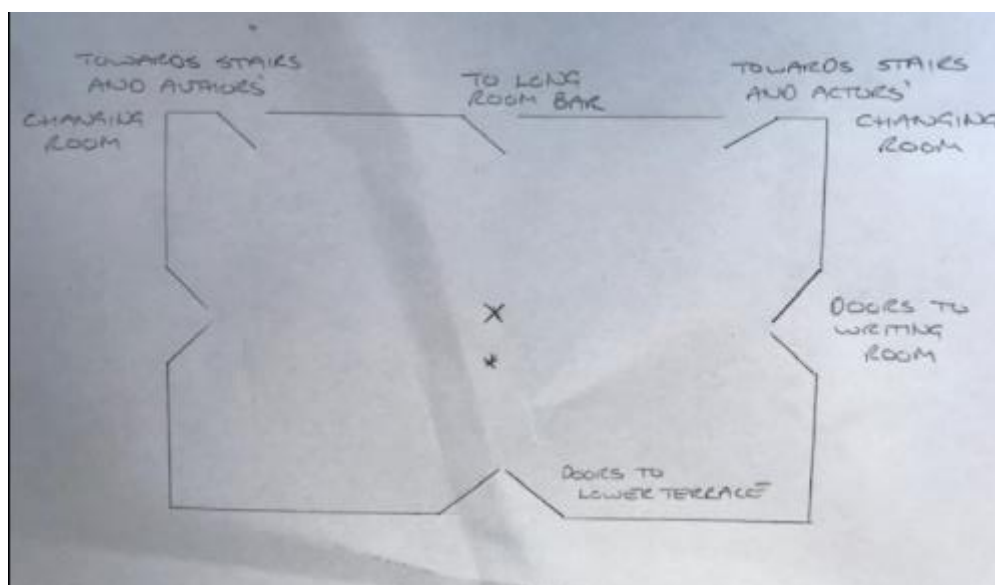
Item number 2: interview Milne at the earliest opportunity.

And so, Cough spent the next quarter of an hour putting his thoughts in order and setting out in his mind his agenda for the day, adding every now and then to the list in his notebook. Once he had finished, he sat back and read over the page:

- Interview Sir A. C. D. Relationship with the deceased?
- Bring in Mr A.A. Milne. Roof terrace? Balcony? Cigars?
Time to commit murder? Relationship with the deceased?
WAS HE ALONE?
- Mr. P.G. Wodehouse. First on the scene. Previous knowledge of Harold Wilde?
- Mr. Henchard. Seemed uncomfortable – fiddling with tie?
In pavilion at time of murder. Detailed knowledge of the pavilion.

- Madeleine Gooch. Only other person in the pavilion seen by Sir A.C.D. And in the vicinity of the Long Room around the time of the murder.
- Red material. How, if at all, does the material from the Long Room Bar relate to this? Where is it from?

His plan for the day complete, for now at least, Cough moved on to the layout of the crime scene itself. He turned to a new page in his notebook, pulled a pencil from his desk drawer and proceeded to draw a diagram of the Long Room as he had seen it yesterday. Once he had the outline of the room completed, he marked as precisely as he could the location of Harold Wilde's body and Doyle's cricket bat.



X = Harold Wilde's body

* = Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's bat

What now struck Inspector Cough was the precision with which Wilde's body had been placed. It lay at the very centre of the Long Room. The diagram, including the whereabouts of the body and the murder weapon was precisely symmetrical. This orderliness nagged at his mind. It argued certainly for some element of control and premeditation. The location of the body was no accident. It was placed, of that Cough felt sure. Perhaps even more than this, Cough wondered whether, whilst found dead in the Long Room, Wilde might not have been murdered elsewhere.

This hypothesis opened a set of further possibilities and questions, and Cough added to the list in his notebook:

- *Was Wilde murdered in the Long Room or elsewhere?*
- *If the murder took place elsewhere, how was the body placed in the Long Room in the interval between Doyle's passing through the Long Room on his way to the changing room and his return?*
- *CLARIFY: what was Mr A.A. Milne doing at this time?*
- *Where is the blood?*
- *What about the placement of Doyle's bat? Is this the murder weapon?*

The early stages of any investigation were always the most difficult. Questions bred further questions and the possibilities proliferated. It was a battle, Cough always found, to establish some kind of initial order; to find a way from the hundreds of loose threads in the narrative into the pattern; to gain a foothold on the logic of the crime and the events leading up to it. This was the hardest part of the detective's work, because what happened before could be read only through the lens of what had happened afterwards, including the killer's own deliberate attempts to deceive. The key, however, was always to work from the position of the killer, to look with their eyes. Any act of murder was always a logical part of the murderer's story; theirs was the narrative point of view it was essential to latch on to. Experience had taught him that once he could capture the murderer's perspective, the sequence of events, however apparently bizarre and unconnected, that led to the killing were susceptible to scrutiny and understanding.

He now continued with his work, sketching out plans of the four floors of the pavilion.

He spent time considering these sketches. He would need to check the accuracy of his memory, of course, because these images of the scene were the means by which he sought to fix the space of the murder in his mind. As he worked with his possible reconstructions of the murder, they would become a canvas on which he could place and move the participants, like characters on the stage set of some deadly drama. Sketches of the scene had more than once helped him to visualise the movements and connections of a case that would otherwise have passed unnoticed.

These preparatory tasks completed, Cough glanced at his watch. A little after ten. Time to return to Lord's itself.

Ten minutes later Inspector Cough was in a carriage heading north on the Tottenham Court Road.

Chapter 12

Friday 16th August

A.A. Milne's apartment

The morning sun shone through the open windows of Milne's apartments and draped a yellow band across the breakfast table. The contents of the table suggested that the events of the previous day, whatever else their effects, had not impeded the young author's appetite. He sat now with a cup of coffee flicking in a desultory fashion through the pages of *The Times*. Propped against the salt cellar was the morning's post.

Interested no more in the day's news, he chewed ruminatively on a thickly buttered slice of toast and reached out for the collection of envelopes. He leafed through them, looking for any he thought might be of interest and settled on a thin missive. The envelope of the style and quality typical of hotel stationery was addressed using capital letters. He did not recognise the printed handwriting, and it was this, perhaps, that had piqued his interest in this particular letter.

He reached for his letter opener, inserted the blade beneath the flap and slit in one neat action across the top of the envelope. Inside was a single neatly folded sheet of matching paper. He opened the paper out and was faced not with a letter but what was evidently a diagram. It was drawn in ink.

Tilting his head this way and that, Milne scrutinised the page. The diagram was of what seemed to be a long room. At the centre of the room was a cross and next to it the letters H.W. Beneath the diagram was a single sentence, a stark and disturbing question written in neat capital letters and in the same ink as the drawing:

WHAT IF INSPECTOR COUGH BELIEVED YOU WERE HERE?

Milne blanched and dropped the toast on to his plate. With a horrible certainty he knew that this was not *a* long room, but *the* Long Room. The position of the doors was graven on his mind's eye. The letters H.W. corresponded to where Harold Wilde's body had been found. And whatever else there was to say, he had undeniably been in the pavilion at the time. And then there was the mysterious note that he had received prompting him to be at the Secretary's Office at precisely that time. Coincidence had never seemed to Milne to be particularly convincing concept. Things in life happened for a reason, and the reason for his being in the vicinity of Harold Wilde's murder was that note.

Who had written it? He wiped a bead of sweat from his forehead. Who had written that note?

He leant back in his chair, but his thoughts were interrupted by a loud and persistent ringing at the doorbell.

Chapter 13

Friday 16th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

It was not long after half past ten that Inspector Cough found himself installed once more in the Library of the pavilion. Patrick McMasters, the chief groundsman at Lord's, sat awkwardly opposite the detective. Although he was a familiar figure around the building, there were certain areas he rarely visited, and this was one of them. He wore a coarse jacket in spite of the summer warmth and a pair of dirtied trousers in a heavy-duty material. He held a tweed cap in his hands which he rotated over and over again. His hands were large and rough; the hands of a man used to physical labour. Since entering the Library he had hardly raised his head. Was this, Cough wondered, a result of natural diffidence, or respect for authority, or was it something more closely related to the investigation?

'Come along, Mr McMasters. It cannot be that difficult a question. You have informed me already that you were in the pavilion at the time Mr Wilde was murdered. I am simply asking the reason for your presence there.'

'I'm sorry, sir,' replied the groundsman. 'Although most of my work is done outside on the grounds, there are occasions when I work in the pavilion. In fact, I have a small office on the first floor.'

'Where on the first floor, Mr McMasters?'

'On a corridor near to the changing rooms, sir.'

'The Home team's or the Visitors' changing rooms?' asked Cough.

'The Visitors', sir.'

'So, you were in the vicinity at the time of Mr Wilde's death.'

'Yes, sir. I suppose that might have been the case.'

'Might have?'

'Yes, Inspector. I went briefly to my office on the first floor before going up to the balcony on the second floor.'

'Very well,' said Cough, his eyebrow twitching almost imperceptibly at this information. 'We will return to that in a moment. But first, while you were in and around your office, did you at any point see Mr Wilde?'

'No, Inspector.'

'To be clear, you did not see him on your way to or from your office?'

'No sir. I did not.'

'Did you hear anything out of the ordinary, or encounter anyone you did not know?'

Again, the response came in the negative. Cough's eyes narrowed by the merest shade. 'Please explain to me the reason for your presence in the pavilion.'

'Certainly, sir,' replied McMasters. 'I went up to the balcony in order to see from above how the wicket was behaving.'

Cough was no *aficionado* of the game, and his blank look now prompted McMasters to provide further explanation. 'I am not employed only to lead a team of grass-cutters, Inspector. I am expected to provide wickets that will suit the needs and preferences of the teams that play here. In order to do so, I need to see how the pitches behave from every angle. I took advantage of a few free moments to watch the play from the balcony and to see how things looked from up there.'

It is not certain that this clarified very much about the finer points of groundsmanship for the Inspector, but it was an explanation. 'Were you up there alone?' asked Cough.

'I thought so at first, sir,' replied McMasters. 'I came out on to the balcony and walked down the steps to the front row of seats from where I would gain the best view.'

'And at what point did you become aware that you were not alone?'

'When I smelled cigar smoke, sir. At that point I looked around and I saw Mr Milne up on the roof terrace. Walking away from the direction of the field of play he was, towards the back of the terrace.'

'Was he leaving the terrace?'

'I couldn't say, sir,' said McMasters. 'As I told you, I was there to watch the wicket and I did not concentrate on his movements.'

'At that point, however, there was nothing to see, Mr McMasters. Play had halted while Mr Wilde and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, err, went to relieve themselves.'

'That is right, sir. As I soon realised. But at the time I saw Mr Milne I was not aware of the fact.'

'And once you did realise?'

'I made my way back to my office, sir, where I was until the alarm was raised.'

'How long after you left the balcony would that have been?' asked Cough.

'A couple of minutes. Maybe three or four,' said McMasters.

'And you saw nothing more of Mr Milne while you were on the balcony or when you went down into the pavilion?'

'No, Inspector. The whole of the roof terrace area is not visible from the balcony. As far as I could tell you, he may or may not have been up there, and I saw nothing of him in the building.'

'It is possible that he could have come down from the roof terrace without you being aware of him, though?'

'That is certainly possible, Inspector. After I saw him, my attention was on the pitch.'

'Thank you, Mr McMasters,' said Cough.

McMasters nodded his acknowledgement and was on the point of leaving the room when Cough asked him a parting question. 'Oh, by the way, Mr McMasters. While you were on the balcony, did you by any chance smoke a cigar?'

'I do not smoke, Inspector,' McMasters replied.

'Thank you, sir,' said Cough. 'There is just one more thing before you go. Does this material seem familiar to you?' As he spoke the words, Cough showed McMasters the thread of cloth he had found in the door to the Long Room Bar.

'I wouldn't swear to it sir, but maybe Mr Henchard's office? I rarely go in there, but I wonder if he might not have red curtains?'

*

McMasters had been gone for only a matter of minutes. What he had established for certain was verification of Conan Doyle's sighting of Milne on the top of the pavilion and some doubt as to the young author's movements once Wilde and Doyle had left the field of play. It was at least possible that Milne could have seen Wilde leaving the field, made his way back down into the pavilion and committed the murder.

McMasters' testimony left Cough with a potential difficulty, however. If, as the groundsman stated, he had been on the balcony and smelled the smoke of Milne's cigar, it argued strongly for his being there when Doyle left the field in what must have been a prominent position on the balcony of the pavilion. And yet Doyle stated as clearly as he was able that he had seen nobody but Milne on top of the pavilion. Here was a mystery that needed to be cleared up. Or maybe Doyle was simply wrong, and McMasters had been there the whole time unnoticed.

Well, there was no point expending any further energies concerning himself about that particular conundrum. No answers could be gained about it now and so it would be fruitless to exercise his mind about it. Store the information and move on. He added a brief memo in his notebook and then turned his mind to the imminent arrival of Milne himself. Before leaving Scotland Yard for Lord's, Cough had dispatched Constable Oates in a separate vehicle to pick the young author up and to bring him to the ground. No doubt they were already on their way to St John's Wood. In the meantime, however, the detective turned his attention to a copy of *Lovers in London*, Milne's most recent book. The previous day, Cough had detailed one of his officers to purchase a copy of the latest works of each of the authors playing in the match. An enthusiastic reader anyway, Cough felt that these may provide a useful context for his investigation; they might provide some insight into the respective authors' states of mind, their attitudes, their views on life. *Lovers in London* was essentially a compilation of light sketches of London life; the kind of thing readers encountered every day in the quality journals and magazines. Neat enough, but not really to Cough's taste. As he glanced through the pages, however, Cough's attention was caught by the title of one of the chapters: 'Lord's and a Lady'.

There was nothing unusual in the sketch of the young couple Teddy and his American friend Amelia visiting the ground, but there was something in the young writer's facility with language, an ease of expression and humour that seemed to set this apart from the other sketches you would see in the *St James's Gazette* or the other hundred and one society journals of the day.

He had just finished reading the chapter when there was a knock at the door, swiftly followed by the appearance of P.C. Oates.

'You have him?' asked Cough.

'Yes, sir. Mr Milne is outside.'

'He came without difficulty?'

'Most accommodating, sir. I arrived as he was taking his breakfast and reading his letters. Most troubled he looked, but he came without difficulty.'

'Very good, Oates. Please show him in.'

Milne entered the room a moment later, smartly attired in suit and tie and took the indicated chair opposite to Inspector Cough.

'Good morning, Mr Milne,' began Cough.

'Good morning, Inspector.'

'May I begin by asking, sir, why you saw fit to absent yourself from Lord's yesterday evening without any reference to myself? I had given the most explicit orders that nobody was to leave until I had given my approval.'

Milne appeared honestly surprised. 'I can only apologise, Inspector. I have read enough crime fiction, I suppose, to have known that I should not have left the ground, but I was not aware of the instruction.'

'You were not present in the Long Room when, after the discovery of Mr Wilde's body, Mr Henchard told the teams to return to their changing rooms and gave the order that no-one was to leave without my personal permission?'

'I was not, Inspector. I am afraid I was rather taken aback by the sight of the body and felt in need of fresh air.'

'Where did you go sir?'

'I made my way up to the balcony at the top of the pavilion, Inspector. I felt sure I should be alone there, and I smoked a cigar to calm myself.'

Well there, at least, was an explanation of the presence of the second cigar on the balcony. Cough struck a line through one of the items in his notebook.

'You have been reading my latest poor offering to the reading public I see, Inspector,' said Milne, once Cough had finished.

'I have, Mr Milne. I always find it helps to know a little about the person one's talking to.'

'I fear there is very little of insight to be gained from *Lovers in London*,' said Milne and laughed.

'It's a cut above the fare that the readers of the society journals are normally presented with, I fancy.'

'Well, it is very good of you to say so, Inspector. If the truth be told, I am not at all satisfied with it, but there. It was good enough to please the editors of the *St James's Gazette* and the publishers, and at the time it came out, I was enough of a pragmatist to be satisfied with that. One must make a living after all, whether it is writing or detecting, what? And if the man who writes the cheque is happy to part with the money, who am I to argue?'

'Indeed, Mr Milne.'

'I'm not sure that after all I won't withdraw the thing. The jolly jaunts of Teddy and Amelia. It hasn't been that much of a success and all in all I feel it might be more of an embarrassment than an aid to my literary reputation in the future. If I ever have the money, I might try to buy the rights back and bury the whole thing. Do you mind if I smoke, by the way?' While he was delivering himself of his views on his book and future reputation, the self-confidence and presumption of which did not go unnoticed by Cough, Milne had been flipping a cigarette case over and over in his hands, a nervous gesture belying his outer composure.

'Not at all, sir.'

Milne opened the case, a fine affair in decorated silver, and offered a cigarette to the Inspector before taking one himself. Looking at Cough through the smoke, Milne took up the conversation, a situation that Inspector Cough was more than happy to allow. There was a certain type of witness that it was best to allow free rein. Allow them the freedom of talk and one never knew what might emerge, and he had detected in Milne a nervous edge. Experience told Cough to be content; to sit back and to allow Milne to fill the silence. And sure enough after only a moment or two of silence, Milne spoke. 'Have you ever thought of writing yourself, Inspector?'

'Not as such, sir,' said Cough. 'Though I have to produce crime reports for all of my cases, of course. I suppose that qualifies me as a writer in some sense. I often feel that as a detective I am a crime writer of sorts. As a case unfolds and new information becomes available, I have to piece together a coherent narrative, you know. I have to find some way of telling myself the story of what might have taken place. It isn't easy, of course, because the story is in a constant state of flux. I haven't the luxury of being like Dr Watson in your friend Conan Doyle's tales; I don't have the wonderful advantage of hindsight as I construct my narratives. They

constantly have to change to account for some new contingency or other. As each new clue emerges, that's supposing I even realise it is a clue, the other elements of the narrative have to shift in order to accommodate it.'

'I see what you're saying, Inspector,' said Milne. He drew on his cigarette and laughed, sending a billow of smoke into the room. Was it arrogance or nerves? Cough was not certain, but of one thing Cough was sure: he did not altogether warm to Mr A. A. Milne.

For a few seconds, Milne puffed away at his cigarette, then asked, 'May I ask how I can assist you with your inquiries.'

'All in good time, Mr Milne,' said Cough. His voice had changed almost imperceptibly but had taken on a slight distance. This was the voice of a man who had given what information he was prepared to give and now expected to take. The change in mood, however slight, unnerved the young writer.

'You think that I can contribute to your narrative,' said Milne, determined to appear composed. 'Well, Inspector, I had no idea I was in the presence of so accomplished a story-teller.'

'I suppose I am, as you say, a good teller of crime tales, Mr Milne. The trouble is that unlike your friends Sir Arthur and Mr Hornung, I don't deal in fiction. The crimes in my line of work are all too real. Like the death of Mr Wilde. All too real.'

'Indeed, Inspector. All too real,' said Milne. His spirits, on the surface, did not seem to be dampened. But what was it? Something had changed with the mention of Wilde's name. There was something beneath Milne's bluff exterior and he would find it. Let the man talk and see what he would give up. 'Your role must be an odd one. Like being in a theatre and watching the events of a play unfold before you. Except, instead of being a straightforward member of the paying audience out for a good

night's entertainment and comfortably removed from what's happening, you find yourself actually a part of events; part of a second story unfolding alongside the narrative that's developing on-stage. As if there were no fourth wall.'

'Precisely, Mr Milne. That's it exactly.'

'In fact,' said Milne, 'it's a good idea for a play. I might have a go at writing that one day. *The Fourth Wall* by Alan Alexander Milne. Yes, it rolls off the tongue.'

Cough watched as the idea ran across Milne's mind and it was Milne who spoke first. 'I assume however, Inspector, that you did not bring me here solely for a discussion about literature, interesting and pleasurable as talk about books always is?'

'No indeed, Mr Milne. No indeed,' said Cough. 'If only this investigation were fiction rather than the messy business of reality, eh? I called you in, sir, because I wish to speak to you about your movements in the pavilion yesterday afternoon in the time running up to the murder of Mr Wilde.'

'Very well. How can I assist you?'

The leather of the sofa creaked as Cough adjusted his position. He placed his hands deliberately on his knees and leaned slightly forward. 'Tell me, Mr Milne,' he said, 'about what happened yesterday at the match.'

Milne said nothing for a moment, and when he replied it was in a distinctly different tone to that he had adopted in their conversation so far. 'Well these matches, you know, are not the most serious of affairs.'

'I wonder whether the late Mr Wilde would agree with you there, sir?' said Cough. 'It turned out to be quite a momentous occasion as far as he was concerned. Somebody seems to have taken quite a serious objection to Mr Wilde's actions or

maybe just his physical presence; serious enough that it seems they beat his head in with a cricket bat. The outcome has proven serious enough, I would say.'

'Yes, of course. Quite so, quite so,' said Milne, 'But that was not my meaning. These matches are generally played in a light-hearted spirit. For most of us it is more the taking part than the outcome of the match itself that matters. Some are more competitive than others, of course. It would be a boring world, as they say...'

'And you, Mr Milne? Are you, as you put it, one of the more 'competitive' ones?'

'Me? No, no. For me it was quite honour enough to be asked to play at all. It's not every day, you know, that young writers like me or Wodehouse have the chance to spend the day with the greats like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr Hornung. Let alone have the opportunity to play cricket at Lord's.'

'And how about the Actors, sir?'

'Well, I did not know most of them,' said Milne. As he spoke, he massaged the muscles of his thighs gently. 'Like our team theirs was a bit of a mixture, from what I could gather. Some of the players are highly successful in their profession, but there was a fair sprinkling of old hacks and some of the up-and-coming new generation.'

'And where does Mr Wilde fit within that spectrum?' asked Cough. Milne was certainly no longer so much at his ease.

'Wilde? Well, he has had quite a bit of success of course, but his star has fallen over recent years. He was the darling of the Savoy Opera a few years back, but now he is no longer the man of choice.'

'And was there any reason you know of why anyone here yesterday would have borne him any particular enmity?'

'Enmity,' repeated Milne and the hands which had continued to massage his thighs fell still. 'Enmity? No, I would not say enmity.'

'Then what would you say, Mr Milne? There is clearly something. Be frank with me.'

'Very well, Inspector. A few years ago, the theatrical world was alive with rumours of some kind of conflict between Wilde and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Some show that Wilde wanted Doyle to write; an adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Doyle refused persistently and Wilde, who had become convinced that this show was the way to breathe life back into his waning career, was equally persistent. He took Doyle's refusal very badly. Not to put too fine a point on it, he has detested Sir Arthur ever since.'

'And is this dislike mutual?'

'Doyle is a gentleman,' said Milne. 'He may dislike, but he has the self-control to remain civil.'

'But Mr Wilde did not. Is that what you are saying, sir?' asked Cough.

Involuntarily, it seemed, Milne's hands commenced massaging his thighs once more. No answer was forthcoming.

'Mr Wilde, sir,' prompted Cough. 'Has he acted upon his grudge against Sir Arthur? Has he done anything that might be considered a provocation?'

'Nothing specific, I believe,' said Milne, his eyes flicking over the spines of the books on the bookshelves and the pictures that adorned the walls of the Library.

'Nothing particular, apart from taking any opportunity that arises to spread his less than charitable opinion of Doyle.'

'A motive for murder?' asked Cough, more of the air, the furniture and the books than of Milne, but his attention quickly returned to the young author. 'Men

have been killed for less,' Mr Milne. 'And a man's good name; well, it is a precious thing.'

'Come, Inspector,' said Milne. 'Would you expect a man of Sir Arthur's status and character to risk his reputation for a worm like Wilde?'

'Worm, Mr Milne? Now that is a harsh word to use of the dead.'

'There is no point in hiding the fact, Inspector. Wilde was a base creature. Dead or alive the man was, as I say, a worm, and I repeat my question. Would you expect Sir Arthur to risk his reputation for a man like that?'

'That is not for me to say, Mr Milne. In constructing these crime narratives of mine over the years I have come to learn that there is very little one can afford to take for granted. Humans are unpredictable creatures.'

'Well, Inspector, all I can say in this case is that I do not believe Sir Arthur to have held murderous intentions against Mr Wilde.'

'For all his provocations?'

'For all his provocations.'

For a few seconds neither man spoke, and the deep repetitive tick of a grandfather clock beat time as Cough looked hard at the young author. As he did so the faintest of smiles curled one corner of Cough's mouth, and then he said, 'Very well, Mr Milne. Thank you. Perhaps we can move on to talk about what happened from the point at which you left the field of play yesterday and your movements in the pavilion.'

'By all means, Inspector,' said Milne. He slipped slightly lower in his chair and crossed, then uncrossed his legs.

'Could you inform me first why you went off. You were not injured, I hope?'

'No not injured, Inspector. As I was saying earlier, these matches are not the most serious of affairs. It is important that every man feels that his day has been worthwhile and that he has been properly involved. We rotate the batting and the bowling, and we take it in turns to come on and off when we are fielding. It makes sure everyone has his fair share of the game.'

'I see, sir,' said Cough. 'Very gentlemanly of you all, I'm sure.' Here was a man, Milne sensed at once, who was not to be overawed by rank or success or self-importance.

'Well as I said, Inspector, we try to give everyone a fair game and when it was my turn to come off, I decided that I would go up to the roof terrace to watch from there.'

'Was there any reason why you selected this particular spot, sir? At the end of the pavilion above the Actors' changing room? Would it not have been more logical to go to the area above your own?'

There was the briefest of hesitations in Milne before he replied. 'No particular reason, Inspector. It is not that often that I have had the opportunity to watch cricket from the pavilion at Lord's and so I thought I would make the most of my chance and took the shortest way.'

'You went straight to the roof terrace area once you left the field?'

'I did,' said Milne.

'And you remained there for the entirety of the time you were off the field?'

'As you say, I remained on the roof terrace and smoked a cigar.'

'I wonder, Mr Milne, what was your frame of mind.'

'My frame of mind? What a century we live in. It will be the century of the new psychology, they say. Have you read any of Dr Freud's work?'

'I cannot say I have, Mr Milne. Would you recommend it?'

'Oh, most certainly, Inspector. I would have thought that his ideas have the greatest potential in understanding the criminal mind.'

'In which case, sir, I shall certainly make a point of looking at his work. But for now, maybe we could return to you and your frame of mind,' said Cough, drawing the conversation back. 'When I spoke to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, sir, he was of the impression that you appeared somewhat preoccupied when he observed you on the roof terrace.'

'Preoccupied, Inspector? No, I would not say I was preoccupied. Daydreaming, perhaps.'

'Daydreaming of what, sir?' asked Cough.

'Ah, well there, of course, you have me. By definition daydreams are ephemeral things; here now and gone a second later. I am afraid I cannot recall. Besides which, there are few places pleasanter to be, you know, than Lord's on an August afternoon. I cannot imagine a better place to let one's mind wander. So, I am afraid that I cannot help you. The contents of my mind at the time to which you refer is a complete mystery to me.'

Cough looked hard at the young author, but he had half turned away, and it was difficult to read his expression. He would have to take the young man's word for it. 'Very well, Mr Milne. One last thing. Could you tell me what happened, from your point of view, after Sir Arthur left the field?'

'I was not aware initially that he had, Inspector,' said Milne, turning back to face Cough. 'I had been watching the game for about ten minutes when I saw Wilde

come off. Confound him—pardon me speaking ill of the dead—he was batting far too well and was much too conceited to hide it. Play obviously halted, and so I got up to stretch my legs and took a few turns up and down while I had a smoke. It was not until after the terrible events had happened in the Long Room that I became aware Sir Arthur, too, had left the field.'

'Yes. So, the events in the Long Room. When did you become aware that something had taken place?' asked Cough. His already intense gaze intensified still further.

Milne, Cough noted, looked away again as he answered. 'The first thing I knew, Inspector, was hearing Sir Arthur shouting out. I came back at first to the front of the roof terrace, but I couldn't see Sir Arthur himself. All I could tell was that his voice was coming from somewhere out of sight down below. It was obvious that something had occurred though, because I then saw everyone on the field, including the umpires and the members of the public in the crowd running towards the pavilion. I then made my own way as quickly as I could down to the Long Room where I found... well you know what I found.'

'To be clear, sir,' said Cough, 'you are certain that you were on the roof terrace at the time Sir Arthur Conan Doyle raised the alarm? Nowhere else in the building?'

'As certain, Inspector, as that I am talking to you here now,' said Milne, his eyes not quite meeting Cough's.

'Thank you, Mr Milne. I need to be clear of your version of events. So, when you left the roof terrace, you went directly to the Long Room?'

'Yes, Inspector. As I have said. It was obvious that something pretty serious had happened there and I did not want to waste any time.'

'You misunderstand me, sir. It is not the speed of your movement that I am concerned with. It is your knowledge that you needed to go to the Long Room. Why that particular place?'

'Oh, I did not know that for certain at the time, of course. I assumed it, I suppose, as the terrace from which I guessed Sir Arthur must be shouting runs along the front of the Long Room. The direction of the players' attention and movement also led me to that conclusion.'

'All of which sounds very reasonable, Mr Milne. But we both know that the only way on and off the field the players take is up the steps and through the Long Room. The matter, whatever it was, that led Sir Arthur to call out might have taken place elsewhere.'

'You are right, of course, Inspector Cough. It could. All I can say is that my first reaction was to run as quickly as I could downstairs to the Long Room and, once I arrived there, I found the room full of people. It was at that point that I became aware of the terrible fate of Harold Wilde.'

Cough allowed a silence to fall in the room after Milne had finished speaking and applied himself to his notebook. Once he had finished writing, he looked up at the young man. 'Well, thank you, Mr Milne. I believe that is all for now. Unless there is anything else you feel I need to know?'

Milne considered this for a moment, his eyes closed as if in thought, as if surprised that there was nothing more the Inspector wanted from him. 'No there is nothing more I can think of, Inspector.'

'Well, if anything further should occur to you, messages can always be left for me at Scotland Yard. And I would be grateful if you would remain in the metropolis until my investigation is concluded, sir. I will ask P.C. Oates to ensure he has details

of wherever you are likely to be found over the next few days so that we can speak to you again if it should prove necessary.'

'Certainly, Inspector Cough. I will provide him with the details of my Club and the addresses of a few friends' houses to add to my own address which you obviously have already.'

'Thank you, Mr Milne. And that idea for the play you were talking about earlier. *The Fourth Wall*, was it? A good idea that. I'd like to talk to you some more about it. The investigator's point of view, you know. It is surprising what you learn to see when you come at crime from my position.'

Milne rose but made no reply. With a nod of the head to Cough he made his way to the door of the Library.

'You'll find P.C. Oates outside the room, Mr Milne. He will see you safely home.'

When Milne had left, Cough stood up and moved slowly about the room. His years on the force had taught him when to stop asking questions and when to release a witness to ruminate upon their own doubts. Such a moment had arrived with Mr A.A. Milne. There were problems with Milne's testimony, that was clear enough. There were things left unsaid behind the information that he had given, and as he walked slowly around the Library, Cough found the motion somehow helped him to put them in order. And the author's refusal at several points of their conversation to meet his eye. Milne had certainly not told the full truth about what he was doing in the pavilion. The question was, why?

Chapter 14

Friday 16th August 1907

St John's Wood Road Underground Station

The station foyer at St John's Wood Road Underground Station was a different place today as they emerged once more from the platform below. Where yesterday all had been noise and bustle, today its silence was disturbed only by the occasional passenger. At this time in the afternoon there were few if any bowler-hatted businessmen heading towards their offices in The City, though here and there could be seen those, more casually attired, on their way for a constitutional in the park.

The same news stand stood in the same corner of the space. A board proclaimed in bold letters:

DEAD IN THE LONG ROOM

DRAMA AT LORD'S AS FAMOUS

ACTOR IS DONE TO DEATH

'Back again, miss?' said the vendor as Agatha purchased a copy.

'Yes,' said Agatha, indicating the board. 'A fascinating business.'

'Indeed, miss. Were you there?'

'I was.'

'And the police?'

'At the minute,' said Agatha, 'I believe they know very little.'

'A difficult man as I've heard it, Mr Wilde.'

'Difficult in what way?' asked Agatha, intrigued.

'An artistic type, I think they'd call him,' said the vendor. 'Strong views and happy to express them. Flamboyant. A bit of a *prima donna*, and not afraid who he might offend.'

'And he did create offence?'

'Oh yes, miss. He created offence alright and no mistake. There was plenty who had no love lost for Mr Harold Wilde, including some of the gentlemen playing yesterday by all accounts.'

'The other actors, you mean?' asked Agatha.

'Oh yes, the actors. But several of the authors as well. He grew his enemies in every quarter. I used to work the Charing Cross stand. Mr Wilde's name was not worth much there, I can assure you, miss.'

'Thank you. Thank you,' said Agatha, handing over a coin and taking the paper the man held out to her. Her brow had tightened into a frown, indicative to those who knew her of deep thought. 'Thank you.'

Chapter 15

Friday 16th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

A few minutes later, Agatha and Monty stood outside the gate near the famous Lord's Tavern. On the gate stood a bulky police officer, who Agatha now approached. After yesterday's events, Scotland Yard had evidently decided on sealing access to the ground. A direct approach, Agatha decided was the best method. 'Good morning, officer.'

'Morning, miss.' He almost smiled.

'I was at the match yesterday and I spoke with the officer in charge of investigating the sad events that occurred, Inspector Cough.'

'Yes, miss.' The smile had disappeared, if ever it had been there. Agatha was committed now, however.

'Well, I have had some thoughts about what might have taken place and I would like to share them with him.'

'Thank you, miss, but I am under strict instructions from Inspector Cough to let nobody pass.'

'I understand, officer,' said Agatha, determined not to be so easily put off, 'but as I said, I spoke with Inspector Cough yesterday and I have some ideas that I believe he might find most helpful with his investigation.'

The officer shifted slightly and she heard the creaking of his boots.

'Nevertheless, miss, I cannot allow you into the ground. My orders are perfectly

clear. If you wish to communicate your thoughts to Inspector Cough, I recommend you pay him a visit at Scotland Yard.'

Agatha sighed. 'Very well, officer. Thank you.'

'Good day, miss,' he said as she turned back to Monty and they walked away back up St John's Wood Road.

'So, what now, Agatha?' said Monty. 'It looks as if we shall not be able to do any more today after all.'

'Oh, don't be so easily defeated, Monty. I am sure there must be some way in.'

'You intend breaking and entering?'

'I intend entering, certainly. Whether or not the breaking will prove necessary is a question yet to be decided.'

They began to make their way back towards Regent's Park. High fences guarded the periphery of the ground and the hallowed turf within. This seemed to offer no promise, but about half way along, Agatha stopped. She walked across to the fence. Yes, there was distinctly a gap. Two broken boards which the groundsman had obviously either failed to notice or that he had not yet repaired.

A minute later, she and Monty both stood on the far side of the fence behind the mound on which spectators sat at this side of Lord's.

The ground wore a completely different air the morning after the match. Agatha noticed it instantly. Without the excitement of the crowd and the buzz of match day, the ground seemed curiously silent. Like an abandoned house, the stands and seats seemed ill at ease, uncertain what to do with themselves. Their purpose taken from them, they stood in blank, silent rows facing the redundant turf of the outfield and the narrow brown strip of the wicket.

'What stories could these seats tell?' Agatha asked herself. If only they had voices, what could they have told her about the terrible events of yesterday? They had seen Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the great man himself, enter the pavilion. They had watched as somehow, during Doyle's time in the building, the body of the poor unfortunate Harold Wilde, his head crushed apparently by a cricket bat, had fallen to the floor of the Long Room. But they would say nothing. They could give up no secrets. They sat as dumb today as they ever had and ever would.

*

After Milne had left, Cough remained seated for a few minutes in the Library, but being stationary did not suit him. He had always needed the stimulus of movement to help his brain accommodate the information he unearthed during an investigation. So now he got up and walked up the stairs on the far wall of the Library to the Bowlers' Bar. He took in the fine view of Lord's that greeted him through the open window. A pleasant breeze, antidote to the stifling heat that was brewing, played on his face, but he did not stay to enjoy the breeze or to admire the view for long. He began to pace up and down and had soon established a track to and fro between the bar and the window.

As he did so, his thoughts went back to Madeleine Gooch and her testimony of yesterday. He had met her coming down the stairs he had ascended to reach the Bowlers' Bar. Was it conceivable that she had been there for the entirety of his interview with Doyle and had been unaware of the men in the Library below? Well, he had no means of testing that now. He would have to come back to that later. In

the meantime he needed to focus upon Mr A.A. Milne and what he had recently heard from him.

All was not as it should be with Milne's account. Here was a young man who was hiding something, and Cough knew it. In an orderly fashion the detective began to sift through the information Milne had given him, testing it against what he had heard from elsewhere.

To begin with there was Milne's evidence about his time on the roof terrace. That he had been there was corroborated by the evidence of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle; the peer had been quite clear that it was upon the roof terrace and not upon the balcony that he had seen Milne. This was supported by the evidence of Patrick McMasters. This was not to say, of course, that Milne was at no point up on the balcony at an earlier stage than the smoking of his second cigar, after the discovery of Wilde's body. More crucially still there were no witnesses who could confirm to a certainty that Milne had been only on the roof terrace. If at any stage prior to Wilde's murder he had gone down on to the balcony, and there was only his testimony to say that the cigar on the balcony was smoked after the discovery of Wilde, he clearly had some reason for not wishing it to be known.

The evidence of Patrick McMasters was, like Doyle's, inconclusive on the full detail of Milne's movements. When compared to Milne's own account, McMasters' evidence left a troubling uncertainty about the young author's actions. If McMasters was telling the truth, he had left the balcony area before Sir Arthur cried out after discovering Harold Wilde's body. This meant that there was nobody in a position to verify Milne's claim to have been on the roof terrace when the crime was committed. Cough ran over the evidence again in his mind. Sir Arthur testified to having seen Milne on the roof terrace as he was leaving the field, but there was as yet no

evidence to support Milne's claim that he remained on the roof terrace until Sir Arthur shouted out his alarm. Access to the stairs running down to the Actors' changing room and to the Long Room was easy from where Doyle said he saw Milne. There was no way of proving at this stage whether or not he had left the upper areas of the pavilion, and that meant that for the moment at least, he had to remain in the frame as the potential murderer of Harold Wilde.

There was then, to be added to this, the fact that Milne was at the Actors' end of the pavilion rather than at his own team's end. There was not necessarily anything in that, of course, but it was suggestive. What was to have prevented Milne, having seen Wilde leave the field, dropping down into the building after Doyle passed out of sight and committing the murder? The timing would be tight, it was true, but certainly possible. By his own account, Doyle was several minutes in the changing room, and it would take a fit young man such as Milne only a matter of seconds to descend from the balcony area to the First Floor or even to the Ground Floor. Once there he could easily have perpetrated the crime and he would have had ample opportunity to avail himself of the murder weapon, assuming Doyle's bat was indeed the weapon, from the Authors' changing room when he first came off the field. The deed once done, there was no need for him to return to the balcony or the roof terrace area. He could have withdrawn to some other spot, such as the Library or the Bowlers' Bar, until the alarm was raised and then make his appearance in the Long Room after Doyle had discovered the body. Cough had only Milne's word that he had come down from the roof terrace when Doyle shouted out.

A number of problems remained, though. Firstly, what could be the young writer's motive? It was clear that there was a simmering animus between Doyle and Wilde. The disagreement over *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. Had Milne somehow

become embroiled in this? But that made no sense. If he were acting somehow to avenge or support Doyle, he would hardly have used the peer's bat as the murder weapon. No, motive was certainly not clear. That Milne had not liked Harold Wilde was evident enough, but it seemed that Mr Milne was hardly alone in that.

Secondly, there was the question of the cigar ash. Both sets of ash on the second storey of the pavilion were supposedly explained by Milne's account, but was he wise simply to accept the man's word for it? The fact that both cigars were of the same brand was something, but it was a leap to accept at face value and without further evidence that both had, in fact, been smoked by Milne. Might there not, for instance, at some stage prior to McMasters' arrival on the balcony and prior to Doyle's sighting of Milne on the Roof Terrace, have been a meeting between Milne and some person unknown, a co-conspirator? If so, what had they done? And if Milne had indeed had a companion upstairs in the pavilion, who was it? McMasters? Were the two in some kind of pact?

Yes, there were some clear potential problems with Mr Milne's evidence. His story did not add up. Or at the very least, it did not necessarily add up to what Milne said it did.

Cough always liked to gather his information by instalments. He found the gaps that emerged in witness accounts of events provided him with spaces within which to think. It was in these gaps that he could apply his creativity and his imagination, and that was what he most loved about his work as a detective. It was in these gaps that hidden stories lurked, the stories that he liked to tell himself and that slowly but surely allowed the truth to take shape.

Well, at this point there were stories to spin around Mr A.A. Milne and what he may or may not have been doing the previous afternoon at Lord's. An arrest was

certainly not called for, as yet. There was insufficient evidence to warrant that, but there was equally certainly plenty to indicate that Mr Milne was not, to adopt an appropriate metaphor, playing with an entirely straight bat. There was something there that did not ring true. He circled this for a moment or two, but when he made no further progress he decided to leave it be for now. If his years at Scotland Yard had taught him anything it was not to force lines of thought. Allow the ideas to germinate by themselves and they would grow. He had learnt by experience that if he took his direct gaze off some troublesome clue or a worrying gap in the tale that he would often come to a new understanding out of the corner of his eye.

Cough paused for a moment or two in his deliberations. His attention had been caught by the sight that greeted him at the window of the Bowlers' Bar. He stopped his pacing and stood still to take it in. The fine promise of the morning had not disappointed, and the Lord's turf was bathed in glorious sunshine. So serene and peaceful was the scene that it was hard to believe he was deep in the heart of a murder investigation. It was here only yesterday afternoon, though, in the exclusive pavilion at Lord's, that a brutal murder had been committed.

While he was ruminating in this way, he heard footsteps climbing the stairs from the Library. He turned to face the door in time to see the well-dressed figure of Henchard, the Club Secretary, framed in the doorway. Catching sight of the detective, Henchard's hand rose involuntarily to the knot of his tie. 'Ah, Inspector Cough,' he began. 'P.C. Oates told me I should find you in the Library, but when you were not there, I thought I would try the Bowlers' Bar before pursuing my search elsewhere.'

'And you have found me, Mr Henchard.'

'Indeed. I came to inform you that a young woman has arrived and is asking to speak with you. A most determined young lady with a young man in tow. A Miss Miller.'

'Miss Miller?' asked Cough.

'That is the name she gave, Inspector.'

'Very well. Thank you, Mr Henchard. Did she say why she wishes to see me?'

'She says she saw you here at the ground yesterday and that she has some information she believes might assist you in your investigation. Something to do with Mr P.G. Wodehouse.'

'Ah, yes. Very well,' said Cough. He had reached a dead end with his thoughts about Mr Milne and needed something to start him on a new track. An image of the lively young woman he had met in front of the pavilion yesterday was clear in his head. How she had managed to gain access to the ground he would have to investigate later. For now, however, he was wistfully happy at the thought of seeing her again. 'I will see her,' said Cough, making his way across the room to where Henchard was standing.

'You could see her in the Library if you wish, Inspector,' said Henchard.

'I thought the pavilion at Lord's was a male preserve, Mr Henchard.'

'No, Inspector. Even Lord's has to move with the times, you know. Ladies are allowed on the Ground Floor of the pavilion.'

'I am pleased to hear it, Mr Henchard,' said Cough. 'The freer mingling of the sexes is, in my opinion, to be welcomed. However, I find myself in need of some fresh air, so I think I will meet her outside if I may?'

'Certainly.'

'In which case, I will follow you to where Miss Miller is now, and I will talk to her while I take a constitutional.'

As he followed the secretary down the stairs to the Library, Cough reflected that he would not normally be so sanguine in allowing his investigation to be interrupted in this way. He liked to work on his own and after his own fashion, recreating and playing with possible solutions to the crime without disturbance. That was why he worked, whenever he could, with P.C. Oates, a man upon whose silence he could by and large depend. There was something about this Miss Miller, though. From time to time since he had spoken to her yesterday afternoon, he had found himself thinking about her in spite of the many more pressing demands upon his time. He could not escape the likeness between her and his daughter. How he missed her. Both he and Ida did. He had found since yesterday that his memory was increasingly preoccupied with the child, the young woman he had lost. Words or phrases, certain knowing looks wise beyond her years kept replaying in his memory. Perhaps it was pure sentiment, but he did not think so. Something told him that this young woman, Agatha Miller, was deserving of his attention.

On emerging from the rear door of the building, Cough was greeted by a smiling Agatha Miller. Infectious in her good humour, she exuded simultaneously great warmth and great energy. 'Oh, Inspector Cough,' she said. The words conveyed expectation rather than surprise. 'I am so pleased to have found you. This kind man,' she said, indicating Henchard, 'told me he would inform you that I was here. I decided to try here rather than going to Scotland Yard. Something told me that this is where I would find you.'

‘Indeed, Miss Miller, and you have found me as you hoped,’ replied Cough. ‘It is a pleasure to see you again. I am most interested, however, to know how you gained access to the ground.’

‘Oh, a most convenient gap in the fence served our purpose, Inspector,’ she said with a wave of the hand.

Milne leaving yesterday without permission. Agatha Miller today gaining access without permission. Something clearly needed to be done about the security of Lord’s Cricket Ground.

‘I trust that Agatha is not interrupting anything of importance, sir,’ said Monty, stepping up to his sister’s side.

‘Not right at this moment, young man,’ said Cough. ‘Had I been involved in anything very important I would not be with you now. No, you have arrived, in fact, at a most opportune moment. I have reached, as it were, a natural pause.’

‘What you mean presumably, Inspector, is that you are at a ... temporary *impasse* in your investigation,’ said Agatha.

Cough laughed in spite of himself. ‘A temporary *impasse*,’ he said when he recovered. ‘Do you hear that, Mr Henchard. A temporary *impasse*. Very good. I must remember that line for the next time I am hauled in front of the Chief Superintendent for lack of progress on a case. Really, Miss Miller. You have a way with words. Perhaps you should consider a career in writing.’

‘There is nothing I would like more, Inspector Cough. But putting my future to one side for the moment, I take it that an idea or two from a well-meaning helper would not go amiss?’

‘That well-meaning helper being you, Miss Miller?’

Agatha simply smiled.

Taking advantage of the silence, Henchard spoke up. 'Well, now you and Miss Miller are together I will leave you, Inspector. I will be in my office should you need me.'

'Thank you, Mr Henchard. I will be sure to see you before I leave.' Then, turning back to the young woman and her brother, Cough commenced walking around the end of the pavilion towards the ground. 'Let me have it then, Miss Miller,' he continued once they had emerged from the shade of the building.

'We were supposed to be returning to Devon this morning you know, Inspector,' said Agatha apparently oblivious to Cough's request, 'but neither of us has any pressing commitment and so we decided to return to the scene of yesterday's crime. Much more interesting than Devon, you know. I am discovering that I have an uncommon interest in crime, Inspector.'

'Really, miss...,' began Cough.

'Yes, an uncommon interest. Ever since I first read the work of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, he has been a hero of mine. And Sherlock Holmes ... Well, perhaps one day I will create a detective of my own who is just as memorable. But not an Englishman, I fancy. No, decidedly not an Englishman. He would have to be a foreigner. The touch of the unknown. The exotic. Or a woman, perhaps. Yes, an elderly woman would do. The last person you would ever expect to be a detective. But there, I am allowing my fancy to run away with me. Monty is always telling me that my imagination is too vivid or too dark for its own good.'

'She is over-burdened with imagination, Inspector,' said Monty.

Cough smiled at the young man. 'I believe the same might be said of me, sir. But I have never quite been able to accept that as a criticism. In my line of work too much imagination is infinitely preferable to too little. So, what do you say, Miss

Miller,' he continued, turning back to her. 'Am I to benefit from your imagination? I think you were going to offer me some assistance.'

There was something about this girl, her ideas and her tales. She was no common young woman. And who was to say but she might not have some genuine insights of her own. Perhaps she might have something useful to add to the progress he had made. She might just spark in him the inspiration he needed to take this investigation forwards. 'I am willing to hear what you have to say, but it is on my terms. Do you understand? The least suspicion of dissent or disobedience and you will be out of here faster than the 13-05 from Paddington.'

'I would expect nothing less, Inspector.'

'Do you know what's going on here, miss?' asked Cough.

'Not in the least,' said Agatha. 'And that is precisely why I am so keen to speak with you. To be part of something one doesn't in the least understand is, I think, one of the most intriguing things about life. But then, do you know, I am not sure that is entirely true.' Agatha fell silent for a moment and gently re-touched her hair as she contemplated this. 'Since we met very briefly yesterday my mind has been constantly running on this case of Mr Wilde's. All, it seems to me, Inspector Cough, is not well in the world of the Authors' XI. There is a story to unravel here, but how to unravel it when there are so many story-tellers and only a single story?'

'There you have hit upon the conundrum, Miss Miller,' said Cough. 'Many people might wish to tell their part of the story in many different ways, but that must not deflect us from the fact that there is one underlying narrative.'

'Or at the least, that is what the public needs to believe,' said Agatha.

Cough nodded. 'To be sure, Miss Miller, you are right there. It is my job to piece these stories together and to wring from them some believable semblance of

the truth. Some sustainable narrative. I have always believed that there must be something of the writer in me. I flatter myself that I have the right kind of imagination. Imagination is the key. "What if...?" That is the question I so often find myself asking. "What if ...?"

'Life is, after all, just one big combination of stories and one's job is to unravel them, then to put them back together in a fashion that makes sense and to do the best one can.' She paused for a moment and directed her gaze to where two men were at work on the outfield. Even at this early stage of the day, the heat was evidently taking its toll, and as she looked one of the men stood up to wipe the sweat from his brow. 'I have a feeling you are right, Inspector. And it must be particularly difficult working with writers; always wanting to relate the tale in their own particular way. What is a detective to do in the face of so many competing narratives?'

'My job is to create a convincing answer to enough of those questions to build a case for the prosecution. It is work that requires a great deal of creativity. By your own account you have a most vivid imagination, Miss Miller.'

'I do, Inspector. It comes from my mother,' said Agatha. 'When I try to explain my view of the world to others, I come back constantly to the fact that I have a tendency either to see the universe as more brightly or more darkly coloured than it appears to others. I believe that I think in melodrama. The good to me are very very good, and the bad are so very very bad.'

'But what about this case, Miss Miller? Are you here to enlighten me? Are you an author yourself, in spite of your tender years?'

'Only of a work of poetry, Inspector. I have it with me, in fact. *A Masque from Italy*. It is my first effort.'

'Not a writer of detective fiction then, miss? The authors of the genre seem determined always to tell me how I ought to do my job. Anyone would think that fiction has more of truth about it than real life.'

'No, I have not ventured into the world of crime fiction, Inspector Cough. Though now you come to mention it, I can see the appeal. Maybe I will try it some day. But you asked me whether or not I was here to enlighten you. I am as yet uncertain. I may be and yet I may not,' said Agatha. 'I cannot decide whether what I have to tell you will provide some clarity for your investigation or whether it will simply deepen the darkness.'

'Either way it seems that I need to hear what you have to say, miss.'

'I believe you do, Inspector. Perhaps as they say, the darkest hour is the hour before the dawn.'

As Agatha spoke, Cough looked to where the groundsmen were at work. One of them again straightened up and Cough now recognised the tall figure of Patrick McMasters. His movements were desultory, as if he could summon up little enthusiasm for his work. The man stretched his back, and as he did so he caught Cough's gaze. With affected ease he turned away and recommenced his labour. A frown creased Cough's brow. But now was not the moment to revisit the part, whatever it might be, that the groundsman might have played in yesterday's events. That was for another time.

Cough turned back to Agatha. 'You were saying, miss?'

'I have been thinking, Inspector. Why do people like reading about crime? Why do they like being frightened? Is it because something rebels in one against the life that is too safe? If we took the wolf out of *Little Red Riding Hood* would anyone enjoy the story? Is a certain amount of danger in life a need of human beings? But

not too much, of course. Most of us do not want the danger to be too real. We'd rather have it vicariously. We'd rather read about it or write about it than experience it at first hand.'

'So if you were writing the story of what happened yesterday, what would you be telling me?'

'Of course, it is not down to what is *there*. It is what one sees that counts. You and I will look at the same object, the same scene, but we will not see the same thing. My height, my angle of view, my mental processes, my reactions to colours and smells and shapes, my natural associations are all different to yours, Inspector. No, I think it would be a great error to assume that people's accounts of what they see necessarily relate in a strictly factual sense to what was there. It is an equally great error to assume that different people's accounts of any event should coincide. If people's accounts differ, they are not necessarily mistaken or lying.'

'What are you saying, miss?'

'Well, I suppose I am thinking of it in this way, Inspector. Let us imagine that two witnesses have seen a man running away from the scene of a crime. The first, let's call him Mr One, tells us that the man was tall and wearing a green jacket. The second, Mr Two, tells us he was short and wearing a brown jacket. Are we to assume that one of them must be, at best mistaken, or at worst lying to us to cover up the truth? Maybe, but maybe not. Mr One and Mr Two may both be correct from their own point of view. What if the man they saw was both tall and short, wearing both a green jacket and a brown jacket, not one or the other as we might assume?'

'How would that be, miss?' asked Cough.

'Because it isn't enough, inspector, to look only for the facts of the crime. We have to look as well at facts about the witness. Those are surely relevant too? Who

are these people that witnessed the crime, whatever it might be, and what disposes them to see the world in the ways that they do? Let us consider Mr One. He is 5 feet 5 inches tall and has a good eye for colour. The man he sees running from the scene of the crime is around 5 feet 10 inches and indeed wearing a green jacket. He has told us precisely what he has seen. The criminal is a man who, from Mr One's perspective, is tall and so dressed. Now Mr Two. He is 6 feet 4 inches tall and suffers from colour blindness. The man he sees running from the same crime scene is, to him, short and in his eyes the jacket appears brown, a common mistake with the colour blind when they see green. We talk of height and colour as though they are fixed properties, but they are not. Both Mr One and Mr Two have given us completely faithful, completely truthful accounts of what they saw. It just so happens that in encountering the same situation they saw two very different things.'

'So where does that leave us, miss?'

'Oh, in a most interesting place, inspector.'

'And where is that, Miss Miller?'

'In a place where we — I'm sorry, but I seem rather to be thinking of myself as a detective...'

'Not to worry, Miss Miller. You seem to have a talent for this kind of thing.'

A smile flickered over Agatha's face. 'It leaves us, Inspector Cough, in a place where we have first to decide whether or not the witness is to be believed. Do they have any reason to deceive? If not, we therefore need to accept their truth, but we have to understand that it is the truth as they see it, not necessarily as we would ourselves. We have to read them and their accounts, in other words, with the empathetic eye of the writer.'

‘And where does such empathy lead us, Miss Miller?’ He would not have allowed many older and more experienced colleagues to speak to him in this way, but this young woman with all her freshness and her naivety brought a lump to his throat. His daughter would have been her age now, and he would have given the world to hear her voice full of the enthusiasm of youth, the certainty of the young not yet knocked out of her by the blows of life.

‘Why, to the best thing of all, inspector. Understanding. Once we understand our witness, understand his view of the world, we know how to interpret what he says. We can participate in his account. It is rather like a dance.’

‘A dance, Miss? And why is that?’

‘Dances have their rules, Inspector. A waltz can only be in triple time and a polka in quadruple time. They would not work in anything else. And I have a feeling that detection is the same. It has its rules and its own particular tempo. Try to force it to fit to a different time and it will simply refuse, or at best it will be somehow out of sequence. No, an enquiry cannot be rushed; it must unfold in its own time. I learnt at my classes in Torquay that the most talented dancers are those who best shape their bodies, their minds and their movements to the dictates of the music. I suspect that the best detectives are those who most effectively shape their solutions to the complex dictates of their witnesses’ accounts.’

‘You are talking, no doubt, about detective fiction, miss. There the unfolding of the mystery is as intricate as the steps of a dance. I’m afraid you won’t find it that way outside of the pages of a book.’

‘What a shame, Inspector. I am rather partial to the intricacies of the dance.’

‘Well now you put it like that, miss, I am rather attracted to your point of view. And what do you say, Mr Miller,’ said Cough, turning to Monty.

'Me, inspector. I say that I learned long ago that there are certain situations in life where it is best simply to agree with Agatha.'

Cough laughed out loud at this. 'Best simply to agree. Yes, by Jove. Best simply to agree. Well, miss, fascinating as it is to talk about these things, I want to know what has brought you here this morning. I don't suppose it was only to talk about your theories of criminal detection.'

'No indeed, Inspector. As we were out for a walk this morning, we happened to pass the premises of Cassell and Company. They have their offices down on the Embankment between the Temple and Blackfriars.'

'I know it, Miss Miller.'

'Well, I can never pass a bookshop window without stopping to look, and this morning as I looked, what did I see but an advertisement for a new book soon to be published by Mr P.G. Wodehouse.'

'I am very happy for the young gentleman,' said Cough. Was this really all that the young woman, well-meaning as she no doubt was, had to tell him?

'Come, Inspector. Do not look so disappointed. I would not take up your valuable time if that were all I had to say. *Not George Washington* is the title of the book. That in itself, however, is not what captured my attention. The advertisement promises a tale of literary deception. Now, far be it from me to presume, but it would seem to me that literary deception might prove a very good motive for murder.'

Chapter 16

Friday 16th August 1907

Pall Mall Club

The appurtenances of afternoon tea had replaced the coffee pot and toast of the morning when Doyle and Wodehouse faced each other again later that day, having reconvened at Doyle's club. Spread out on the same table that they had occupied that morning was a copy of that day's first edition of the *Evening Standard*. It was open at a page displaying an array of notifications and small advertisements.

'Well, I have little doubt that this particular advertisement is designed for our attention, Plum,' said Doyle, pointing to a small box of text towards the bottom of the page.

SCOTTISH MASTER REQUIRES
MAN OF LETTERS TO ASSIST
IN LITERARY CONSTRUCTION.

SUITABLE FINANCIAL TERMS
BY NEGOTIATION.

APPLICANTS TO RESPOND BY
RETURN TO B. MAILER AT THE
THE SPOTTED COW,
FARNHAM.

'If I were you, Arthur, I would be flattered by the opening line.'

"Scottish Master." Indeed,' said Doyle.

'And I am, I therefore presume, considered a man of letters in this particular equation,' continued Wodehouse. 'We may at least take comfort that in being blackmailed, for I presume from the central part of the advertisement and from the subtlety of the name at the end that this is where we are heading, our true abilities are recognised.'

Doyle and Wodehouse both smiled in spite of the circumstances.

'I am more than ever convinced from the final sentence,' said Doyle, 'that our correspondent must have overheard us at Farnham.'

'The fact that we are directed to reply to The Spotted Cow in Farnham, avoiding in the most obvious way any reference to the Bat and Ball, leaves little room for doubt,' said Wodehouse.

Doyle leant back and sipped thoughtfully at his tea. He sat silent for a moment or two, watching the carriages and people streaming past the windows of the club. When he spoke again, he did not look at Wodehouse and his voice was weary. 'It seems that we have little choice but to respond,' he said.

'We could simply pass the verses and this advertisement on to Inspector Cough,' said Wodehouse.

Doyle gave this a moment's thought. 'We could, Plum,' he said. 'I still feel more inclined, though, to gather our information more fully before we think of going to him. To present him with these documents would, I fear, simply rekindle any perceived part I might have played in Wilde's murder,' said Doyle.

Wodehouse nodded reflectively. 'Perhaps you are right, Arthur,' he said. 'We can lose nothing and might very well gain a great deal by meeting with Mr B. Mailer and seeing what precisely it is that he proposes.'

'Whatever our correspondent lacks in literary ability and in subtlety of approach, he seems to make up for in directness of purpose,' said Doyle. 'To Inspector Cough or anyone else looking at the poem and this advertisement from the outside, a clear line is drawn between us, some putative literary conspiracy and the murder of Harold Wilde. Add into this potent mixture the chequered history that exists between me and Wilde over his appalling proposal about *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and the circumstantial case is all but complete.'

'Yes, I suppose you are right, Arthur. The situation from that perspective does not look good. Perhaps we are better, for now at least, keeping our cards to our

chest as far as Inspector Cough is concerned. Let us see what we might do by ourselves in the first instance.'

Both men, as if by tacit consent, fell silent. Doyle looked out the window while Wodehouse appeared focused on the particular intricacies of the pattern on the tablecloth. In reality, however, both were deep in thought about the problem at hand.

'I suppose what it comes down to is this,' said Doyle after a minute or two. 'We must make our reply to The Spotted Cow as instructed.'

'To the subtly named B. Mailer,' added Wodehouse.

'Indeed,' said Doyle. 'I feel that we have little choice.'

'The game's afoot as Holmes would say. Well, let it be me that makes the arrangement. I am, sad as I am to admit it, by far the lesser known of the two of us. Whether it remains that way only posterity will be able to decide. I have great hopes of *Not George Washington*, you know.'

As he spoke, Wodehouse pulled towards him a sheet of the Club's writing paper and a pen. 'So how do we begin?'

Chapter 17

Friday 16th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

When Oates returned to the Library, having seen Agatha Miller and her brother from the ground, Cough was no longer there. In the temporary absence of his constable and any further witnesses to question, he had decided to turn his attentions to the on-going mystery surrounding the cigar ash.

The detective, when Oates finally ran him to ground, was pacing out the distance between the spot on the balcony and the place on the roof terrace where the two deposits of ash had been found. 'Oates,' he called when he spotted the constable's unmistakable form. 'I want you to stand where you found the ashes there on the balcony.'

'Very good, sir,' said Oates, moving with surprising pace to do as requested as the Inspector made his way up the steps at the rear of the balcony and on to the roof terrace.

'We need to establish in the first instance whether or not Smoker Number One, seated or stood where the ash is found on the balcony, would have been able to see Smoker Number Two on the roof terrace.

'That is to assume, sir, that Smoker Number One and Smoker Number Two were not one and the same person.'

'Indeed, Oates. Mr Milne has given evidence that he was the smoker of both cigars, but I want to allow for all possibilities.'

'Including the possibility that Mr Milne might not be telling us the truth.'

'As you say, Oates. It is also to assume that if the smokers were two different people that they were smoking at the same time. One line of inquiry at a time, though. Let us first establish the answer to my initial line of thought. Sit down at the seat where you found the ash,' Cough instructed.

Oates complied.

By now Cough had reached his position at the far side of the roof terrace where, standing, the upper portion of his body was clearly visible. 'So, if Milne was standing, he would have been clearly visible to someone sitting where the balcony ash was found. Now, how about if he were sitting down?'

Suiting action to his words, Cough promptly sat down and disappeared from view. 'And you are now out of sight,' called Oates.

'There is one more test to do, Oates. I want you to remain seated while I walk up and down from the front to the rear of the roof terrace.' This he now proceeded to do several times.

'Well, Oates?' asked Cough.

'You were in sight for most of the time, sir, but when you approached the rear of the roof terrace you could not be seen from a seated position on the balcony.'

'Excellent. Excellent,' said Cough. Without further speech, he disappeared from view to reappear a moment later on the balcony. 'So, we have established a number of things. Point number one: it is entirely possible that two people—McMasters or some other person and Mr Milne could have been up here at the same time yet to have remained unaware of each other's presence. It is also possible, depending upon where Mr Milne was on the roof terrace at the time, for them to have come and gone without seeing each other's movements.'

'Meaning,' said Oates, 'that we cannot necessarily read anything into McMasters' or Milne's statements regarding Mr Milne's whereabouts.'

'That is correct, Oates,' said Cough. 'We will need to find some other means of establishing what in fact happened up here in the minutes before Wilde was killed and what part, if any, those events might have played in the crime.'

'Somebody must have seen, sir,' said Oates. 'There were people all around the ground and people on the opposite side of the ground or upon either side would have had a clear view.'

'You are right of course, Oates,' said Cough. 'But whether or not any witnesses come forward is not in our control. We must wait and see what the gods of criminal detection may throw into our path.'

'We could always encourage them, sir,' said Oates.

'Who?'

'The gods of detection, sir. An advertisement placed in the dailies may catch somebody's eye.'

'A good idea, Oates,' said Cough. 'There is your next task. I will write the text myself.'

*

Once he had sent Oates on his way, Cough decided to pay a visit to the Club Secretary to let him know out of courtesy that he was leaving. Politeness, Cough had learnt over the years, always paid dividends.

He made his way up the stairs to the first floor landing and knocked at the Henchard's door.

'Come in,' came the Secretary's voice.

Cough opened the door and entered. The late afternoon sun shone into the room. 'I'll be leaving now, Mr Henchard,' he said.

'Very well, Inspector Cough. I trust you have had a fruitful day?'

'Food for thought,' said Cough. 'Food for thought.'

'I will take that as positive,' replied Henchard, a somewhat enigmatic expression on his face.

'Progress is progress, sir. Though sometimes it does not seem like it. Well, I wish you a good afternoon.'

'Good afternoon, Inspector,' said Henchard, returning to his work.

It was as he turned to leave the room that Cough noticed the curtains at the window were missing.

Chapter 18

Friday 16th August 1907

The Spotted Cow, Farnham

The man took his pint of mild and walked away from the bar to a table in the far corner of the snug. At this time of day, he had known the place would be reasonably full. For this business he did not want to be too conspicuous, and what better place to disappear from view than in the warmth and noise of a convivial public house at the end of the working day, with its air of good humour and release from honest toil. Well, honest for some at least. And for those less honestly looking to make their living? Well, hide in full view seemed to be a good motto and the snug at The Spotted Cow served his purpose perfectly.

He settled into his seat. He placed his tweed cap on the table in front of him and next to it his pint. He pulled from the pocket of the coarse jacket he always wore a neatly addressed envelope that he had collected from the barman when he bought his drink:

Mr. B. Mailer
The Spotted Cow
Farnham
Surrey

Without further delay he tore open the top of the envelope and withdrew its contents. Good quality paper he noted to himself. A gentleman's club probably. Plenty of funds where that came from. Rubbing his hands in satisfaction he turned his attention to the letter itself.

Dear Mr Mailer,

I was most interested to read your advertisement in the *Evening Standard*. I have never undertaken work of the sort to which you allude before, but would be most interested to hear from you further regarding your proposals and terms and to see whether, under the right circumstances, we might come to a suitable agreement.

Please reply with the necessary details by means of a further advertisement in the first edition of the *Evening Standard* of Saturday 17th August.

Yours sincerely,

A Man of Letters.

He read the letter over twice before folding the paper and returning it to the envelope. That done, he slipped it into the pocket of his jacket.

Well, well. So, they had taken the bait, and they would have their advert in tomorrow evening's paper.

Part 3
The Second Innings

Chapter 19

Saturday 17th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

A new day had dawned over Lord's, the sun bright and the air warm as it had been for the last few days. Cough on his arrival had made his way without delay to the Library, which Mr Henchard had made available to the detective for the duration of his investigation. Supplied with refreshments and meals from the kitchens Cough was very satisfied with the arrangement.

'Who else do we have to see today, Oates?' asked Cough. Lunch seemed many hours ago already. 'Surely there cannot be many more staff?'

'Only a few more, I think sir,' said Oates, who proceeded to lean back against the wall, as if overcome by this burst of loquacity.

It was towards the end of what was proving to be a very long afternoon of taking statements from the staff who had been on duty the previous day. Cough could not stifle a yawn, though he hated to display anything suggestive of physical or mental weakness while he was on duty. 'Very well. Show in the next one,' he said.

While Oates was out of the room, Cough took the opportunity to relax for a moment. He shut his eyes and leaned back into the armchair. The softness of the cushions and the warmth of the room were likely, if he were not careful, to send him to sleep. He often found, in the throes of an investigation, that he did not sleep well at nights. The events of the day, the information he had acquired and the ways in which these might be configured and reconfigured to point to the solution of whatever crime he happened to be investigating were not easily banished from his

mind. Some of his colleagues, he knew, shut their minds on the day's work when they shut the front door to their houses in the evening and reopened them again when they left home the following morning. Not so Cough. The net result was that at the most inopportune of moments during the night he found his mind at work on the case, and at equally inopportune moments during the working day he had the tendency to be overcome with tiredness at little or no notice. That must not happen now, and so he quickly opened his eyes and stood up. Exercise was what he needed, but for now he shook his hands and feet as he awaited the return of Oates and whichever of the pavilion staff he would bring with him next.

Any tiredness Cough may have felt a moment before disappeared as he saw the distinctive figure of Madeleine Gooch enter the room. A shaft of sunlight burnished her glorious red hair. But as to her age, her body and face gave no definitive indication. She could have been anything between twenty and forty.

'Thank you, Oates,' said Cough.

'Is there anything else, sir?' asked the constable.

'There is, Oates.' As he spoke, Cough steered the burly constable towards the door of the Library and lowered his voice so that Madeleine Gooch would not hear. 'I would like you to take the carriage and go to the offices of Cassell & Co. They are on the Embankment, not far from Blackfriars. I need you to ask them for two copies, in whatever form they have it, of a book called *Not George Washington* by Mr P.G. Wodehouse. One of them is for me; the other I would like you to deliver to Miss Agatha Miller. You have the address of her hotel on file, I presume?'

'Yes, sir.'

'In which case, that will be all.'

'Very good, sir,' said Oates. 'I'll go right away.'

'Oh, and Oates.'

'Yes, sir?'

'One more thing. While you are away, I also want you to call in at Scotland Yard. See what, if anything, we have on file for Mr A.A. Milne.'

Oates nodded his understanding. This satisfied Cough that his instructions would be followed to the letter. A man of very few words, Oates was unfailingly reliable. As long as his orders were understood he would not deviate by one iota from his task. He would be back, all being well, within two hours with everything as requested.

'Now. Miss Gooch,' said Cough, turning his attention back to the woman who was sitting patiently and apparently unperturbed on the sofa. 'We spoke briefly yesterday when we met by chance, but since then my investigation has moved on and I have some further matters I would like to discuss with you.'

'Certainly, Inspector.'

'Good. You told me yesterday that you were at work in the Long Room when Mr Wilde came off the field. Please tell me what precisely you were doing during the afternoon.'

For the first few minutes of their interview Cough learnt very little of any substance. Madeleine Gooch had been employed in her usual routine activity. Preparing tables, organising the napery and cutlery, laying out the platters of food, wiping the crockery. Most of the afternoon she had spent working in the kitchens and the pantries in the basement and so naturally she had not been able to see what was happening out on the field of play or in the upper floors of the pavilion. It was only towards the end of the afternoon that she had been sent to the Long Room to ensure that all was in readiness for the players' tea. It must have been, she supposed when

asked, about ten to five, maybe a little later. They had been expecting the gentlemen in when the match finished, and according to the regular reports they received, because it did not do to keep the gentlemen waiting for their tea, the Actors had already won and the day's play would soon be over.

'And who did you see while you were in the Long Room?' asked Cough.

'Only Mr Wilde, sir, as I told you before,' said Gooch.

'Very well,' said Cough. 'Otherwise there was nobody?'

'Nobody apart from me. It only takes one person to make sure that everything is in readiness for when the teams come in and that everything is perfect with the tables. When I was certain that everything was ready as it should be, I left the room right away.'

'And that is when you saw Sir Arthur Conan Doyle leaving the field?'

'Yes, sir. It was as I was going out of the room. He had almost reached the boundary when I saw him.'

'And you are positive that you did not see Mr Wilde again?'

'I did not. I was only in the Long Room for just a few minutes, three or four at the most after Mr Wilde passed through.'

'Nobody saw you?'

'Nobody as far as I am aware, Inspector.'

Cough made a mental note of this. Madeleine Gooch's account was certainly plausible. She could not, it seemed, cast any light on the movements of Doyle and Wilde in the pavilion itself beyond what she had told him already.

'Shall I go on, sir?' asked Madeleine Gooch.

'Yes, yes. Please do, Miss Gooch,' he said.

‘After I saw Sir Arthur approaching the pavilion, I left the Long Room directly by the door facing the Writing Room, then made my way straight to the Bowlers’ Bar.’

‘And did you see anybody else while you were on your way to the Bowlers’ Bar?’ asked Cough.

‘Only one, sir. He was coming down the stairs towards the Secretary’s office, rather out of breath it seemed. I saw him through a gap in the bannisters as I was approaching the stairs by the Library here.’

‘And who was that?’ asked Cough.

‘One of the younger players in the match, sir. One of the young authors, I think. Mr Milne, I believe is his name.’

*

Bearing in mind what he had recently heard from Madeleine Gooch, Cough was faced with a dilemma. It was clear to him at once that either Gooch or Milne was lying.

The woman placed Milne at the crucial moments surrounding Wilde’s death on the stairs heading down towards the Long Room. According to her testimony, the young author had been moving at speed and seemed not to have seen her in his haste. He had appeared to her to be somewhat winded.

According to Milne’s own version of events, he had at this time been up on the roof terrace watching the match.

McMasters’ account could not help Cough here. He had left the balcony area before the time in question and so could neither confirm nor disprove Milne’s

account. Milne's story was hazy, and Cough sensed that he could not rely entirely on the author's evidence. That Milne had at some stage in the run-up to Wilde's death been on the roof terrace was not open to doubt. Doyle and McMasters both agreed that they had seen him there. Neither man, however, could provide Milne with the alibi he needed for the time of Wilde's murder. No, for the crucial moments leading up to the actor's death Milne was without witnesses to his whereabouts. Until, that is Madeleine Gooch had come along with her claim to have seen Milne on the stairs.

Would he have had time to make his way down after Doyle saw him when he turned to leave the field and the point at which Gooch left the Long Room? He estimated that it would have taken Doyle approaching a minute to make his way from the field. Yes, it was just conceivable that Milne would have had long enough. Gooch could be lying, of course. But why would she lie?

Milne's story about the time he had spent up on the roof terrace simply did not add up for Cough. Weighing up the odds, the detective decided that on balance he had sufficient reason to bring Milne in for further questioning. Cough felt quite certain that the author had not been completely straight with him, and at the very least the suspicion that he might be guilty of murder would force Milne to reconsider his position and to think very hard about being more co-operative. If obliged to decide one way or the other, Cough would have to say that he doubted that Milne had, indeed, remained on the roof terrace throughout his time off the field. The arrest might induce a little more honesty from him.

Chapter 20

Saturday 17th August 1907

A.A. Milne's apartment

Milne was just sitting down to his afternoon tea. His writing had gone well. He would show the world soon enough that he was better than *Lovers in London*. The book had been a start, a way in, but it was not where he saw his reputation resting. No, as he'd been discussing with that police detective the previous morning, writing about crime seemed to open up many potential avenues. Not least the possibility for comedy. There was something self-conscious, something self-deprecating about the form that appealed to him. It was as if it knew that it was its own most serious yet also most forgiving critic.

He poured himself a cup of tea and was about to launch into the scones and jam when the doorbell rang. He went to the door and for the second time since the day of the fateful match at Lord's found himself facing a representative of the Law. In fact, on this occasion he was faced by several of them.

Before Milne could say anything, Inspector Cough, for he it was who had disturbed the author at his tea, spoke. 'Good afternoon, Mr Milne. We meet again. I am here to arrest you on the suspicion of murdering Mr Harold Wilde.'

Chapter 21

Saturday 17th August 1907

Farnham, Surrey

It was approaching dusk when Wodehouse's train pulled into Farnham station. It was still nearly an hour until the time their correspondent had identified in his advertisement in the first edition of the day's *Evening Standard*, but The Spotted Cow was, he knew, a reasonable distance to walk from the station and he wanted to leave himself sufficient time to make his way there and to check out the surroundings before he made the *rendez-vous*. The failing light would help his cause with this, but it would also assist whoever he was going to meet. He would have to be careful and to keep his wits about him.

He was one of only a handful of people, as it transpired, who alighted from the train at Farnham, and by paying a judicious call to the Gentlemen's Waiting Room, he found himself a few minutes later the sole possessor of the station premises. The Station Guard having seen, as he thought, the last of the passengers on their way to their final destinations, had retired to wherever guards at stations retired at this time of the evening. A cup of tea and the newspaper were by now, very likely, the man's one focus of attention and it was with a feeling of some security and confidence that Wodehouse made his way through the abandoned ticket hall and turned his face towards his assignation.

Forty-five minutes later Wodehouse had taken up a position concealed in the trees from which he could, with reasonable chance of not being seen himself, observe anybody approaching or leaving The Spotted Cow. Apart from any

pathways running through the woods, a method of approaching the public house he thought it most unlikely their correspondent would take in the dark, the road in front of him was the only means of reaching their meeting place. It was entirely possible, of course, that the man (he and Doyle had convinced themselves that it must be a man) was already *in situ* awaiting the arrival of his intended victim, but Wodehouse had decided to leave it until the last possible moment to see whether anyone he knew arrived, and he had no intention of arriving early himself. In the course of the last twenty minutes, however — and an uncomfortable twenty minutes they had been wedged awkwardly between the rough bark of two trees — nobody had passed by except for a group of farm labourers at the end of their day's work going for an honest and hard-earned pint or two before returning to their homes.

Well, the time had come. Looking to left and right to ensure that his appearance would not be observed, he pushed his way back through on to the roadway and brushed himself down. The last thing he wanted to do was to appear in front of their correspondent looking as if he had just taken a rather muddy hike through the woods. He must appear to be the epitome of calm and collectedness.

Once he had made himself presentable, it took Wodehouse only a minute to make his way from his hiding place down to the door of The Spotted Cow. He had not been to Farnham since the occasion of his ill-omened conversation with Doyle. Their ideas had come to nothing, of course, but in the meantime Doyle had produced no Holmes stories to satisfy his adoring public. Whoever had overheard their conversation that day, not knowing their decision to proceed no further with the business, would have every reason to believe that the fraud was in the process of becoming reality. The letters he and Doyle had received provided plentiful evidence that somebody was very much of the opinion that the Sherlock Holmes-reading

public was going to be deceived, and intended to turn what they believed they knew to their advantage. But who was it?

Bracing himself, Wodehouse pushed open the door to the bar and walked in as confidently as he could manage. Here and there a scattering of drinkers looked up to appraise the new arrival, but Wodehouse consciously avoided their gaze. Whatever happened, it must seem as if he were here for no purpose other than a casual drink. And so, he approached the bar where he ordered a pint of the local bitter from the landlord before making his way to a table in the corner of the snug.

From the far side of the bar, Wodehouse's movements were being carefully watched. Seated alone close to a pillar which served as effective cover from most areas of The Spotted Cow, the man sat, nursing a tankard in his rough hands. Workman's hands. His cap, a rough tweed, lay on the bar next to his drink.

So, they had taken the bait. Wodehouse had come.

The author, out of his element away from the city, no doubt, sat with determined calmness. He did not want to make any discomfort he might be feeling obvious to the clientele of The Spotted Cow. Whoever he was here to meet, Wodehouse assumed, would recognize him and he did not want to make what was already a bad situation worse. Regularly, almost rhythmically, the young man drank from his beer and was deeply engaged, apparently, with the content of his newspaper.

His observer determined to wait a few minutes, to give himself the advantage not only of surprise but also of discomfort. He was pleased now that he had arranged for the meeting to be here rather than in London. Although a crowded pub in the City would have afforded its own kind of anonymity and safety, Farnham, a place far from Wodehouse's familiar territory, had the advantage of putting the author on the back

foot. He smiled to himself. How appropriate the metaphor was in the context. And the more uncertain Wodehouse felt, the more likely it was that he would accede to whatever demands were placed before him. Besides which, there was a certain poetic satisfaction in bringing the plot to a crisis back in Farnham, where it had all begun two long years ago.

So now, he was content to lurk for a few minutes like the evil genius in the background awaiting the moment for his big reveal. As far as Wodehouse was concerned Patrick McMasters, if he knew who he was at all, might only be the groundsman at Lord's, but he was about to learn that he was rather more than that. For two years he had been obliged to hold his peace. The information he had picked up that fateful evening outside the Bat and Ball, when he was the lowly groundsman of Farnham Cricket Club, had seemed so promising, but month after month had passed. He had almost given up hope of ever being able to use it, but now was the time to make hay. Now that Wilde was out of the way, Wodehouse and Doyle must pay for their conspiracy. Either that or the newspapers would pay for the privilege of the sensational story he could tell. It was true that still no new Holmes stories had emerged, but he was determined to use what he knew. Even the suggestion that the two men were conspiring to defraud the public at large with spurious Holmes stories would be enough. Blackmail was an ugly thing, but after all it was no worse than the plot the two authors had hatched that evening in the parlour of the Bat and Ball. It was time for him to turn his knowledge to good account.

Taking a final fortifying draft, McMasters placed his tankard firmly on the bar, gathered up his cap and made his way towards Wodehouse's table. As he had hoped, in the busy snug the author remained unaware of his approach, and McMasters stopped just a couple of feet behind where he was seated.

‘Welcome back to Farnham, Mr Wodehouse,’ said McMasters in a clear, firm voice. Much to his satisfaction he watched as Wodehouse started upon hearing his name.

When the author answered, however, it was in a calm and even humorous tone. ‘Ah, Mr Mailer, I presume? Now tell me I am wrong, but I am almost certain that I saw you only a couple of days ago when I was playing at a match at Lord’s.’

‘Aye.’ McMasters had not envisaged that Wodehouse would display such confidence, but he was not to be outfaced. ‘Aye,’ he repeated, ‘but that’s neither here nor there. It makes no difference to me whether you recognise me or not. I have other and bigger concerns, and by the time we have finished speaking you will likely think so too.’

‘Then please enlighten me,’ said Wodehouse. ‘To continue the vein of our correspondence to date, perhaps a limerick will serve.

‘I’ve joined you at Farnham in Surrey
To address your concerns and your worry.
Tell me what you believe,
Though you’re roundly deceived,
And I’ll be on my way home in a hurry.’

Wodehouse smiled and sat back to await his companion’s answer but saw at once that he had misjudged his man. McMasters looked hard at Wodehouse for a moment then exhaled dismissively through his nose before pulling out a chair and sitting down opposite the author. His expression intensified as he leaned across the table until his face was only a foot from Wodehouse’s and he exhaled again, this time more slowly. His words when they came were few and to the point. ‘Fraud, Mr

Wodehouse. You and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. It is time for you to pay. Insurance we can call it. Insurance that I will not tell what I know. And fraud is only the start of it.'

*

It was almost an hour later that the disconsolate figure of P.G. Wodehouse was to be seen making his way back to Farnham station. In spite of his best efforts he had not succeeded in his attempts to persuade the obdurate McMasters—at last the shadowy figure had a name and a face—that the conversation he had overheard at The Bat and Ball had come to nothing more than hot air. The death of Harold Wilde, a death for which the man clearly blamed Doyle, served merely to fan the flames of his conviction that conspiracy was rife. For McMasters, it transpired, had not been alone in overhearing that ill-fated conversation. Harold Wilde had also been present, himself unknowingly watched. Yes, McMasters had positively revelled in the details. If there was nothing, as Wodehouse claimed, in the plan for him fraudulently to write Holmes tales on Doyle's behalf, a plan that Wilde had without doubt overheard, why was the actor now dead? And how could Doyle's presence in the pavilion at precisely the right place and time be explained without malice aforethought?

To Wodehouse as he made his way to the station and later as his train steamed on towards London once more, it seemed that only one option remained. The time had come for him and Doyle to make a clean breast of it to the authorities. Tomorrow they must speak to Inspector Cough.

Chapter 22

Saturday 17th August 1907

Pall Mall Club

It was late when Wodehouse's train finally pulled into Waterloo Station. He had determined on the train journey back, however, that no matter how late it might be, he needed to pay a visit that evening to Doyle. McMasters had left him with no doubt that he refused to accept that the writers' conspiracy had come to nothing. He had watched Doyle's progress as a writer in the time since with the closest of attention, and in the intervening years he had published not one Holmes story.

The clamour of the reading public notwithstanding, nothing had emerged from Sir Arthur's pen to assuage their desires. The only work of fiction he had produced in the interim was *Sir Nigel*. As an historical novel it was all well and good of its type, but it had failed to capture the public imagination, an imagination that would be appeased by Sherlock Holmes and nothing less. There had also been *Through the Magic Door*, a rather strange work that had never been likely to make much way in the world. Of more interest was the sequence of letters Doyle had published in the *Daily Telegraph* about the real-life crime case of George Edalji. It was evident that Doyle had not finished with crime and detection, but when it came to writing, his interests had been diverted into the realms of true crime rather than into its fictional cousin.

'How am I to account for this, Mr Wodehouse?' McMasters had asked. 'How am I to interpret this particular mystery? Or should I say crime?'

Wodehouse's assurances that Doyle had simply tired of Sherlock Holmes had carried no weight. No, McMasters was certain that behind this absence of the world's greatest consulting detective lay a much darker truth. The truth was that he (Wodehouse) was, with the aidment and abetment of his friend Doyle, mastering the art of writing Holmes stories himself. That silently, unbeknown to the eager detective fiction reading world, Wodehouse was steadily accumulating a body of work ready to pass off at the right time as Holmes' latest series of adventures. The reading public was used to the often large gaps between the publication of the Holmes stories. Eight years had elapsed between *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* and the appearance of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* in 1901, closely followed by a quick sequence of tales published in *The Strand* magazine throughout 1903 and 1904. There had been nothing since, but this was, as McMasters observed, nothing unusual in Doyle's pattern of writing the Holmes tales. Nothing unusual, that is, except for the events of that evening in Farnham on the 4th July 1904 following the Allahakhbarries match against The Artists. That, said McMasters, had changed everything.

All of this and more Wodehouse knew that he had to impart urgently to Doyle. There was no doubt in the fired imagination of Patrick McMasters that in the time since that fateful conversation in the rear room at The Bat and Ball, Wodehouse and Doyle had been engaged in a base conspiracy to defraud the British and American reading public and that his continued silence, should they wish to ensure it, would come at a hefty price.

'Where are these stories to which you refer, McMasters?' Wodehouse had asked. 'Where is your evidence of this fraud?'

‘That no Holmes stories have appeared since that evening in 1904 proves nothing,’ the groundsman had replied. ‘All it serves to demonstrate is that you have not published them yet. Everyone knows that Conan Doyle often leaves lengthy periods of time between publishing Holmes tales and that they then emerge in swift succession. It serves, no doubt, to heighten the public’s anticipation and the demand for more. This, I presume, leads to a surge in sales when new stories do eventually emerge, much to the benefit of his bank balance.’ The groundsman’s face had contorted momentarily here, as if the whole idea of authorship and earning money by the pen were either distasteful or painful to him. ‘It would also, no doubt, be much to the satisfaction and benefit of any other author who happened to be involved in the business,’ McMasters had concluded. ‘I warn you, Mr Wodehouse, that nothing you can say will make me believe to the contrary, so you might as well save your breath.’

‘What, then, is the point of this meeting, sir? If there is nothing I can do to convince you of the error of your beliefs, there is very little space for me to manoeuvre.’

‘Would you say so, Mr Wodehouse? I would not. I can see one clear way of avoiding any further... misunderstanding.’

‘And that is?’

‘£300 per annum will do it. That is the price of my silence. Sir Arthur can, I am certain, afford the cost, and any partner in crime, if he valued the career he was just embarking upon, would be able to make his own contribution to the sum. See it, if you like, as the price of your security.’

From the train, Wodehouse made his way directly to the taxi rank and was soon on his way to Doyle's club, where the peer had agreed he would remain until Wodehouse returned or until he received direct communication from him. Tonight was no time for false economy.

*

'Well, Plum,' said Doyle in one of the small parlour rooms that the Pall Mall Club offered to its members, 'it seems that our man is convinced we are engaged in a conspiracy, and as is so often the way with conspiracy theorists, there is no reasoning with them. Every piece of information they encounter is either forced into the service of corroborating their views or is written off as deliberate misinformation and serves only to deepen the original conviction. I fear there is nothing we can say that is likely to convince him that we have not acted on the idle conversation of a summer's evening.'

'That is very much my view of the case, Arthur.'

'Nothing will satisfy the man but his money. His £300 per annum.' Doyle looked away in disgust. And you are certain that the man is McMasters, the groundsman at Lord's?'

'Without a doubt, Arthur.'

'So does this demand for money connect in any way with the murder of Wilde?' asked Doyle.

'Now there, Arthur, is yet another depth,' said Wodehouse, helping himself from a plate of ham sandwiches that the club steward has provided as late night sustenance. 'McMasters was quite explicit that he has come forward with his

demands now because of the fact that Harold Wilde is dead. It is as if Wilde were somehow standing in McMasters' way. There is an additional complication, however.'

'Yes?' said Doyle, waving away the plate of sandwiches Wodehouse was proffering.

'McMasters is convinced that you killed Wilde.'

'He believes I killed Wilde?' said Doyle.

'Yes,' continued Wodehouse. 'Your presence in the pavilion is too big a coincidence in his mind and serves to convince him still further of the truth of our plan to produce phoney Holmes stories. It seems that Wilde was also somehow privy to our conversation.'

'That night in Farnham?'

'He must have been, Arthur.'

'Was Wilde playing that day in Farnham?' asked Doyle after a brief silence.

'No, I am quite sure he was not playing. The match that day was against the Artists. He was there, though. I would know the man anywhere. He had a friend playing, no doubt, and was simply there for the pleasure of the occasion.'

'And who can blame him, Plum? Life offers no pleasure greater than cricket on a sunny summer afternoon.'

'Indeed, Arthur, indeed. However, life offers no dampener on an afternoon's pleasure quite so effective as the presence of Harold Wilde. That is why I am so certain of my facts.' Wodehouse laughed. No situation was ever so serious that he could not appreciate its humorous possibilities. 'But let us not lose our thread. Is there any connection, do you think, between what I have learnt this evening from Patrick McMasters and the murder of Wilde?'

'Besides McMasters' own interpretation of the matter?'

'Besides that yes, Arthur.'

Doyle rolled an empty glass restlessly between his palms. 'It seems that there must be. But I think, Plum, that any definitive decision relating to that particular conundrum must be left squarely in the hands of Inspector Cough of Scotland Yard. What we need to do, first and foremost, is to tell him about this attempt at blackmail and what we have done about it so far.'

'To come clean,' said Wodehouse. 'I have come to the same conclusion myself.'

'Then we are agreed. The time has come, and we must keep this to ourselves no longer. Inspector Cough must know everything now. The advertisement in the *Evening Standard*. Our response. The second message via the *Standard*. Your visit to The Spotted Cow this evening. Everything.'

'Even the conversation we had at Farnham on the evening after the Allahakhbarries match.'

'Everything, Plum. We have done nothing wrong after all. Our discussion that evening was no crime. Ill-advised, maybe, but certainly no crime. And I, for one, have no intention of submitting to Patrick McMasters and his sordid demands for money with menaces.'

Chapter 23

Sunday 18th August 1907

Various awakenings in various places

It was still some time in advance of Inspector Cough's usual rising hour when the sun cast the first rays of a new day over Lord's the next morning. The sky was a wash of blue and promised another day of intense heat. As its first beams crept over the stands, it cast long shadows across the outfield.

A profound silence reigned, the kind of silence that is the feature of any large city in the early morning, especially on a sabbath morn before the noises of traffic and the more sedate business of that day have reasserted themselves. The silence was all the more profound for the occasional sounds that did find their way into the space.

Neither the shadows nor the sounds, however, made any impression upon the figure of the dead man lying face down in the middle of the square.

*

The same sun rose upon the walls of the Marylebone Police Station, the temporary abode of Mr A.A. Milne, detained at His Majesty's pleasure for questioning while Inspector Cough continued his investigations.

Milne had spent an uncomfortable night. The unforgiving slats of what passed for a bed had quickly made their hard presence felt through the thin flock mattress provided for His Majesty's guests so that it felt as if every one was cutting into his

hips, his shoulders, his knees and ankles. No matter which way he had turned in an effort to decrease the discomfort, Milne had failed to find relief. These punitive bed slats were a constant reminder to him of the reasons why he was here.

He was no murderer. Wilde had not received his death blow at Milne's hands, but it was his own unwillingness to co-operate with the Inspector that had brought him here. A certain shame at admitting what he had done at the match had prevented him from revealing everything to the Inspector in the mistaken belief that he could keep it secret. A night in the cells at Marylebone Police Station had convinced him of the error of his ways. Today, he would tell Inspector Cough all.

*

The sun also rose upon the façade of the Doncaster Hotel where Agatha and Monty Miller would shortly be taking their breakfast.

Monty was sound asleep in his room, adjacent to that of his sister. Like most young men, it took a great deal to come between Monty Miller and his sleep. Even Agatha's involvement in the investigation into Harold Wilde's murder, their extended stay in London with the inevitable expenses this incurred, and the awkward conversations this would lead to with his mother upon their return could not disturb his rest. Long experience had taught him that once Agatha had reached a decision there was nothing to be done but to go along with her determination. And so, as he slept on the sunlight of the new day cast its glance unseen across his room, capturing the dancing motes of dust in bars of yellow light.

Next door, by contrast, all was brightness. The shutters had been folded back and the windows stood wide open to the fresh morning air. The sun flooded the

room, and seated in an armchair in the corner was Agatha, engrossed in the manuscript Inspector Cough had sent to her via P.C. Oates the day before yesterday.

Dawn had found her already awake and out of bed, the covers neatly folded back, a cup of black coffee steaming on the small table at her elbow. Agatha took the occasional sip as she read for the third time through the adventures and the deceptions of James Orlebar Cloyster.

Mr Wodehouse could certainly write. The nefarious affairs of Cloyster and his accomplices and the elaborate literary hoaxes they perpetrated were handled with aplomb. Wodehouse's deft comedy somehow seemed to mitigate the crime; made it easy, even acceptable. There was much here to learn as a writer. But what, she puzzled in the early morning sunshine, had any of this to do with the situation she was engaged with? Was there some sign here waiting for her?

Chapter 24

Sunday 18th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

Within two hours of the discovery of the body, Inspector Cough, P.C. Oates and the Club Secretary were to be seen engaged in conversation near where the body lay. None of them, it seemed, had a ready explanation for how Patrick McMasters had met his end, nor why his body should have been placed as it was.

In the silence of the Sunday morning stadium, nobody even noticed the young woman, her hair pulled into a hasty bun at the back of her head, as she looked out from time to time through the windows of the Long Room, where she stood concealed behind a set of shutters. Fear lurked in the corners of her eyes. She would not wait to make all the usual preparations for the next day's match. That was why Mr Henchard had called her in, but her days of employment at Lord's must come to an end. Now, if she understood anything, was the time to make a swift departure.

Chapter 25

Sunday 18th August 1907

Scotland Yard

Later that morning, Cough was seated in one of the many interview rooms provided by Scotland Yard for meetings with innocent members of the public. The furnishing and decoration of these rooms, whilst hardly sumptuous was, nevertheless, somewhat more comfortable than that of the rooms dedicated to the interrogation of suspects. Opposite to him in two upholstered chairs were Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr P.G. Wodehouse. Three steaming cups of tea stood between them on a plain table. 'Well, gentlemen, I don't know what brings you here at this time on a Sunday morning, but after the start to the day that I have had, nothing would surprise me much,' he said.

'What has happened, Inspector?' asked Wodehouse.

For reasons of his own, Cough was evidently in the mood to be communicative. 'Shortly before seven o'clock this morning Mrs Cough and I were awoken by a violent knocking at my door, and within the hour I found myself back at Lord's.'

'New information, Inspector?' asked Doyle.

'You could say that, Sir Arthur.'

'It must have been important for them to drag you from your bed at such an hour on a Sunday morning.'

'Momentous enough, sir. I was summoned to the ground which is now the scene of a second murder.'

'Another murder?'

'Yes, Sir Arthur. I was summoned to begin investigations into the murder of Mr Patrick McMasters.'

'Patrick McMasters,' said Wodehouse, the colour draining from his face almost at once.

'That is correct, Mr Wodehouse. The groundsman at Lord's. He was found first thing this morning by other members of the ground staff. Dead in the middle of the wicket.' Wodehouse was turning, if possible, even paler. 'Are you quite well, sir?' asked Cough.

'No, Inspector, I do not believe I am. This is the most terrible coincidence.'

'And why is that, Mr Wodehouse?'

'Because,' said Doyle, seeing that his companion was incapable of further speech, 'it was of Patrick McMasters that we have come here to speak with you.'

*

'Let me be clear of my facts here,' said Cough. He had listened intently and had said nothing while Wodehouse and Sir Arthur had shared their story with him. 'Three years ago, a cricket match took place between the Allahakhbarries, Mr Barrie's team, and The Artists at Farnham in Surrey. After the match you gentlemen, whether in earnest or in jest, discussed the possibility of you, Mr Wodehouse, writing a number of stories that might be passed off as the work of Sir Arthur here.'

'That is correct, Inspector.'

'This plan or joke or whatever it was, however,' and here Cough shook his head somewhat despairingly at the behaviour of the literary fraternity, 'came to nothing.'

'Again, that is correct, Inspector,' said Doyle. 'We were in agreement that it would not be a good idea. We are writers, after all, not criminals.'

'Indeed, Sir Arthur,' continued Cough. 'Let me be sure I have this all correct. The position recently grew more complex. Is that right?' Doyle nodded. 'You have subsequently discovered that your conversation at The Bat and Ball that evening was overheard. You have also both recently received correspondence from someone intending to blackmail you. In response, messages have been passed via notices in the *Evening Standard* and you, Mr Wodehouse, yesterday met with this person.'

'Yes,' said Wodehouse.

'The person in question, calling himself Mr B. Mailer, subsequently proving to be the deceased Patrick McMasters,' continued Cough, shaking his head. 'Well, it is a situation worthy, almost, of one of your own Sherlock Holmes tales, Sir Arthur.'

'It is, Inspector,' said Doyle.

'And Mr McMasters was planning to use the information he overheard on the evening in question outside The Bat and Ball public house as the basis for blackmailing you gentlemen to the tune of £300 per annum.'

'As you say, Inspector Cough,' said Doyle. 'Just like in the novels.'

Chapter 26

Sunday 18th August 1907

Doncaster Hotel

'Body is following body in this case, Monty,' said Agatha. She placed her newspaper on the sofa next to him and pointed to an account of the second murder to have taken place at Lord's Cricket Ground within four days.

Monty picked up the paper and glanced through the report for himself. 'The mystery thickens. Agatha,' he said.

'Is that all you have to say about it, Monty?'

'I can't really see what else there can be to say,' he said, returning the paper to his sister and turning his attention again to *Not George Washington*, which he had been reading. 'Rather good this, you know,' he observed. 'I had not read it carefully before, but Mr Wodehouse is really very amusing.'

'Well, I am pleased you are amused,' said Agatha. 'I for one am rather inclined to take it more seriously.'

'So you said yesterday, Agatha,' said Monty. 'To be frank, I wonder whether you don't take the whole business a little too seriously.'

'Can anything be more serious than murder, Monty?'

'Well, if you put it that way, I suppose,' replied her brother. 'But dash it all, it's not really any business of ours, you know.'

'Inspector Cough seems to be happy enough to allow me some part in the business,' said Agatha, piqued by her brother's tone.

'As a potential witness, Agatha. Anybody who was at the match might have seen something that is of relevance to the investigation.'

'No, as more than that. Why else would he have listened at such length to what I have had to say on the subject? Why else would he have sent his constable with an advance copy of Mr Wodehouse's book and asked for my views? He wants to meet with me again later today to discuss it,' she said indicating an envelope that had arrived for her attention that morning.

'I don't know, Agatha. Perhaps it is simply one of his regular methods. You know these detective chaps. They always have their own idiosyncratic approaches, if the novels are to be believed. Perhaps Inspector Cough is one of those investigators who lets everyone else do the leg work, pieces together his case from the information they give him and then waltzes in at the last moment to take the glory for the solution.'

'No, Monty. I will not believe that of Inspector Cough. If he has given me permission to look at Mr Wodehouse's book and has sought my opinions, he has not done so out of personal laziness or out of any other low motive. Inspector Cough is, I am certain, a man of the highest principles.'

'But why, Agatha, would a man at the top of the tree at Scotland Yard want to involve you in his investigation?'

Agatha paused for a moment over this. Monty's question was a fair one. He had been dismissive a moment ago, but perhaps Monty was on to something. Why would Inspector Cough be allowing her such importance in this case? She was, after all, only one amongst hundreds of people who had been there that day and who had witnessed what had happened at Lord's. Why had he picked her out for such particular treatment?

Well, perhaps after all he had not. It was she who had sought him out, not the other way around. And she had not gone to him empty-handed. She had gone with ideas, with contributions. It was evident from his continued wish to communicate with her and his willingness to listen to what she had to say that he, for some reason, valued her input. Monty's observations, however, continued to niggle. He was watching her now; reading, no doubt, how she felt about the seeds of doubt he had planted in her mind. That was Monty all over; ten years her elder, but he still took the childish delight he had always taken in vexing her.

'I don't know, Monty,' she said at last. 'I have to confess that it does look curious, now you come to mention it. I must ask the Inspector when I see him later on.'

Chapter 27

Sunday 18th August 1907

Scotland Yard

'Before we speak about Mr Wodehouse's novel, could I ask you something, Inspector?' said Agatha. She had arrived promptly at the time Inspector Cough had indicated in his note, and she had at once been shown to an interview room where the Inspector was already seated.

'By all means, Miss Miller,' said Cough. 'What is it you wish to know?'

'It was my brother that first brought the question to my attention,' Agatha continued, 'and I have to say I am surprised that it had not struck me before. I am usually quite observant.'

'So I had noticed for myself,' said Inspector Cough, a smile turning the corner of his mouth.

'Yes. Thank you, Inspector. But I was wondering why are you so happy to allow me to be involved in this investigation? Writers of detective fiction, of course, like nothing more than to have a brilliant amateur solve their mysteries, making the regular police force look like fools. But you are no policeman of that order, Inspector...'

'Thank you very much, Miss Miller.'

'...nor am I a brilliant amateur. I simply happened to be in the right place at the right time when Mr Wilde was killed. Why, beyond the observations and the statements you take from any other witness, would you pay any attention to my views?'

'You have shared much more than mere facts and statements, Miss Miller,' said Cough. As he spoke, his face contorted for the briefest moment into what looked like pain followed almost at once by affection and he wiped his eyes. There was a catch of emotion at the back of his voice as he continued. 'You have offered what not many witnesses I have encountered in my long career at the Yard provide, and that is insight. It is a foolish detective who does not remain alert to the theories of others, especially people who were present at the crime. Nine times out of ten, if not ninety-nine times out of a hundred, these theories are either the purest nonsense or they come to nothing, but that is a poor reason not to listen in the first place. And the ideas you have put forward? Well, I feel this might be the one case in a hundred. Have you ever considered, Miss Miller, that a career in writing might beckon?'

Agatha flushed. 'Well, I have published a few poems, Inspector, and tried my hand at some stories, but nothing more. My elder sister is the literary talent in the family.'

'Besides which, miss, there is someone—someone I valued and trusted very much—of whom you remind me. I am prepared, however irregular it might be, to back my feelings that I can trust you in the same way. I am happy to allow you to work with your ideas in trying to come to a solution of these murders.'

'I am flattered, Inspector,' said Agatha. Being the youngest in her family and having at a young age lost her father, she had become accustomed to taking on responsibilities that did not fall to other girls of her age. Monty's long and regular absences abroad had also tended to encourage her into a maturity beyond her years, and as a result she was at ease with responsibility.

'Well, Miss Miller,' said Cough, eager it seemed to move on. 'Have you had the opportunity to read Mr Wodehouse's new book?'

‘Indeed, Inspector. I have read it several times over, and with the keenest of interest.’

‘And what do you make of it, miss?’

‘I think that Mr Wodehouse is a most entertaining writer, Inspector. It is a very funny book.’

‘It is, Miss Miller. It seems to me—though what would I really know about these things—that his is a name to watch out for in the world of letters.’

‘I could not presume to comment on such things, Inspector,’ said Agatha. ‘However, I very much enjoyed his style.’

‘Since I arranged for a copy of the book to be sent to you, miss, new information has come to light. Since last we spoke, it has emerged that there has been a blackmail plot afoot to implicate Mr Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in a case of supposed fraud on the reading public.’

‘To be brief, Inspector,’ said Agatha, seeing her way at once, ‘you think there are potentially interesting ways in which the plot of *Not George Washington* might relate to the attempts at blackmail.’

‘That is the aspect of the book that has most struck me, Miss Miller.’

Agatha picked up the proof copy of the novel and flicked through the pages. To anyone who did not know her, this might have looked like uncertainty or even abstraction. To anyone who knew her well the action would have conveyed nothing more certain than her complete attention. The Inspector did not know her well, but he suspected enough about this young woman, in whom he found himself more and more strangely interested, to sense that her mind was working at speed. When she spoke, it was as if there had been no delay, though in reality a full minute had passed since the Inspector’s last words had been uttered.

'The way the main character...'

'Mr Cloyster,' said Cough.

'Yes, the way that Mr Cloyster devises his scheme with his friends in order to make his writing serve his own personal and financial ends. Can it be pure coincidence that this should tie in so closely with a potential blackmail plot against the author himself. Is that your meaning, Inspector?'

'It is, miss.'

'You know, of course,' continued Agatha, 'that Mr Wodehouse has already earned money from writing using the character of Sherlock Holmes?'

Cough's years of experience working at Scotland Yard meant that he usually maintained total control over his facial expressions. The ability to seem impassive even in the face of the most momentous information was an essential weapon in the detective's armoury. Unchecked displays of emotion could ruin an investigation. Now, however, his face displayed only too clearly his surprise at the information he had just received.

'Yes, Inspector,' continued Agatha. 'The storyline of *Not George Washington* piqued my interest in Mr Wodehouse's own publishing history, and I remembered reading a Sherlock Holmes parody he published called *Dudley Jones, Bore-Hunter*. I'd read it in *Punch*. My father was an enthusiast of the publication, and we always have a copy around the house. I looked into it further and Mr Wodehouse published a sequence of poems and comic stories relating to Sherlock Holmes, all of them published in 1903 as it happens.'

'Between *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*.'

'I will have to take your word for that, Inspector,' said Agatha.

‘So, like Mr Cloyster in the novel, Mr Wodehouse is making his way in the world of publishing by turning to whatever means he can.’

‘So it seems, Inspector.’

‘Well, I suppose that young writers trying to make their way in the world have to earn the wherewithal to pay the bills somehow,’ said Cough.

‘And in this case, Mr Wodehouse has, in a way, become Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s collaborator. It is the same with another of the younger authors who was playing the other day. Mr Milne.’

‘Milne as well?’ said Cough.

‘Yes. A Sherlock Holmes parody was his first published work. *The Rape of the Sherlock*. It was published by *Vanity Fair* in 1903.’

‘The same year as the Wodehouse parodies.’

Cough sat back to allow this to sink in. There were implications to be considered here. They had vociferously denied the truth of the allegations, of course, but in what ways and to what extent would Wodehouse and Doyle be prepared to take their ‘collaboration’? Were the accusations of the putative blackmailer totally without foundation? And what about Milne? Were they all tied up in the kind of literary deception found in *Not George Washington*? Except, of course, that the type of fraud the novel used was precisely the reverse of that the blackmailer suggested.

When he spoke again, Cough leant far forward in his chair. ‘The implication being, I imagine, that Wodehouse and Milne have immersed themselves so far in Doyle’s fictional world that they could, if they wished, write most efficiently in imitation of the Holmes tales.’

‘I imply nothing, Inspector. However, the possibility, at least, must surely be entertained.’

Chapter 28

Sunday 18th August 1907

Doncaster Hotel

Agatha was seated, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say sprawled, in the capacious armchair that dominated one corner of her hotel room. Since her meeting with Inspector Cough at Scotland Yard this afternoon her thoughts had hardly strayed from Wodehouse's book and the possible connections it might have with the blackmail plot to which the Inspector had referred. And beyond that, who knew. Did it somehow connect to the murders of Harold Wilde and Patrick McMasters?. 'I am not quite sure what to make of this new book of Mr Wodehouse's, Monty,' she said.

'Why not, Agatha?' Monty replied. He knew his sister well enough to realise that her statement was merely the prelude to a longer disquisition and that this question was required of him.

'Because, Monty, while it masquerades as a work of humour, at its heart lies something much darker. There is deception here, dishonesty, a certain willingness to blur the distinctions between right and wrong. I wonder about Mr Wodehouse.'

'Come along, Agatha. It is only a book. Just because an author chooses to write a character or two who are morally and ethically suspect does not necessarily make him bad. The book is not about Mr Wodehouse himself, after all.'

Agatha adjusted her posture so that she was sitting upright. 'But can you be sure of that, Monty?' Her eyes positively glistened. 'The fact that it might not be about Mr Wodehouse doesn't remove the possibility that it is. There is the wonder of your "might". In fact, if I were to assume anything about the early life of an author

trying to forge a career in London, I would say that in many respects the path trodden by Mr James Orlebar Cloyster may well bear a considerable resemblance to the life-to-date of Mr Wodehouse.'

'Ah, well there you have the advantage of me, Agatha,' Monty said.

'In my superior knowledge of literature, you mean?' said Agatha, always keen to score a point over her elder brother.

'No,' replied Monty. 'Simply in that you've read the whole of the book and I have not.' He smiled his triumph and Agatha laughed.

'Well, I can't fault you on your reasoning there, dear brother,' she said. 'I got rather ahead of myself. Perhaps it would help if I explained.'

Again, realising that this was a cue to encourage her to continue, Monty said, 'By all means, Agatha. Do tell me. Explain away.'

*

'So what do you think, Monty?' said Agatha.

About an hour had passed during which time, except for the occasional question to elicit further information or clarification, Monty had simply listened. He was seated at a table opposite to his sister and between them stood a jug of water, two glasses and the remains of afternoon tea, delivered by one of the hotel maids at Monty's request when it became evident that his sister's explanation was not likely to be brief.

'I think,' said Monty, 'that first and foremost Mr Cloyster is a first-rate bounder who does not deserve his happy ending.'

'The joys of comedy,' said Agatha. 'But the hero's personal shortcomings aside, what do you think about Mr Wodehouse?'

'I go back to what I said before. It doesn't seem to me that it's a good idea to see an author's life as too closely imitating the life of one of his characters.'

'Of course, Monty. But nevertheless, it is surely equally foolish to say that there is no connection between the author's life and their work. What else is a writer supposed to draw upon if not their own experiences and feelings and thoughts?'

'Well, if you put it that way, Agatha.'

'In that case, if you don't mind, I wonder what you think of this as a point of view.' And without waiting to hear whether Monty minded or not, she launched on a further lengthy exposition.

Once she had finished expounding her ideas, Monty sat back and stared at his sister. 'Well, if you're right, Agatha,' he said, 'you are on to what would be one of the greatest literary hoaxes of all time. A reversal of the Chatterton scandal, no less. And Doyle and Wodehouse! Who'd have thought,'

'If I'm right, Monty.'

Chapter 29

Sunday 18th August

Lord's Cricket Ground

'When I arrived, the body had already been discovered,' said Henchard. Another day, another immaculate shirt and tie, another impeccable suit, his hair parted with precision. The Secretary was outwardly composed, but the same fiddling with the knot of the tie when Cough had entered the office. Still, Cough noted the curtains were missing.

'You were not early to the ground?' asked Cough.

'I am very rarely the first to arrive, Inspector. The groundsmen are usually here long before I am, as are the catering staff.'

'Is it normal for people to be here early on a Sunday?' asked Cough.

'During the summer when there is a match the next day, Inspector, the ground staff often arrive very early to roll the wickets before the sun has the chance to burn away all the moisture.'

'And you arrive later?'

'Typically, yes, Inspector. In fact, on a Sunday I would not normally come in at all. I only came in today because, for obvious reasons, I was summoned.'

'I see, sir,' said Cough. He resisted the urge to make any observations regarding class privilege. 'And when you arrived, can you tell me what happened?'

'Yes. Well, I knew the broad details from the telephone call made to my home, but I did not know the specifics until I reached the ground. Richardson, the usual man on the gate I enter by, told me that the dead man was McMasters. A terrible

blow to the club, and to the man's family of course.' Sympathy for McMasters' kin, however, was short-lived in the Club Secretary's mind and he moved on to other matters. 'As soon as I had seen the lie of the land and ascertained that you had been called, I retired to my office.'

'And then, sir?' asked Cough.

'I have some important meetings planned for the coming week, and I thought that I might as well have a look over some papers by way of preparation while I was awaiting your arrival. The next Ashes series, you know.'

'Indeed, sir,' said Cough. The preparations of the cricketing world, even the Ashes, held little interest for him in the face of two dead bodies in four days.

'Yes,' continued Henchard, oblivious apparently to Cough's lack of interest. The idea that the fate of the world did not hang on the next encounter between England and Australia was not conceivable to him. 'A delegation from the Australian Cricket Board is in town at the moment to make preparations, and they are due for a meeting here at Lord's on Tuesday. As if I needed any further inconvenience after poor Wilde's murder the other day.'

Cough kneaded his brow while he listened to Henchard. The deaths of Wilde and McMasters had registered with The Club Secretary for a moment, but now seemed to be just so much water off his back, except in so far as they represented an inconvenience to the cricketing calendar.

'Is there a problem, Inspector?' asked the Secretary.

'No, Mr Henchard. Nothing at all. Please can you confirm for me whether McMasters' body has been moved or otherwise interfered with?'

'To the best of my knowledge no, Inspector. However, I cannot be quite certain of that. As soon as I had verified that he was dead, I summoned the men who had found him to my office.'

'Who were these men?' asked Cough.

'Two of our regular ground staff,' said Henchard. 'Greaves and Forster.'

'Greaves and Forster.' Cough repeated the names as he scribbled them into his notebook. 'I'll speak with them after I have seen the body myself.'

'Do you wish to see the body now?' asked Henchard, who had already lifted the telephone from its cradle ready to call his assistant to summon the men.

'Yes please, Mr Henchard,' said Cough. 'The longer the time that elapses between the perpetration of a crime and the initial investigation of the scene, the greater the chance that critical evidence will be lost, tampered with or even destroyed.'

'Of course, Inspector. I will take you out to the body at once.' Henchard removed a fleck of dust from the lapel of his blazer. 'I suppose this will put Mr Milne in the clear,' the Secretary continued.

'Of McMasters' death at least,' said Cough. As he spoke, Cough was conscious that he was in danger here of being somewhat indiscreet. Henchard was, after all, simply a member of the public who had, no doubt, heard of Milne's arrest through the press reports that had been rife since Wilde's death. He had no right to privileged information. Even though he came from one of those classes in society that believes in its fundamental entitlement, there was no reason why he should be treated any differently. Cough was no respecter of class. On the other hand, it seemed to him that Henchard was hovering on the edge of something, some moment of revelation and that a little apparent indiscretion on the detective's part

might yield dividends. That was the nature of his work, and the success or failure of investigations often depended upon moments such as this.

Aware that he was still holding the telephone receiver, Henchard now replaced it before leading the way to the door. Courteously he ushered Cough on to the landing of the pavilion.

'I notice that you have no curtains at your window, sir,' said Cough as they left the room.

'Indeed, Inspector,' said Henchard. 'They are in the process of being cleaned and mended.'

'Mended, sir?'

'Yes,' continued Henchard. 'When I was in my office on the afternoon that poor Wilde was murdered I noticed that the material of one of the curtains was torn and so I ordered them to be taken down and sent for repair.'

*

In the room next door another telephone receiver was placed back silently on its hook. So, Milne was in the clear for McMasters' death. Would that also take his name out of the running as a suspect for Wilde's murder? Only time would tell.

*

A smell of linseed oil and leather, the unmistakable aroma of cricket greeted the two men as they emerged from Henchard's office, and from the kitchens somewhere

below the smell of cooking bacon. Cough's stomach rumbled. He had left home hurriedly when he heard of the second death at Lord's and had not eaten.

'Is there anyone you suspect, Inspector?' asked Henchard.

'Right now, sir, the only person who is not on my list is, as we were just discussing, Mr A.A. Milne. It is difficult to commit a murder at Lord's whilst being detained at His Majesty's Pleasure at Marylebone Police Station.'

Chapter 30

Sunday 18th August 1907

Doncaster Hotel

'What else makes you so certain that we should connect Wodehouse to the contents of this book, Agatha?' asked Monty, holding it up as he spoke, as if she were likely to be in some doubt as to which particular book he was referring.

'Well, to begin with look at Mr Wodehouse's position now. A young and emerging writer who is having his work in a range of forms accepted for a variety of publications. Society pieces, comic verse, short fiction. Even novels.'

'But he's hardly alone in that, Agatha. It is a good and amusing subject for a book and takes a nice pop at writers' pride at the end when it is the girl and not Cloyster himself who actually comes up with the goods. The play that's such a smash hit is hers, remember, not his. Why should we go a step further and assume that the work is really about Wodehouse himself?'

'I do not say it is about him, Monty. I simply observe, dear brother, that in this case the author is perhaps more than usually 'in' the novel. Look at the repeated references to Cloyster's work on *The Belle of Wells*, for instance.'

'Yes?' prompted Monty.

'Well, only a few years ago Wodehouse was working as a lyricist at the Aldwych, and one of his first major projects was a musical comedy. *The Beauty of Bath*. This may, of course, be completely incidental. It does not in and of itself mean that Wodehouse has been indulging in some kind of literary fraud but well ... It makes one wonder.'

‘And how on earth do you come by that gem of information, dear sister?’
asked Monty.

By way of response, Agatha simply placed on the table before him a copy of *The Era Almanack* for 1905, observing, ‘Information is always freely available if only one asks for it, Monty.’

Chapter 31

Sunday 18th August 1907

Inspector Cough's house

When he returned to his home that evening, Inspector Cough heard his wife at work in the kitchen, busy at the stove. The aroma of the roasted coffee beans, a pleasant burnt smell that must have lingered in the house all day since breakfast, filled the air of the small but impeccably neat hallway. He hung his hat and coat on the hooks by the door and made his way into the rear parlour. The room was pleasantly cool at this end of the day, facing north as it did, and after the stifling heat of Lord's, he was glad of it.

From the small kitchen next door he could hear the clatter of dishes and the promising sizzle of bacon, eggs and, if he was lucky, a fine Cumberland sausage and a slice of black pudding. There was something unusually pleasurable about bacon and eggs, especially when eaten later in the day.

'Sit down, George,' said Ida. Somehow, he never had managed to ascertain how, she always knew when he arrived in the parlour, no matter how quiet he had been. He had tried to avoid discovery on numerous occasions—coming downstairs in stockinged feet to secrete presents beneath the Christmas tree, trying to evade Ida in one of their family games of hide and seek when Lottie had been a girl, or when playfully trying to catch her unawares—but he had never once succeeded. It must, he had eventually been obliged to conclude, be that there was simply some sixth sense that Ida possessed, the strange communion that existed between some husbands and wives that meant she simply knew as by instinct when he was around.

If only, he reflected, the detection of crime were so simple. But such sympathy and knowledge, he knew, were hard won.

His eyes strayed to the mantel shelf above the fireplace where stood a photograph of a fine-looking young woman. Lottie. Their only child. Seventeen or eighteen she must have been when that picture was taken. Eighteen, in fact. The year they had gone for a holiday to Broadstairs. Her face was split with a smile, half-humorous, half-despairing of the photographer. Behind her stretched the expanse of the beach, dotted here and there with bathers and in the distance the still surface of the sea. This had been their last holiday together before they had lost her.

He settled into his place at the table. It was because of his girl—so he still thought of her—that he had so much time for Miss Miller. Her smile, her enthusiasm and her youthful self-confidence all reminded him of his Lottie. Her sometimes misplaced but nevertheless charming confidence to speak her mind. To tell him as if they were news things that he knew all too well, but which emerged from her lips with the bright charm and excitement of youth. The naivety that permits the young to tell their elders the way to live, the way to do things. Yes, he admitted to himself, he was allowing Miss Miller a voice and freedom that he would not have allowed others, not even the other men on the Force, because it gave his emotions a vicarious life; the pleasure of imagining Lottie alive and well once more. There was more to it than that, though. There had to be. Now that he had allowed his mind to stray into these dangerous waters, he needed to know. What was it about Miss Miller?

‘A penny for them, George.’ The voice at his elbow made him start. Whatever supernatural abilities Ida had to know of his whereabouts were clearly not reciprocal. He had been so engrossed in his thoughts that he had not been aware of the slim,

familiar figure of his wife as she had approached the table. 'She was a fine girl, George. A fine girl. And would have made a grand young woman.'

Cough battled the lump that had suddenly formed in his throat, fighting to force his words past it. He managed only, 'She would, Ida.'

He turned his head abruptly to look at her and then, unable to sustain her gaze, shut his eyes and rubbed ruminatively at his eyebrows.

'Come along, George,' she said. Her hand was warm on his shoulder and she squeezed affectionately. 'Eat your dinner before it goes cold. And while you do you can tell me all about it.'

Chapter 32

Monday 19th August 1907

Jerome Kern's apartment

Jerome Kern was not a regular reader of the daily press. His regular routine composing for the theatres and playing in pit bands was demanding, and when he did find himself with a few spare hours he preferred to spend the time in taking healthy exercise to clear his head rather than filling it with what he saw as either the inanities or the barrage of bad news that Fleet Street foisted upon the news-reading public of the metropolis.

Nevertheless he did occasionally, when he had a little more time to spare than usual ('just to read the theatre reviews for gossip and inspiration, you know'), take a copy of several of the papers, which he would then spend a relaxed hour perusing. As chance would have it, it was on one of these days that Inspector Cough's advertisement, inspired by the unusually imaginative P.C. Oates, appeared. So, they were looking for new information from the cricket-going public to help them solve Harold Wilde's murder, and they were particularly interested to speak to anybody who had been seated where they had a clear sight of the pavilion. He had been sitting in the Mound Stand and had had a clear view of the pavilion.

He looked at his watch. It was only two o'clock. Four hours until he needed to show himself at the theatre where he was playing tonight. That should be plenty of time to pay a visit to Inspector Cough at Scotland Yard and to see what he could provide in the way of useful information in relation to the case. He had been no devotee of Harold Wilde and his work, but the man had been murdered after all. And

then, his friends Wodehouse and Doyle had been playing in the match. He had heard nothing from them, but they must, he guessed, be somehow involved in the investigation. If, by showing his face at Scotland Yard, and telling them about what he had seen up on the balcony of the pavilion he could do anything to expedite the investigation, then do it he would.

Chapter 33

Monday 19th August 1907

Scotland Yard

'An American gentleman to see you downstairs, Inspector Cough.'

The message was delivered to him by a young and evidently nervous constable. These kind of nerves when approaching a senior officer were not uncommon at Scotland Yard, and Cough viewed it as a good thing. Due deference for authority was the sign of a serious and disciplined force.

'An American, you say?' he replied.

'Yes, sir.'

'Did he give a name?'

'Yes, sir. Mr Kern. Mr Jerome Kern.'

'The composer?' asked Cough.

'I couldn't say, sir,' replied the constable who was not a regular supporter of the theatrical and musical arts.

'Well, never mind,' said Cough. 'Did he say why he wants to see me?'

'He said he has come in response to your advertisement for witnesses at the Lord's match between the Authors' XI and the Actors' XI, sir,' said the constable.

*

Five minutes later, Cough settled into a seat opposite the composer.

'I'm sorry about the rather austere surroundings, Mr Kern,' said Cough, 'but I'm afraid that this is the best I can do.'

'Please don't worry, Inspector,' said Kern. 'I'm here to provide you with whatever information I can. The surroundings do not matter so much.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Cough, flicking to the floor a scrap of paper that was clinging to his sleeve. 'I appreciate your understanding, and I am grateful to you for taking the time to come in to see me. You caught me in the nick of time. I was just about to leave for Lord's to follow up a few lines of inquiry. In fact, how would you care to join me, and then we could have our conversation *in situ*, as it were? It might help.'

'I have to be at the theatre by six o'clock, Inspector. Provided you can assist me in being there by then, I am at your disposal for the afternoon.'

'Well that is excellent, Mr Kern. I will have a carriage for the rest of the day, and I will personally make sure that you are not late.'

'In that case, I would be happy to accompany you.'

*

'What took you to Lord's on the day of the match?' asked Cough as the police vehicle nosed its way out of Scotland Yard heading towards Trafalgar Square. 'It is not so common for your compatriots to be lovers of cricket.'

'I am no exception to your observation,' said Kern, 'and I would not have been there had Plum not asked me along.'

'Plum?' said Cough.

‘Yes. Wodehouse. Pelham Grenville Wodehouse. Better known to his friends as Plum. He’s mad on the game, you know. Has been ever since he was a schoolboy. If he’s to be believed, he’s not a bad player, but with my sceptical Yankee view of your national game I can claim to be no good judge of that.’

‘It is a complex, some may even say an arcane sport, Mr Kern,’ said Cough. ‘Matches can last for days, and even then it is possible for neither side to emerge victorious.’

‘A most unsatisfactory state of affairs from my nation’s point of view,’ said Kern. ‘My countrymen like their sport to be short, simple and decisive. They do not appreciate the longer arc and the intricacies of a sport such as cricket.’

‘But nevertheless, you were at the match.’

‘Yes, Inspector. Plum asked me to come and watch, as I said. These teams you know—the Authors’ XI, the Actors’ XI, the Artists’ XI—they are something to be a part of. They are useful places to spend time, to be seen and to get to know people.’

‘I see,’ said Cough, looking, as he spoke, at the imposing steps and columns of St Martin-in-the Fields as they slipped by.

‘Besides which,’ continued Kern, ‘Plum and I go back some way. We worked together at the Aldwych first, and we have kept up something of a collaboration ever since. A talented man, Plum, and he is certain that one day he and I will make it big in the musical comedy world. Broadway beckons, you know. But that will be of no interest to you.’

‘I don’t know, Mr Kern. In my experience it is a foolish detective who does not listen to everything his witnesses tell him. You never know where and when the vital clue will emerge. You were telling me about your acquaintance with Mr Wodehouse and your invitation to the match.’

‘Yes,’ said Kern. ‘Well, I decided on the basis both of friendship and of business that it would be good to go along to the match, and so I was at Lord’s when Mr Wilde was killed.’

‘Did you know him personally?’

‘I had met him, Inspector,’ said Kern, ‘but he was not a friend. Harold Wilde did not ... how should I say this? He did not go out of his way to ingratiate himself with the world.’

‘He was not a popular man?’ This was an emerging theme. Not many people in the theatrical and literary fraternities, it seemed, would miss the presence of Harold Wilde.

‘Far from it, Inspector. Doyle, Plum and I had all fallen foul at some point or another of Wilde and his obsession with advancing his own career. Not that any of us would actually have gone so far as wanting the man dead, of course. Don’t think that. But he certainly lacked the social and the professional graces.’

The carriage was by now making its way past the junction of Oxford Street and Tottenham Court Road and was progressing north towards Goodge Street underground station.

‘That is all very helpful, Mr Kern. Thank you. It helps to build a picture of how the victim was perceived within his own circles and by the world at large. Maybe you could now tell me about the match day at Lord’s?’

‘Of course, Inspector. Unless you would rather wait until we are at the ground itself.’

‘Just a few details for now, Mr Kern, if you don’t mind.’

‘Not at all,’ said Kern.

‘Where were you seated during the match?’

‘Well, for much of the time I was on the terraces just outside the Long Room. I was there as an invited guest of Plum’s and so was given the true hospitality treatment. A couple of times during the match, though, I decided to take what I believe you English call a constitutional’—consti-too-tional, Cough noted the American opening of the vowel—‘and I walked around the ground. I was in the middle of doing this in the afternoon about the time that Wilde was killed.’

‘Perhaps you could tell me some more about that, Mr Kern.’

‘Certainly. Well, I had reached a spot almost directly opposite to the pavilion, in the Mound Stand. I had been sitting there for about fifteen minutes when play stopped as a couple of players needed to leave the field.’

‘Who went off, sir? Did you see?’

‘Yes. First of all it was Wilde. The man has a very distinctive gait. *Had* a very distinctive gait, I suppose I should say. He had been gone for a couple of minutes when Doyle followed him off the field.’

‘Followed. That is an interesting choice of words, Mr Kern. Did you gain the impression that Sir Arthur left the field of play with the intention of pursuing Mr Wilde?’

‘No, Inspector. I mean simply that Doyle left the field after Mr Wilde had done so.’

‘And nobody else left the field at that time?’

‘Not until a few minutes later when Doyle appeared on the steps outside the Long Room and shouted out after he had discovered Wilde’s body.’

‘Thank you, Mr Kern. It’s important to establish precisely what happened from your point of view. The comings and goings of the players is of the utmost importance to my investigation.’

‘There was one other player who had already left the field before Mr Wilde, though, Inspector,’ continued Kern. ‘Mr Milne had gone off some time before and a substitute had come on to field in his place.’

‘How long before Mr Wilde left the field did this exchange happen?’

‘I couldn’t honestly say, Inspector. However, it was while I was still sitting in front of the pavilion. He passed me as he entered the building, but where he might have gone once he was inside I could not say. The next I saw of him was when I was taking my walk around the ground.’

‘And where was he then, sir?’ asked Cough. He could not have come upon the matter any more neatly if he had planned it.

‘He was up on the roof terrace at the right hand side of the pavilion.’

‘Is that the right side as you look at the building or as if you are in it, sir?’

‘As you look at it, Inspector.’

‘And what was he doing, Mr Kern?’

‘He was at the outer side of the terrace, walking to and fro.’

‘Did he appear agitated?’

‘I don’t know that I would say agitated, Inspector.’

‘How would you describe his mood?’

Kern did not reply at once. He looked out of the carriage window at the rows of apparently identical houses that they were now passing.

‘Impatient,’ said the composer after a moment’s reflection. ‘I should say that he was impatient.’

‘Impatient,’ repeated Cough. ‘As if he were expecting somebody? Or something?’

'That may well be, Inspector. In this little drama that we are spinning it may well be that Mr Milne was doing either of those things. In fact, why not both? If I were writing a musical accompaniment, there would be tremolo strings with the quiet insistent beat of timpani.'

Cough smiled but quickly moved the conversation on. 'Can you tell me anything more, Mr Kern?'

'Milne was smoking,' said the composer. 'A cigar I'd say by the quantity of smoke billowing around him. And oh yes, I had almost forgotten. There was another man on top of the pavilion too.'

'Was he with Milne?' asked Cough just as the carriage drew up at the gate of Lord's.

'Oh no, Inspector. The two men were definitely not together. In fact they did not even seem to be aware of one another's presence.'

*

'Everything looks very different from up here,' said Kern. Cough had led the composer up on to the roof terrace. He was keen to gain some more precise details about what they had been discussing in the carriage.

'It does, Mr Kern. It is one of the fascinating aspects of my work. Exploring the ways in which different people view and understand the same event depending upon their perspective. The crime scene itself is like the centre of a circle of witnesses. They all look at the same thing, but what each person sees is unique. It is my job to construct from their varied accounts the solution that most fully captures the essence of their combined evidence. Of course, it is not down to what is *there*. It is what the

witness sees that counts. Let me explain. You and I will look at the same object, the same scene, but we will not see the same thing. My height, my angle of view, my mental processes, my reactions to colours and smells and shapes, my natural associations are all different to yours, Mr Kern.'

'So, what does this mean for the investigation of crime, Inspector?' asked Kern.

'It means, sir, that it is a great error to assume that people's accounts of what they see in fact reflect what was actually there. It is an equally great error to assume that people's accounts of any event should coincide. Much store is set in the work of detective fiction writers on witness accounts tallying with one another. That does not always worry me so much. If people's accounts differ, they are not necessarily mistaken or lying. My job is to make sense of these sometimes contradictory, but not misleading accounts.'

'A hard task, Inspector,' said Kern. 'It makes composing a musical seem very easy by comparison. The events on the stage only have to make sense from the point of view of the stalls.'

'In many ways though, Mr Kern, I feel that our jobs are rather alike. Detection, like music, has its rules.' He was conscious, as he spoke, of how he was echoing the words of Agatha Miller. She had managed to capture the detective's dilemmas in a very efficient fashion.

Cough fell silent, and for a moment or two neither man spoke. The sun, mid-afternoon as it now was, beat down with some intensity and the air above the square shimmered in a haze of heat.

'You mentioned when we were driving here, Mr Kern, that there was another man on the balcony at the same time as Mr Milne. Can you tell me anything about the two men's movements?'

'Of course. Let me think.' He paused briefly while he considered the events of the previous Thursday. 'The man seated on the balcony was the first to leave.'

'Unseen by Mr Milne?'

'I would say so, yes.' Cough was pleased to note how this coincided with McMasters' account, assuming that was that the second man to whom Kern referred to be the deceased groundsman.

'This second man, Mr Kern. Can you tell me what he was wearing?'

Kern looked away for a moment to recall. 'Yes, Inspector. They looked like workman's clothes. A coarse jacket of some description, and I am certain he also had a tweed cap.'

'Excellent. Thank you, sir.' It was McMasters, then. 'And what about Mr Milne himself? Did he also leave?'

'He remained there on the roof terrace, pacing up and down for a moment or two while he finished with his cigar, but then yes, he too left.'

'When Sir Arthur raised the alarm,' stated Cough.

'Oh no, Inspector.' Kern's tone was most definite. 'It was most certainly before Sir Arthur shouted out his discovery of Wilde's body that Milne went back down into the pavilion.'

'Before? You are quite sure of that?'

'Yes. It must have been a good couple of minutes later that Sir Arthur raised the alarm and everyone began to flock towards the pavilion.'

So it seemed that Madeline Gooch's evidence may be true after all and that the man she had seen descending the stairs had indeed been Mr A.A. Milne.

'Thank you, Mr Kern. You have been most helpful,' said Cough. 'I will arrange with my driver to take you to the theatre. You should be in good time.'

'I am grateful, Inspector. And I hope that I have been of some assistance.'

'Indeed, sir. Indeed,' said Cough. 'And should I need you again, I can find you through the theatre?'

'Yes, Inspector.'

'That is excellent, sir. Thank you again.'

As Kern, accompanied by the vast figure of Oates made his way down through the pavilion, Cough reflected on what he had just learned. Whatever Mr Milne might claim, here was a clear indication of the fact that he had been in the pavilion at the likely time of Wilde's murder.

Chapter 34

Monday 19th August 1907

Scotland Yard

'There is more to Mr Milne's involvement in this case than he has been prepared to admit so far, Oates,' said Cough when the officer returned from seeing Jerome Kern back into the carriage and on his way. 'He certainly did not murder Patrick McMasters, and I do not believe he killed Harold Wilde either, but there must be some reason that he has not been completely truthful with us.' As he spoke, Cough's face clearly showed his agitation.

'Indeed, sir,' said Oates, who knew better than to offer an opinion at this precise moment. In his years of working with Cough he had come to learn the points of an investigation at which to break his customary silence, and this was not such a point.

'Yes, Oates,' continued Cough. 'If what Mr Kern has just told me is correct, and I have no reason to suppose it is not, then Mr Milne was not up on the roof terrace as he claims at the time of Wilde's murder. We knew from what McMasters had told us that Milne had the opportunity to come down into the pavilion, but Kern tells us that he in fact did so. That he was in the building at the time of Harold Wilde's murder, as Miss Gooch's testimony suggested. And what might he have done while he was there? We need an answer to that question.'

Oates stood in silence, giving his superior officer time to think about how best to proceed. 'Well,' said Cough at last, his features marked by decision. 'We must confront him with Madeleine Gooch's and Mr Kern's evidence. If they are telling the

truth and that he really was down in the pavilion and in the vicinity of the Secretary's office around the time that Wilde was killed, Mr A.A. Milne has some explaining to do.'

Chapter 35

Monday 19th August 1907

Marylebone Police Station

Milne's hair was dishevelled and he was evidently in some physical discomfort. He gingerly rolled his head and flexed his joints as if still trying to ease his body out of the aches and pains that were inevitable after spending a night on the unyielding planks that passed for a bed in His Majesty's cells. Here he was, late in the day, and his body still felt as if it had done several rounds with a heavyweight champion. Seated on a spartan wooden chair if anything marginally more uncomfortable than the bed he had endured last night, Milne found himself on the opposite side of a scarred wooden table to Inspector Cough. The detective had his back to the door against which stood the immovable bulk of P.C. Oates. The room smelled of damp and the whitewashed walls were covered with black trickle marks. In one corner of the room was another small table with a jug of water and two glasses on it.

'Good evening, Mr Milne.'

'Good evening, Inspector,' said Milne. 'I hope that you are here to bring me good news. That you know now that I had nothing to do with the death of Harold Wilde.'

'I am afraid not, Mr Milne. I cannot be certain of any such thing. I still have questions for you about whatever it was that occurred on the roof terrace of the pavilion and what your movements might have been. And now the case has become still more complicated.'

Milne continued to ease his head from side to side, wincing occasionally as he tried to realign the bones in his neck. 'More complicated, Inspector?'

'Yes. This morning the body of Patrick McMasters was discovered dead on the wicket at Lord's. Like Wilde he had died from a vicious blow to the head.'

'A second murder?' Milne seemed, for a moment, choked. The effect was only momentary, however, and when he spoke again it was with his usual affected composure. 'Well I hope at the very least you will accept that I cannot be guilty of *his* death, Inspector.'

'Indeed, Mr Milne. You of all people have a cast iron alibi for McMasters' murder. However, I am still far from convinced that your hands are clean in this business at Lord's. I have more questions for you about what you were doing around the time of Harold Wilde's death.'

Milne gestured his readiness to answer Cough's questions, or at least to demonstrate that he had no alternative but to hear them.

'I am still keen to hear the truth of what happened when were on the roof terrace before Harold Wilde was killed, sir,' said Cough.

'You are not satisfied with the answers I have already given?'

'No, Mr Milne. I am not satisfied. In fact, I am increasingly unsatisfied with them as time goes by. A new witness has come forward who was perfectly placed to see all that took place on top of the pavilion in the few minutes prior to Wilde's murder, and this witness is clear that, contrary to the account you previously gave me, you had left the roof terrace several minutes before Doyle raised the alarm. If this is true, and I have no reason to believe that it is not, then you would certainly have had the opportunity to kill Wilde.' Did he detect a slight crack beginning to emerge in the young man's composure?

'Opportunity established,' the detective continued, 'I therefore have to ask myself, did you have the motive? That is what I want to know now. And the less open you are with me about what you were doing, the more inclined I am to believe that such a motive exists. There is something you are not telling me, Mr Milne. Something that will help me to understand your movements on the afternoon of the death of Harold Wilde. Now, I don't know why you have chosen to lie to me up to now, but I would strongly recommend that you make a clean breast of it.'

Cough leant back in his chair.

Milne sat upright.

The young author's features were inscrutable as he stared at the small, barred window that punctured the wall of the interview cell. 'So, you have a witness who tells you I was not on the roof terrace for a few minutes before Sir Arthur raised the alarm. Is that all, Inspector?' he asked eventually.

'No, Mr Milne, it is not.'

Cough watched the writer's face intently for any sign of what he might be thinking or feeling. Milne's features, however, gave nothing away as the long-drawn seconds ticked by. And then, without warning Milne turned to face his interviewer. He drew a deep breath preparatory to speaking then said, 'Very well, Inspector. What else is there?'

'We also have a witness, Mr Milne, who places you in the lower regions of the pavilion at or around the time of the murder. Is the witness telling us the truth, and if so, why on earth have you persisted in maintaining the fiction that you were on the roof terrace at the time Mr Wilde was killed?'

So far from crumpling as Cough had perhaps hoped he would, Milne's face simply wore an expression of resignation. A moment longer and his muscles relaxed into what was almost a smile of relief.

'Do you find this amusing, Mr Milne?' If you do, all I can say is that our senses of humour are of a very different nature.'

'No, Inspector. I am not amused. Relieved, rather. I am pleased you have asked me this. It is clear that it is time for me to speak out.'

'Well, I am pleased that we can agree on that at least, Mr Milne,' said Cough.

'May I have a drink?' asked Milne, indicating the jug on the table by the wall. 'My mouth is rather dry, and I feel it may help me tell what I have to reveal.'

By way of response, Cough simply nodded to P.C. Oates who poured a glass of water and placed it on the table in front of the author before returning to his station at the cell door.

'I had, in fact, already come to the conclusion that I needed to provide you with the details of what happened on the afternoon of the match,' began Milne. 'I have, I am afraid, rather blighted the family honour and have not been truthful with you. All I can offer in my own defence is that I believed my actions were not important to the case you were investigating. I am also, as you will see, embarrassed at my own naivety.'

'Would you care to explain, sir?' asked Cough.

'On the day preceding the match, Inspector, I received an anonymous letter. This letter, evidently from somebody who knew I was playing in the Authors' versus Actors' match, indicated that if I were to go to the Club Secretary's office at the time it specified, I should learn about an opportunity that would be significantly to my advantage. Needless to say, being a young man trying to make my way in the world,

I was intrigued and decided to follow its instructions. I was keen not to miss this appointment and so left the field of play in good time, claiming that I needed some time to rest after a spell of bowling. Once I reached the pavilion, to prepare myself for whatever the promised meeting had to propose, I calmed myself with a cigar up on the roof terrace where I thought I could be sure of being undisturbed.'

'What happened next, Mr Milne?' asked Cough.

'Shortly before the appointed time I came down from the roof terrace,' said Milne.

'Did you see anyone whilst you were up on the roof terrace or whilst you were coming down?'

'Nobody, Inspector,' replied Milne. 'That much, at least, of what I told you before is correct.'

'And what about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle? He left the field at around that time.'

'I did not know that at the time, Inspector. I did not see him. I was rather preoccupied with my own affairs.'

'Very well, Mr Milne. Please proceed.'

'I descended the stairs of the pavilion and at the appointed time I knocked at the door of the Secretary's office, but there was no response. I tried a second time and still I received no reply, so I decided to try the door. It opened, and so I stepped in to await my correspondent. This seemed to me better than standing very obvious for any passer-by to see on the landing.'

'And what happened then, Mr Milne?'

'Nothing, Inspector. Nothing happened. Nobody arrived. The telephone did not ring. There was no cryptic message giving me further instructions about what to

do. I simply stood in the Club Secretary's office waiting for a person who did not arrive.'

'You did not stay there indefinitely though, Mr Milne. I know that, because I saw you in the Long Room after the murder of Mr Wilde had been discovered.'

'Yes, Inspector.'

Cough stood up and paced slowly around the table. When he had collected his thoughts, he stopped, facing Milne and leant on the back of his chair. 'Well, you must admit that all of this places you in rather an awkward position regarding Mr Wilde's death, sir. It looked bad enough before, but now the picture has darkened still further.'

Milne blanched. 'I assure you, Inspector, that the worst thing I am guilty of in this is naivety and a touch of youthful arrogance.'

'Then put the record straight, Mr Milne. Tell me in as much detail as you can precisely what happened. And no evasions this time.'

'The first I knew of anything after I entered the Secretary's study was when I heard Sir Arthur shouting. His voice is commanding, as you know, and it easily carried to me on the first floor even though the door of the office was closed. His call was followed by a general disturbance as people ran to see why he was shouting and as they became aware of what had happened to Harold Wilde.'

'And how about you, Mr Milne. What did you do when you heard his shouts for assistance?'

'I waited until the initial furore had died down,' said Milne, 'then I checked that the coast was clear before leaving the Secretary's office and making my way down to the Long Room.'

'Why the circumspection, Mr Milne?' asked Cough. 'If, as you say, you had nothing to hide, why would you delay going down to see what all the commotion was about?'

'Again, Inspector, I can plead only my naivety and a certain sense of embarrassment. To be seen appearing from the Secretary's office on my own would have appeared somewhat suspicious. That it now appears to you doubly suspicious is a circumstance that I can only concede. I can offer no better explanation, because this is the unvarnished truth of the matter.'

Cough looked hard into the author's face. Here was a young man who made his living from concocting tales, but his face told—if Cough was any judge of character—that this was no fabrication. Mr A.A. Milne was not the murderer of Harold Wilde any more than he was the killer of Patrick McMasters. His part in the events surrounding the actor's death was not, the detective was sure, purely incidental. Somebody had sent the author the note to lure him to the Club Secretary's office at this particular time, and this suggested some larger plan. But what that plan was and who else it might involve, he could not discern at the moment. Too many other questions remained unanswered.

'Very well, Mr Milne,' Cough said. 'Tell me about the time you spent in the Secretary's office. Did you see or hear anything unusual other than Sir Arthur calling out when he discovered the body?'

Milne closed his eyes, as if recreating in his mind the impressions he had received whilst in the Club Secretary's office. 'Two things, Inspector,' he said at last. 'I recall that there was at some point a thud from somewhere. I would say it came from almost immediately beneath where I stood in Henchard's office. The second, now I come to think of it, is that one of the curtains in the office was missing.'

'One of the curtains. Missing, you say?'

'Most definitely, Inspector,' said Milne. 'I wonder now that it did not strike me as unusual at the time. I suppose it must be one of those impressions that one is not aware of at the time. Everything else in the room was in pristine neatness. Not a fountain pen or a blotter out of place. I suppose that there and then with so much else going on in my mind regarding the meeting I was expecting and then with Sir Arthur's discovery of the body, I registered the fact but only on a subliminal level. Then from the moment I left the office, other events rather took over.'

'I understand, Mr Milne. But you are certain? Forgive me for pressing you on this matter, but this may be information of the utmost importance.' Cough touched, as if it were still there, the pocket in which he had placed the shred of material he had discovered caught on the doorframe between the Long Room and the Long Room Bar.

'Yes, Inspector. I am quite certain of it. One of the curtains was most definitely missing.'

'And can you describe these curtains, Mr Milne?' said Cough, pulling the chair backwards and settling into it again.

'Of course, Inspector. They were of red velvet.'

The uncomfortable chair creaked as Cough leant forward, his elbows firmly planted on the table between the two men. 'And the letter, Mr Milne. Do you still have it?'

'Indeed, Inspector. It is in my apartment.'

'Then I would be most obliged, sir, if you would take us there.'

'Will I then be free to go, Inspector?'

'I would not go that far as yet, sir. It will rather depend.'

Milne's head dropped as he faced the possibility of another night on the cell bed.

'We will be back shortly to take you to your apartment, Mr Milne, but first we must arrange for your release into our custody. Officer,' he called, and a tall man who had evidently been waiting outside the door the entire time entered the room. 'You will remain with Mr Milne until we return.'

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Alone again with the dutiful Oates as they emerged from the interview room, Cough reflected upon his recent interview with Milne. 'Well, if what Milne has just told us about the curtains in Henchard's office is correct Oates, this new information is potentially of real importance. Whoever killed Wilde must have done so in the pavilion. The timeframe we are working with would not allow for anything else, but it seems unlikely that Wilde was killed in the Long Room itself. That would have been much too visible from the field of play. Besides, there was not enough blood. With blows to the head like Wilde had received he must have bled more than we found evidence for in the Long Room. There would also have been spatters of blood around the body. So where did the blood go? We have not found any evidence of blood elsewhere either.'

'The body must have been moved, sir,' said Oates.

'Indeed, Oates, but from where? We know that there was only a limited time between Sir Arthur entering the Long Room on his way to the Authors' changing room and his return, so it cannot have been moved from far away. And why, in that

case, would we not have found a trail of blood where the body had been dragged or carried?’

‘Indeed, sir,’ said Oates.

‘The entrance into the narrative of a thick red curtain of the sort Mr Milne says was missing from the Secretary’s study makes possible an answer to all of these problems,’ continued Cough. ‘The murderer needed only to gain access to Mr Henchard’s office and to have removed one of the curtains then used it to smother Harold Wilde’s head before inflicting the fatal blows. The thick material of the curtain would have been sufficient to absorb the blood, ensuring the scene of the murder could remain concealed by preventing blood spattering around and would also have allowed for the removal of Wilde’s body to the Long Room without leaving a trace.’

‘Most ingenious, sir,’ said Oates appreciatively. ‘Except, sir, that we have no actual evidence that this is what happened.’

‘Oh but we do, Oates. We do. On file back at Scotland Yard is a shred of red velvet cloth that I found on the day of the murder caught on the frame of the door that connects the Long Room and the Long Room Bar. I did not until now know what this might mean. It might have meant nothing, but now it seems that it may in fact be a discovery of the utmost significance.’

Chapter 36

Monday 19th August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

Intermittently, since the conversation she had previously had with Inspector Cough, Agatha's mind had continued to run over the subject of *Not George Washington*. How far did the kinds of collaboration suggested by the novel relate to the real-life relationship between Mr. P.G. Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle? Did the fact that Wodehouse had successfully produced parodies of Sherlock Holmes prove anything of significance in relation to the supposed production of any fraudulent Holmes stories? Or was there some shadowy figure in the background ready and willing to take advantage of the connection between the two authors? And even if any or all of these things were so, did they in their turn connect in any meaningful way to the deaths of Harold Wilde and Patrick McMasters?

These and a hundred other questions as yet not fully formed were running through Agatha's mind as she approached the Lord's Tavern. Monty had decided upon an evening at the theatre and had gone out to dinner first. Unusually for her, she was not in the mood for the theatre. She had a real drama on her hands, and she had decided to use her brother's absence as an opportunity to return again to the scene of the crime. She was prepared to risk the social improprieties of going out alone in the early evening. Nearing the gate, she became aware of a young woman ahead of her. For a moment Agatha was not certain, but the woman seemed familiar to her, and then the memory cemented itself in her brain. It was the same young woman that she had seen on the day of the Authors' match; the woman at the

window of the Long Room who she had observed so interestedly watching the unfolding scene in the aftermath of the murder of Harold Wilde.

Quickening her pace, Agatha drew level with the young woman as she stood at a bus stop near the gate on St John's Wood Road.

'Hello,' Agatha said.

'Hello,' replied the young woman turning, in surprise, to face Agatha. Her face displayed the uncertainty that usually accompanies a greeting from a stranger.

'I am sorry,' said Agatha, realising the bluntness of her approach. 'My name is Agatha. Agatha Miller.'

'It is a pleasure to meet you, Miss Miller,' said the girl. Her words were formal and polite, but an understandable reserve lay behind the response. 'How can I help you, miss?'

'In many ways, I feel,' said Agatha.

This somewhat cryptic response tended to add to rather than to allay any concerns the young woman might have been feeling.

'I am flattered by your confidence, Miss Miller. But really, I do not understand how I can help you. We have not, to the best of my recollection, met before.'

'No indeed,' said Agatha, 'but I have seen you.'

'Seen me where, miss,' said the young woman. Her hair shone a red chestnut colour in the evening sunlight. She seemed to pull her whole body taller, as if the additional half inch she achieved by the action raised her so much further above reproach.

'I observed you in one of the windows of the Long Room,' said Agatha. 'It was on the day of the Authors' versus Actors' match. After the discovery of Mr Harold Wilde's body. You were there in the Long Room.'

For a moment, the young woman evidently considered denying the fact. Agatha watched the words forming in her mind, the determined look of defiance contracting in the muscles of her forehead. But then a change took place, a conscious shifting of position in the young woman's head. What was the point of denying something that this Miss Miller, whoever she was, so obviously knew for certain. Besides, what could be the harm in the admission. She had been at work, after all. There was no need for defensiveness. There was nothing in Miss Miller's observation other than the fact. She had been in the Long Room and at the window as Miss Miller observed.

'I was, miss,' she said. 'A terrible thing, the murder of Mr Wilde.'

'Terrible indeed,' said Agatha. 'Did you know him?'

'By repute only,' said the girl. 'He was rather well known, of course.'

'Yes,' said Agatha. 'Though not always, I believe, for the best of reasons.'

'That I could not say, miss,' observed the young woman. 'I knew nothing of him except that he was a famous actor. I saw him perform once.'

'Did you?' asked Agatha.

'Yes,' said the young woman. 'In a Gilbert and Sullivan, it was. At the Savoy Theatre.'

'Did he only act in light opera?' asked Agatha.

'I think that was the main part of his work,' said the woman, looking down the road in the hope of seeing her omnibus approaching. She evidently did not altogether like the direction their conversation was taking.

'I have heard that he was once hoping to land a role as Sherlock Holmes,' said Agatha, who had busied herself earlier finding out all that she could about

Harold Wilde. 'There were some rumours about a musical adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.'

'I wouldn't know about that, miss,' said the young woman, her mouth set hard. 'I cannot imagine Sir Arthur Conan Doyle consenting to write a musical version of his work.'

'Ah, who is to say what an author might or might not do with the right incentive,' said Agatha. 'Besides, authors do not always work alone. They collaborate. Sometimes one author will even take on the characters or the situations of another and will subject them to their own personal treatment. Within bounds, of course. Beyond a certain stage this would be dishonest. But up to a point. As long as it is all transparent and known to the paying public.'

Throughout Agatha's speech the young woman had not made eye contact, but had kept looking down St John's Wood Road. Her omnibus would save her from this conversation.

'Enough of that though,' said Agatha. 'There must have been an odd atmosphere in the pavilion on the day of the match.'

'Not until the body of Mr Wilde was found, miss,' said the young woman. 'Up until that point it was much the same as on any other match day.'

'Have you worked at Lord's for long?' asked Agatha. As she spoke, she looked back at the looming red bulk of Thomas Verity's pavilion behind them.

'Only on occasion,' said the woman. 'It is only for the bigger events that catering on that scale is needed, and then I am called in. My...'. But she allowed the words to die on her lips as the sound of horses' hooves came to her ears. Her omnibus had arrived at last, and the young woman could hardly conceal her relief.

'Goodbye, miss,' she said, climbing on to the rear platform of the vehicle almost before it had come to halt. 'It has been a pleasure to talk with you.'

The conductor indicated an available seat, but the young woman did not notice.

'Goodbye,' said Agatha. She watched as the vehicle pulled away from the kerb. Less of a pleasure, she thought, it was difficult to imagine. The young woman had been about to say something significant, of that Agatha felt certain. 'My what?' What had she been about to say? Employment such as hers in the pavilion at Lord's could not be easily come by. My what? A person? A significant other?

She continued to watch as the omnibus gained pace. The young woman still stood on the rear platform of the vehicle and Agatha noticed a small chit of paper flutter from the young woman's bag on to the edge of the road. She was on the verge of calling out, but realised there was no point. The vehicle was already moving quickly now in the direction of Regents Park and the driver would not have heard her to stop the vehicle.

Agatha hurried to the spot where the paper had floated to the ground and, looking in both directions to check that the roadway was clear, she bent down and picked up the paper from the road. It turned out to be nothing more exciting than a shopping list. Potatoes, bread, half a pound of butter, a cup of sugar and various other domestic items.

She was about to consign the paper to the nearest bin as a mere irrelevance, but something stopped her. She would pass the paper on to Inspector Cough. If there were anything to learn from her reading of Anna Katherine Green and her other favourite writers of crime, it was that mysteries frequently turned on the apparently trivial. And her conversation with the young woman, while it had lacked in detail had

certainly opened up a world of potential. She would speak again with Inspector Cough. The young woman's face, when they had been talking about Harold Wilde and about the possibility of a stage adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* had given Agatha enough of a sign. There was something behind that. And when they had begun to talk about how writers might work together, the young woman had all but closed down. This young woman from the Long Room window knew something about the tragic events of the Authors' and Actors' match. Of that Agatha was becoming more certain by the minute, and she was determined to find out what that something was.

Chapter 37

Monday 19th August 1907

A.A. Milne's apartment

Within the half hour, Inspector Cough, P.C. Oates and Milne entered the author's apartment. Confident that Milne was compliant and would try nothing—he had seen enough suspects over his years in the force to know when a man was likely to cause trouble—Cough allowed the young man to lead the way to the study. Once there, Milne walked around the desk and removed a leather correspondence wallet from a shelf. He opened it and took out a sheaf of papers. He flicked through these for a moment and his face relaxed as he found what he was looking for. He pulled the document from the wallet and handed it to Cough.

'Be careful how you handle that please, Mr Milne,' said Cough. 'I will be passing this on to the Fingerprint Branch at Scotland Yard to see what we can pick up from the surface of the paper. Your fingerprints, obviously, will be on it, but we might also find the prints of the writer of the note.'

'Will that help you, Inspector? What are the chances of you obtaining a match to the prints of any known individual?'

'There right away you have hit on a difficulty with what promises to be an invaluable science, sir.' Cough continued, unable to prevent himself. 'Many people are not aware that their hands and fingers leave prints. This branch of criminal detection is in its infancy and there is still a lot that remains down to chance. The store of fingerprints on file is increasing, but it is still small. We have to seek out individuals who might be suspected and obtain their prints in order to verify any

found at the scene of a crime. It is worth pursuing as a part of any investigation, though, as once established it is a most reliable proof.

‘There was a very interesting case reported from the United States a few years ago in which two men, both named William West and bearing a striking physical resemblance to one another, were incarcerated at the same time in the same penal institution in Leavenworth, Kansas. Their Bertillon measurements were the same, which began to call into question the usefulness of that as a method of identification. To distinguish between the two men, their fingerprints were taken, and their unique criminal identities were thus established.’

‘Fascinating, Inspector,’ said Milne as he handed him a sheet of cheap writing paper. ‘You will now be able to identify me from any other A.A. Milne you might encounter the next time you are in Marylebone Police Station as you will be able to gain a good set of my prints from this letter.’

Cough laughed. ‘There you have it, sir. As I said a moment ago, any prints we obtain will only be of use if we can connect them to somebody who was at Lord’s on the day of the match. But I retain my faith, Mr Milne. The world of criminal detection has to remain as creative and as imaginative as the criminals it is trying to seek out, and any and every means must be employed.’

Handling the paper carefully, Cough placed it on the desk and read the message it contained. As Milne had told him previously, it was a simple missive. It indicated that if he, Milne, wanted to learn of some information that would be materially to his advantage, he should ensure he was, at the stated hour, on the first floor landing near the Secretary’s office. The handwriting was neat and the spelling accurate.

'The writer of this letter is evidently a person who has received a good rudimentary education and knows how to use a pen, Mr Milne. The paper, however, does not seem nearly of the right kind that any person of quality would be likely to use.'

'Unless that is the impression they wished to give, Inspector,' said Milne. 'I have to admit, however, that I did not give the paper itself any thought. The content of the message is all I considered.'

'I understand, Mr Milne,' said Cough. 'What I do not understand is why you did not simply tell me about this when we first spoke on the day after Wilde's murder.'

'It seems strange to me too, now, Inspector. I could have saved myself a world of trouble and a night of discomfort,' said Milne, rubbing his lower back, which still pained him, as he spoke. 'In the heat of the discovery of Wilde's body in the Long Room, however, I could see a story brewing and I naively thought that concealing this letter was the best way of avoiding becoming embroiled in it.'

'A decision that I can see now you have lived to regret, Mr Milne. Let this be a lesson to you,' said Cough, and he fell to perusing the letter again. Was it a male or a female hand? It was never easy to tell. There were people at the Yard who would know, however. He would have to take it to one of them.

Chapter 38

Tuesday 20th August 1907

Doncaster Hotel

'Good morning, Miss Miller,' said Cough. He had come here directly from Scotland Yard where he had gone for only a few minutes to pass on the letter he had obtained from A.A. Milne the previous evening. Milne himself had been released from police custody. Beyond naivety and a measure of arrogance and entitlement there was no reason to detain him any longer.

'Good morning, Inspector,' she replied.

They had met in the lobby of the hotel where Agatha and Monty were staying. At this time of day, it was a relatively peaceful place. The morning rush of businessmen and sightseers had subsided, but it was as yet too early for the hotel's habitual residents, a more leisured class of guest altogether, to have descended for their breakfast. The staff in the restaurant were taking advantage of the temporary lull to recharge the tables, to reset the cutlery and replace any soiled nappery. The lobby itself was empty apart from Agatha and the inspector, who appropriated two armchairs in a secluded corner, concealed from view by a large potted palm.

They chatted about neutral topics until the coffee Agatha had ordered arrived. Then, once the waiter had retreated, their conversation turned to the subject of the investigation.

'So tell me, Miss Miller. What do you make of *Not George Washington* and its potential bearing upon our case?' began Cough.

Agatha smiled to herself, noting the word 'our'. 'I am inclined to think, Inspector, that there is nothing in it after all. If this were a work of detective fiction, the novel might be of some significance. But this is the real world, and are we to suppose that if P.G. Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were actually involved in literary fraud that they would advertise it quite so obviously?'

Cough nodded his agreement and wiped coffee from his moustache with a napkin. 'I am of the same opinion, miss.'

'I am not saying, mind you, that they might not have contemplated such an idea. It is not beyond the realms of possibility. A creation of the magnitude of Sherlock Holmes must cause all kinds of unforeseen results, and who is to say that Sir Arthur is not heartily sick of him? Just consider the large gaps of time between the Holmes tales. It is as if Sir Arthur has to steel himself mentally to engage again in a bout of producing Holmes stories and that in the interim he has the opportunity to engage with what are, to him, more attractive literary pursuits.'

'More attractive perhaps, Miss Miller, but also substantially less lucrative I should imagine.'

'Almost certainly, Inspector.'

'Yes, I can see from where the temptation to pass the writing of Holmes on to more willing hands might arise,' said Cough. 'As we have agreed, however, I am inclined to the opinion that *Not George Washington* does not provide the solution to our case.' Leaning back in his seat, Cough took a notebook and a fountain pen from the breast pocket of his jacket. He opened the notebook and made a neat line through an item on his list.

‘Seeing your list reminds me, Inspector, that I have something to give you,’ she said, placing on the table the shopping list that she had retrieved the previous afternoon from the St John’s Wood Road.

‘What is this, miss?’ asked Cough.

‘A shopping list I believe, Inspector. Nothing more, nothing less.’

‘Why, miss?’ he asked.

‘I see that this probably requires some further explanation,’ continued Agatha with a light laugh. ‘Early yesterday evening, I decided to pay a further visit to Lord’s. While I was there, I had a conversation with a young woman who was working in the pavilion on the day of Harold Wilde’s murder. I am quite certain of that, because just before you and I first met I had seen her standing in one of the windows of the Long Room. I cannot be mistaken because she has the most striking red hair.’

‘Madeleine Gooch?’ asked Cough.

‘That I would not know, Inspector. I did not ascertain her name. All that I can tell you is that when I tried to engage her in conversation about the events of the Authors’ versus Actors’ match, she was unwilling to talk and appeared to be most relieved when her omnibus arrived. It was as she was boarding her bus that she dropped her list and the vehicle had pulled away before I had the chance to return it to her. It then occurred to me, I don’t know why, that it might be of interest to you.’

‘On such things cases have turned before now, miss,’ said Cough, who then proceeded to look over the list more closely.

It took only a second for the unexpectant look in his eyes to give way to a spark of recognition and then the flame of hope. ‘By Jove!’ he exclaimed, leaping from his seat. ‘I say! Get me Scotland Yard on the line at once,’ he shouted to the

man at the Reception desk. 'Tell them that it is Inspector Cough and that I need to see Chief Superintendent Frobisher as soon as possible.'

Without ceremony and with no respect for the garment's material, Cough snatched up his overcoat and turned a flushed face towards Agatha. 'You may join me later at Lord's if you wish, Miss Miller, but now I must leave you. I have not the time to explain, but if I am right, this list is of the greatest importance. All will become clear in time, miss, I promise. But for now, I can say no more.'

With that and a further shouted instruction to the man at the Reception desk, Cough made his way to the revolving door at the front of the hotel to find a hansom cab.

Chapter 39

Tuesday 20th August 1907

Scotland Yard

Twenty minutes later, Cough and his superior, Chief Superintendent Frobisher, were stood side by side behind Cough's desk. On it were two pieces of paper: the letter Cough had been given the previous day by A.A. Milne and the shopping list he had received just a short time ago from Agatha Miller.

'There is no doubt in my mind,' said Frobisher. 'They are both written in the same hand. By Jove, Cough,' said Frobisher. In a second, he had straightened up and lifted the receiver from a telephone on the wall in the corner of the room.

'Hello? Hello? Yes. This is Chief Superintendent Frobisher,' he barked into the mouthpiece. 'I need somebody from the Fingerprint Branch up here as soon as you can.' He placed the receiver back in the cradle and turned his attentions again to Cough. 'If we can find matching prints on both of these documents, this could be the key to the entire puzzle. We can eliminate yours easily enough, and this Miss Miller's if she has touched them both.'

'Miss Miller's prints will not be on the letter, sir,' said Cough.

'Very well, Cough. That makes life easier. In that case once we have eliminated your prints, then we can be certain that any matching prints that are found on both documents must, if our identification of the hand writing is correct, be the prints of the young woman...'

'Madeleine Gooch,' said Cough.

'Madeleine Gooch,' repeated Frobisher. 'And if we can establish her as the person who sent the letter to Mr Milne, I would say that the young lady will have a fair amount of explaining to do. Any other prints we find are unlikely to be relevant.'

'Indeed, sir,' said Cough. 'Miss Miller is certain that she saw the young lady in question in one of the windows of the Long Room shortly after the discovery of Harold Wilde, which places her in the vicinity at the time of the murder.'

'Let's not run ahead of ourselves, Cough,' said Frobisher. 'She was in the pavilion at the time, but this letter alone proves nothing more than that she was playing some kind of prank on Mr Milne. Have you established, by the way, whether or not there was any connection between Miss Gooch and Milne prior to the day of the match?'

'That I do not know, sir,' said Cough.

'Well, there is a task for you once we're finished here, Inspector,' continued Frobisher. Cough dutifully recorded the question in his notebook as a job to be followed up. 'If they had been in touch with each other, or if they knew each other in any way, we will need to know the details as soon as we can. For all that Mr Milne appears to be innocent in all of this, we cannot take it absolutely for granted,' said the Chief Superintendent, pulling a fob watch from his pocket and looking impatiently at the time. 'Where is the man from the Fingerprint Branch, damn it,' he grumbled. 'Do they think I have all day and nothing else to do?'

'Indeed, sir,' said Cough, ignoring Frobisher's irascibility.

'Indeed what?' asked Frobisher, stuffing the watch back into his waistcoat pocket, which stretched tightly across his ample form.

'Indeed, sir, I think that in the circumstances you described we cannot completely assume Mr Milne's innocence.'

'Ah, yes,' said Frobisher. 'That's right. But if, on the other hand, there was no contact or known connection between him and Miss Gooch, we can be sure we are looking for some more sinister motive behind the letter. Assuming, that is, that it turns out to have been written by her.'

The Chief Superintendent was at this point prevented from launching into further reflections by a knock at the door. 'Come in,' he called, and the door opened to reveal a small man carrying a brown leather case.

'Cameron, sir. From the Fingerprint Branch, as requested.'

'Ah yes. Very good,' said Frobisher. 'Well come in, man.'

Cameron entered, closing the door behind him and then, following an indication from the Chief Superintendent, approached the table.

'I want you to check these two documents for fingerprints,' said Frobisher, indicating the note and the shopping list on the table. 'We are looking for matching prints on both. You will, to a certainty, find Inspector Cough's on both, so you can take his prints now in order to eliminate those.'

'We already have his prints, sir,' said Cameron. 'As a routine, now, we are building up a bank of every officer's fingerprints for the purposes of elimination when looking at evidence.'

'Well you do not have mine, man,' said Frobisher, frowning.

'An oversight that we will have to rectify, sir,' said Cameron, cool in the face of his superior's annoyance.

'Very well. See you do. But in principle that is excellent. A most sensible procedure,' said Frobisher. 'You will also find on the shopping list the fingerprints of a Miss Agatha Miller. Hers you will certainly not have on file, but they are easily obtainable, is that not so, Cough?'

‘Yes, sir. Miss Miller will, I am certain, be more than happy to cooperate in any way with our investigation. We will need her prints purely for confirmation purposes.’

‘Very good. Then in the first instance, we are hoping for the presence of a third set of prints to be found on both documents. Assuming that we find that third set of prints, the likelihood is that we will be on our way to establishing a most important lead in this case.’

Without any further preamble, Cameron took from his leather case a bottle of black powder and a fine-haired brush. These items he placed on the table next to the shopping list and the letter before extracting from his jacket pocket a pair of black cotton gloves. These he proceeded to put on with all the care and precision of a ritual. Cameron now proceeded to apply a small quantity of the black powder to the soft bristles of the brush. Once he was satisfied that he had enough of the powder, the man deftly applied the brush first to the front and then to the back of the two pieces of paper. He left them for a moment or two, presumably to allow time for the black powder to undergo some kind of arcane scientific transformation before taking the papers one by one and gently blowing on their surfaces.

Cough and Frobisher stared intently as Cameron went about his work. The excess black powder faintly clouded the space above the table but Cameron, apparently unaware of his superiors’ close attention, focused at once on the surfaces of the documents where an array of elaborately patterned whorls, loops and arches was now visible.

As if reading Frobisher’s and Cough’s minds, Cameron began to explain what he had just been doing. ‘The powder, sir, adheres to the oils left by the human hand on the surface of the paper, rendering visible what would otherwise not be evident to the naked eye.’

'I see, Cameron,' said Frobisher. 'And is there anything there that is likely to assist our cause in this investigation?'

'You were looking, I believe, for two sets of prints that are found on both documents and a third that is to be found on the shopping list only?'

'That's right,' said Cough.

'Very good. Well, here we are, sir.' As he spoke, Cameron indicated with his forefinger the three sets of prints they had hoped to see. 'This set, I would venture, is yours, sir. The breadth of the finger compared to the others would indicate that they were made by a male. These,' he said, pointing to another set of prints on the shopping list and the note, 'being narrower are more likely to be the prints of a female. And this third set, found only on the shopping list are, I presume, those of Miss Miller.'

'Very well, Cough,' said Frobisher, who had begun agitatedly tapping his foot in his impatience, a habitual exercise of his when engaged in mental occupation. 'You have your three sets of prints. What we need now is to verify whether the final set indeed belongs to Madeleine Gooch.'

'I will dispatch Oates to Lord's, sir, to find out the young woman's address. They must have those details on her employment record. We can then take the next step and obtain a set of her fingerprints.'

Chapter 40

Tuesday 20th August 1907

Kentish Town

It was about three hours after Cough's discussion with Chief Superintendent Frobisher that P.C. Oates accompanied by Cameron, clutching his leather case, arrived outside what appeared to be a terraced house just like a thousand others in the surrounding streets. In his years on the force what had repeatedly struck P.C. Oates, for in spite of his taciturnity and his immovable exterior Oates was a man much given to thought, was the normality of crime. The general public, he had often had cause to observe to himself, was much given to the idea—an idea made all the more common no doubt by its insatiable desire for the sensations of crime fiction—that crime must be somehow out of the ordinary, somehow spectacular. In his experience, however, it was the mundaneness of most crime that was its chief characteristic. Everyday crimes were committed by everyday people, engaged in everyday employments and living in everyday houses much like the one he was looking at now.

Caversham Road was one of the many residential streets located off the Kentish Town Road between Camden Town and Tufnell Park. The road and house number 26, outside which they now stood, were not to all intents and purposes any different to a thousand other roads and houses all over London. Except, thought Oates, that this particular building may be the residence of a suspect in the murder of Harold Wilde. The Lord's Murder, as it had come to be known in the popular press, still continued to exercise the public imagination. Well little, Oates supposed,

must the residents of Caversham Road suspect that the case would come knocking at their door.

With this thought, he approached the door of number 26 and applied himself to the bell pull. Somewhere to the rear of the property he heard the bell ring and he took a step back on to the pathway, neatly tiled in alternate black and white. He had learnt over his years on the force that this was a wise move. The effect produced by his stature, combined with the uniform of the Metropolitan Police tended to cause alarm to the unsuspecting opener of the front door, and allowing a little distance helped to make the initial encounter less intimidating.

Through the frosted glazing of the front door he became aware of movement as a figure, male or female he could not tell, made its way towards the door. The nondescript figure loomed fuzzily through the glass, and a moment later he heard the key turn, and the door opened to reveal an elderly woman, her hair tied up neatly in a scarf. The woman did not at first say anything and took her time in weighing up her unexpected visitor and the other, much smaller man who stood behind him on the pathway before committing herself to words.

‘How can I help you, officer?’ she said at last.

‘We are looking for a young woman,’ said Oates. ‘A Madeleine Gooch. She lives here, I believe?’

‘*Lived* here,’ said the old woman, a resentful smile twisting her upper lip as she spoke. ‘The day before yesterday she upped and went without ceremony and without feeling the need to pay a week’s rent she owed me.’

Ever the phlegmatic, Oates was not one to allow disappointment to show. ‘You have no idea, I suppose, where she might have gone?’

'None, officer. If I knew that I would give you her address right away and ask you to pay her a visit to collect the money she owes me. No. She kept herself to herself and as far as I know never received any visitors.'

'No young men or anything of that sort?' asked Oates.

'I run a respectable house, officer,' the old woman said, bristling at any suggestion of impropriety. 'She was engaged to some young fellow, I know that. She let it slip one day. But more than that I cannot say.'

'Nothing?'

'Nothing, officer. I never saw him, and it was only on that one occasion that she mentioned him. Patrick something; I can't recall what. Something to do with her job at the cricket ground as far as I could tell.'

'And you are sure that there is nothing else you can tell us about her that might provide us with a clue as to her whereabouts?' asked Oates.

'I'm afraid not,' the old woman said.

'Well, thank you, madam,' said Oates. 'There is another reason we have come as well, though. I must ask to be allowed to see the young lady's room. We have reason to believe that she may be somehow involved with a very serious crime and we need to try to obtain a set of her fingerprints.'

'Fingerprints, indeed,' said the old woman. 'And what may they be? Ah well.' Her curiosity regarding the modern methods of detection evidently went no further, and she was willing to cooperate. 'Anything that might help you find her and get my rent money. You'd better come this way.' Saying this, she shuffled back into the hallway and indicated for Oates and Cameron to follow her.

The unmistakable odour of fried onions and damp assailed Oates' nostrils as he entered the hallway and followed the old woman as she made her painfully slow

way into the house. 'Top of the stairs and it's the first room on the right. I'll be in the kitchen at the back there when you're finished.' She gave a vague gesture to a door at the end of the passageway.

Some twenty minutes later, Oates and Cameron descended the stairs. Madeleine Gooch's room had proven to be a spartan affair. A wrought iron bedstead and sagging mattress of the sort that would have been ruin for Oates' back, a cheap table and chair and an old oak wardrobe with a mirrored door. The room had, however, provided Cameron with two neat sets of fingerprints.

Oates was about to make his way to the kitchen when the old woman emerged. She had evidently heard their feet as they were coming down. 'Ah, there you are, madam,' he said. 'We have found fingerprints as we hoped. We will need, only for purposes of elimination of course, to take your prints now so that we can be sure which set belongs to Miss Gooch.'

'Very well, officer,' the old woman said obligingly. 'Come in here.' She turned back into the kitchen, through the door of which Oates could see a neatly arranged table and a range upon which bubbled a number of saucepans. 'And while you take what you need, I will tell you about something else that has occurred to me. Why I didn't think of it when you first asked, I don't know. My old head, you see,' she said, tapping at that same old head with the flat of her hand as she spoke.

She said nothing more until she was seated at the kitchen table while Cameron busied himself, preparing his materials to take her fingerprints. 'Now you asked me, officer, whether I could give you any idea of where she might be. I naturally thought, I suppose, of where she might have gone in London. Now of that I have no idea, but then I came to think about the weekly letter she used to receive.'

'Yes, madam,' prompted Oates. 'What can you tell me about this letter? A postmark, perhaps, or a sender's address?'

'Farnham,' the old woman replied. 'A Farnham postmark. Once a week, as regular as clockwork. On a Monday it used to arrive.'

'Farnham,' repeated Oates. 'Farnham in Surrey?'

'Yes,' the old woman confirmed. 'Farnham in Surrey.'

'And the sender's address?'

'That I cannot recall.' Oates attempted to conceal his disappointment, but his efforts proved unnecessary as the old woman continued, 'But I can remember a name. It was my husband's name: Graham. That is what brought it back to my mind. The sender's name was Graham. Rowena Graham.'

Chapter 41

Tuesday 20th August 1907

Scotland Yard

'Thank you, miss,' said Richards, a colleague of Cameron's in the Fingerprint Branch, as he removed Agatha's finger from the white card. This card he now flapped gently to and fro, encouraging the ink to dry.

In response to an urgent summons from Inspector Cough and Chief Superintendent Frobisher, she had at once made her way to Scotland Yard. She had no hesitation in complying with their request that, for the purposes of confirmation, she supply a full set of her fingerprints.

Still flapping the card gently, Richards made his way over to a bench on the other side of the small laboratory. He placed the card, labelled with Agatha Miller's personal details, on the bench next to the shopping list and the note. He then proceeded, with the aid of a lens that he screwed firmly into his right eye, to undertake a close examination of the two documents.

It took no more than a few minutes. He stood up straight and turned to face the expectant Cough and Frobisher, both of whom had been present in the room throughout the procedure. 'There is no doubt about it, sir,' he said, addressing Chief Superintendent Frobisher. 'Of the three sets of prints found on the shopping list, one belongs to Inspector Cough and a second to Miss Miller. Inspector Cough's on both documents and Miss Miller's only on the shopping list. That leaves only the third set, which is on both the list and the note, to be accounted for.'

'Excellent, Richards. That is excellent,' said Frobisher.

'In which case, sir,' said Cough, 'all we now have to do is to content ourselves that, as we suspect, the third set of prints belongs to Madeleine Gooch.'

Frobisher nodded. 'And what do you propose to do with this information if and when we can confirm it?' he asked.

'In the first instance, sir, we can establish whether or not Miss Gooch was the writer of the note to Mr Milne.'

'And in the second instance?' asked Frobisher. His face indicated his dislike for the phrase.

'We can establish whether or not she had handled the weapon with which Mr Wilde was killed.'

'Doyle's bat.'

'Possibly, sir.'

'There is some way to go however, even supposing we can prove that Miss Gooch had handled the bat, to be certain that she was the person holding it at the moment the lethal blow was struck, Cough. In fact, as far as I can see, there must be some uncertainty as to whether or not the bat was the murder weapon. It had no traces of blood on it after all.'

'Quite right, sir,' said Cough. 'There is plenty of room for doubt. One step at a time is all that we can take. But I am interested nonetheless in establishing what motive, if any, Miss Gooch might have had for wishing to kill Harold Wilde.'

Chapter 42

Tuesday 20th August 1907

Farnham, Surrey

It was early evening of the same day when Inspector Cough and P.C. Oates, acting on the information Oates had brought back from his trip to Kentish Town, descended from their train at Farnham Station. His previous interviews with Doyle and Wodehouse had left Cough in no doubt that The Bat and Ball public house would be the ideal place to begin his local investigations, and so he wasted no time in procuring a vehicle to take them there.

When they entered the Public Bar, Inspector Cough made his way directly towards a substantial man standing behind the bar, who he took to be the landlord.

'Are you the licensee, Mr Rowlandson?' asked Cough, who had taken the time to read the plate displayed above the entrance to the premises.

'Mmmm,' replied the man, in a tone that Cough chose to interpret as consent.

'Is there a place where we can speak in private?' asked the detective. He had no wish to conduct this meeting before a ready audience of inquisitive locals.

'Mmmm,' said the landlord in the same tone as before. 'But first I must know who I am speaking to.'

'Yes, of course,' said Cough. 'I am Inspector Cough of Scotland Yard. And this,' he continued, indicating the substantial figure of his companion, 'is P.C. Oates.'

This information was greeted by nothing more than a slight inclination of the landlord's head. 'Inspector Cough. Of Scotland Yard,' he said at last in a deliberate voice. 'You have, I presume, some form of identification?'

Cough and Oates both held out their cards, and Rowlandson looked at these with the same slow deliberateness with which he had spoken. 'Very well,' he said once he was satisfied. 'It is not often that Farnham is graced with the presence of the Metropolitan Police. Let us go into the rear parlour. We will not be disturbed there. Can I offer you some refreshment?'

'Thank you, Mr Rowlandson. Coffee if you have it.'

Rowlandson turned his head and called, through a door that stood open behind the bar, the instruction that coffee was to be brought to the rear parlour. Then he led the way through the Public Bar to where a door could be seen at the far side of the hostelry.

The eyes of the collected drinkers of The Bat and Ball were upon them as they made their way through the door, and Cough felt a palpable sense of relief when Rowlandson, who had ushered them into the room, finally closed the door. Give him the city and its cosy anonymous sprawl any day. Rural communities for all the open space they offered had always struck him as intensely claustrophobic in a way that the packed streets of London never were.

'Please take a seat, Inspector,' said Rowlandson. 'Wherever you like. And you, P.C. Oates.'

'I'd prefer to stand if it's all the same to you, sir,' said Oates, for whom years on the beat in the metropolis had rendered sitting a most unnatural activity.

'Of course,' replied the landlord, and he turned his attention back to Cough who had, by now, settled himself comfortably into an armchair by the parlour's substantial fireplace.

Usually talkative, even garrulous with the regulars of The Bat and Ball, with strangers and especially with figures of authority, Rowlandson had evidently decided

that he ought to adopt a more restrained and circumspect manner. And so it fell to Cough to make the next move. 'I am sure you are wondering, Mr Rowlandson, what brings us from London to Farnham. Well, let me explain. I am interested to know anything that you can tell me about a man named Patrick McMasters. He has, I am fairly certain, some history in Farnham.'

'McMasters,' said Rowlandson, nodding his head. Cough observed in the man's eye a glint that informed him he had said something to capture his interest, and he allowed this interest to take root on its own. 'Aye, McMasters,' continued Rowlandson a moment later, 'I remember Patrick McMasters well enough. Groundsman at the local cricket club amongst other things.'

'When would that have been, Mr Rowlandson?' Cough prompted him, seeing that the landlord's more talkative nature was already beginning to assert itself.

'Oh, several years ago now, Inspector.'

'Was he a local man?'

'No. He moved into the area to take up the job as groundsman.'

'Do you know where he had been before coming to Farnham?'

'I do not, I'm afraid. McMasters was pleasant enough company in the community and quite a regular with us here,' said Rowlandson, indicating in the direction of the bar. 'But he kept very much to himself about his past.'

A knock came at the door and their conversation was interrupted temporarily while a girl brought in a tray with three cups and a jug of coffee. She placed the tray upon the large table in the centre of the room and then withdrew.

Once the door had closed, Rowlandson poured the strong black liquid and handed a cup to each of the policemen before taking up his own. 'Help yourselves to cream and sugar,' he said, pointing to the tray. 'I never take either myself. If God had

intended us to take coffee with cream and sugar, I always say to myself, he would not have made it bitter in the first place.'

'I entirely agree, sir,' said Cough. 'I cannot, however, answer for P.C. Oates. But we were speaking of Mr McMasters. Would you say, then, that he was a secretive man?'

'On the contrary, Inspector,' said Rowlandson by now evidently warming to his theme. 'McMasters was always more than willing to talk, but if the subject of his past came up, he had a ready way of changing the subject. As I told you, he was well-liked in the area and he worked wonders on the wicket here. A talented man, Patrick McMasters.'

'When exactly did he leave, Mr Rowlandson? Do you recall?'

The landlord shifted position in his chair. 'Now, let me see.' He fell silent and gazed into the fireplace as if seeking the answer to the question there. 'It would have been at some point soon after he met Margaret Graham,' he continued at last. 'A serving girl up at the Manor House. Fabulous red hair, she had. Fair stricken with her, McMasters was, and there were plenty as would have agreed with him on that front. Including the Lord of the manor's younger son if rumours are to be believed. A fine headstrong girl who knew her own mind. Loyal, you know, and determined.'

'Can you recall in which year he left, sir?' asked Cough, bringing the landlord back to his line of enquiry.

'1904 it must have been, Inspector.'

'You are certain of that?'

'Yes. In fact, it must have been late in the summer of that year. He saw the season out as he was contracted to do, but he handed in his notice earlier in the summer. I'm on the committee at the club, you know, so I knew of his intentions to

leave early. It was shortly after Mr Barrie and the Allahakhbarries had played a match here against the Artists' XI. Strange we should be talking about that here, because one of the players that day, a young fellow name of Wodehouse I believe, was the guest of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in this very room. But that is by the by.'

'I would never be so bold as to presume that anything is by the by in a murder investigation, Mr Rowlandson,' said Cough.

'Murder?' said Rowlandson.

'Yes. Did I not mention that?' said Cough.

'Murder,' repeated the landlord.

'Indeed, sir,' replied Cough. I am investigating the deaths of Mr McMasters and Mr Harold Wilde. Rather a celebrated actor. Both of them were killed at Lord's Cricket Ground in the last few days.'

Rowlandson's lower jaw fell slightly, and he was rendered temporarily mute. Cough was more than satisfied with the effect of his words.

'Please go on, Mr Rowlandson. You were telling me about the evening after the Allahakhbarries match. Was Mr McMasters present in the bar that evening?'

Rowlandson shook his head as if in a daze, trying to find his tongue, an endeavour in which he eventually succeeded. 'Err, no. He was not in the bar, Inspector. No. But he was certainly in the vicinity.'

'You can be certain of that can you, sir?'

'Aye. I am quite certain. He was not in the bar. I was there myself that night. Mr Barrie and the Allahakhbarries are always good entertainment when they are with us. I stepped out from time to time, however, for a breath of fresh air, and on one of those occasions I saw Mr McMasters for certain. He was walking along the road heading towards the station.'

'Was he alone?' asked Cough.

'He was on his own, Inspector, but ahead of him on the road some distance was a man I had seen watching the match. You've mentioned his name already, sir. Harold Wilde.' Having said this, Rowlandson slid lower in his chair as if to indicate that he had ended.

'That is all most interesting, Mr Rowlandson. Most enlightening. Thank you.' Cough took his notebook from his pocket and jotted down a few notes. 'Now, I would like to return to the timing of Mr McMasters' departure from Farnham?'

The landlord scratched thoughtfully at his stomach. 'He must finally have left in late September of that year when he had finished his final work on the ground after the season had finished.'

'Can you tell us anything more, Mr Rowlandson?'

The landlord settled still lower into his chair as he thought, looking again into the fireplace as if for inspiration. 'Only one thing comes to mind, Inspector, and that is that Margaret Graham moved on from the Manor House at much the same time.'

'Was she a local girl?'

'She was, Inspector. She lived at the Manor House, of course. All the domestic staff were expected to live on site, but the Grahams are a local family. Have lived in Farnham time out of mind, as the headstones in the local churchyard will testify.'

'And are her parents still living?' asked Cough.

'Her father died a few years back, Inspector,' said Rowlandson, 'but her mother, as far as I know, is still alive and well.'

'And her name, sir?' asked Cough. P.C Oates, the silent observer of this interview noted in the eyes of his superior officer a glint that he had come to

recognise only too well. A glint that showed that they were nearing the end of an investigation. A glint that showed that Cough had seen the glimmer of a way to the end.

'Rowena Graham,' Rowlandson replied.

Chapter 43

Tuesday 20th August 1907

A train

As their return train to London approached Waterloo Station, Cough stared at the pages of his notebook. The words he had written in his small, neat handwriting seemed to stare back at him.

Why did McMasters leave Farnham?

Margaret Graham = Madeleine Gooch?

Here were the two questions, he sensed, upon which this case hinged. That McMasters and Margaret Graham had left Farnham at or around the same time was too much of a coincidence as far as he was concerned. All of his instincts as a detective were on the alert to this. He also had very little doubt that Margaret Graham and Madeleine Gooch would transpire to be one and the same person. But why the change of name?

And then there was the suggestive connection to the Allahakhbarries match at Farnham. The Allahakhbarries, he knew, was a team largely made up of writers and other artistic sorts brought together by the writer J.M. Barrie, and Cough would have given all kinds of wealth to know which, if any, of the players involved in the Authors' and Actors' match at Lord's had been playing, or at least present in Farnham on the day of the Allahakhbarries game.

Chapter 44

Wednesday 21st August 1907

Doncaster Hotel

'You don't mind Monty being here do you, Inspector?' asked Agatha.

'Of course not, Miss Miller.'

Monty did not look as if he was moved one way or the other whether Inspector Cough minded him. Deeply ensconced in an armchair in a corner of the hotel lounge, he was engrossed in the contents of his newspaper, and did not seem even to have registered the detective's arrival.

Cough looked at the young man, aloof even supercilious as he was wont to be, and wondered at the marked difference between him and his sister.

'Much has happened since we last met, Miss Miller,' said Cough, returning his attention to Agatha. 'The shopping list you provided us has proved most informative. I cannot say much more at this stage except to tell you that in providing the information you have regarding Madeleine Gooch, you have opened up some very significant avenues for further investigation.'

'I am pleased to have been of assistance, Inspector,' Agatha replied. She looked beyond the detective. Motes of dust danced in a shaft of sunlight cast across the lobby of the hotel.

'I will be happy at some point to explain to you further, miss, but for now I cannot.'

'Of course, Inspector. I completely understand,' she replied, hiding her disappointment.

‘Speed is of the essence and I need to ascertain precisely what you saw when you were at Lord’s on the day of the Authors’ and Actors’ match. What did you first notice of Madeleine Gooch?’

Agatha turned her attention again to the shaft of sunlight as she contemplated. The sound of passing traffic wafted into the hotel lobby on the breeze and drifted lazily into the lounge where they sat. She slowly rotated her hat on her knees as she gave the question her attention. ‘She was at one of the windows of the Long Room, as I told you previously, Inspector. I could to a certainty show you which if we were to return to Lord’s, and if you felt it was necessary.’

‘Thank you, Miss Miller, but I do not think that will be needed. What I need to know is the details of what you saw. What was she doing? What was she wearing? How did she appear to you?’

‘Ah! Very well, Inspector,’ she continued. ‘She was wearing her work apparel: a black dress, black stockings, a white apron and cap. Precisely what you would expect a waitress to be wearing on such an occasion, in fact. Nothing out of the ordinary.’

‘And what was she doing?’

‘She was standing in the window,’ said Agatha. Still she did not look Cough in the face. Her attention remained fixed on the shaft of sunlight. ‘She was looking out at the crowds that had gathered on the terrace after Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had raised the alarm about Harold Wilde’s death.’

‘Nothing unusual in that either, I suppose,’ observed Cough.

‘No, nothing unusual,’ agreed Agatha. ‘Humans are curious creatures, and it is not every day that one finds oneself in the vicinity of a murder.’

‘Unless, that is, you happen to be a detective in crime fiction, in which case it occurs with a startling regularity, it seems.’

Agatha laughed. ‘There is something in that, Inspector. One may very well suppose that some detectives might be the murderers themselves and their investigations simply elaborate means of placing the guilt for their crimes on to others. Yes, there is something in that. I wonder.’ For a brief instant a distant look flickered across her face, as if she were concentrating very, very hard and storing away a valuable idea for the future.

‘Thinking about it though, miss, I wonder if there isn’t something unusual about her situation after all. She, unlike the crowd she was looking at, was on the inside of the pavilion. She was in the same room as the deceased. Does it not strike you as odd that the crowd on the steps and on the terraces outside the Long Room should be more interesting than Harold Wilde’s dead body? If I had been in Miss Gooch’s position, I do not think that my eyes would have been on the crowd looking out. They would have been fixed on the corpse. Think again, Miss Miller. Her presence at the window strikes me as odd. What was she doing there? I may be wrong, but I cannot believe she was doing no more than looking out at the people below.’

Agatha rose from her seat and cast a glance in the direction of her brother. Monty was still buried in his newspaper, oblivious to their conversation. She stood up and took a short stroll up and down, as if to clear her mind’s eye, and then took up a position leaning on the back of the chair in which she had been seated. ‘Now you put it in that way, Inspector, I suppose there is something a trifle unusual in her presence there. I only caught the briefest of glimpses of her. I was speaking at the time to a pleasant young man. A Mr Raymond Chandler. He had the most bizarre notions of

his own, I recall, about detective fiction. Positively barbaric!' She shuddered. 'But to return to Madeleine Gooch.' Agatha closed her eyes, recreating the situation in her mind. 'What was she doing? What was she looking at?' Agatha said to herself in an attempt to prompt her memory. Then, with a new emphasis, 'What was she looking for?'

'Why do you say that, Miss Miller?' asked Cough. 'What might have given you the impression that she was looking for something?'

Agatha did not answer right away. Instead she shut her eyes again, replaying in her memory events as they had unfolded in front of the pavilion. 'She was restless,' she said at last. 'Moving her head from side to side as if she had misplaced something. And there was something furtive about her at the same time. She was keen not to be seen. She probably thought that she had not been noticed, in fact. A reasonable enough supposition with so much else going on. Who would notice a waitress standing at a window?'

'You, Miss Miller,' said Cough. 'You seem to have an eye for the telling detail.'

Agatha continued as if she had not heard him. Perhaps she had not, for by this time she was immersed in her recollections. 'Yes, who would notice a girl at the window? She was certainly most distracted when I mentioned the fact that I had seen her there when we were speaking while she waited for her omnibus yesterday. Most distracted. I am surprised that it did not register with me more at the time.'

'Never mind that, miss. It has occurred to you now. Can you recollect anything more about what you saw of her in the window of the Long Room?'

'Just one thing, Inspector,' she said after a short hesitation. 'She was only visible to me for a brief instant, but just before she moved out of view, she bent down and picked something up.'

'What was it, Miss Miller? Can you recall?' Cough's eyes and the set of his mouth were eager now.

'I do not know exactly what it was, but I believe it was some kind of red material. Something, perhaps, that had been dropped and obscured by the shutters?'

'Dropped, maybe. Or left there, perhaps, to be collected at a later stage. When the coast was clear.'

Chapter 45

Wednesday 21st August 1907

Scotland Yard

'So, your Miss Miller believes that she saw Madeleine Gooch pick up some red material in one of the windows of the Long Room,' said Frobisher. He and Cough were seated on opposite sides of the Chief Superintendent's impressive leather-topped desk at Scotland Yard. The sounds of traffic on Whitehall ascended from below and made its way through the open window.

'Yes, sir. And I would take her word as soon as I'd take the Gospel. A most remarkable young woman.'

'She has certainly made quite an impression on you, Cough. Well, let us say she is correct. Why should this be of such significance as far as you are concerned? It was no doubt a tea towel or a napkin of some description.'

'No, sir. Miss Miller was clear that it was quite a large piece of material. Too large to have been either of those things.'

'Well, a tablecloth or something similar.' Frobisher had, he evidently felt, to play the role of devil's advocate.

'It could have been, sir. But why should such an item have been left in the embrasure of a window? And why, even if it had, should the young woman have been furtive in her manner. There can be no reason, surely, why a tablecloth should have made Miss Gooch demonstrate the kind of concern that Miss Miller's recollections suggest. I do not believe the explanation of her actions lies in a domestic detail like that.'

'Then where, Cough, do you think the explanation is to be found?'

Cough leant back in his chair and looked to where the curtains billowed lightly at the window behind Frobisher's back. 'If you ask me, sir, I think that the answer is to be found in the office of the Club Secretary.'

'Eh?'

'In the Club Secretary's office, sir,' repeated Cough.

'I heard you well enough the first time,' said Frobisher, teasing the ends of his moustache as he spoke. 'Why should this have anything to do with the Club Secretary's office? That is what I want to know.'

Cough smiled. Yes, it was all coming together now. 'Because, sir, when I was in Mr Henchard's office the other day I noticed that there were no curtains at the windows. I registered it at the time and Mr Henchard told me they had somehow been damaged and sent away for repair. Then I have it, on the word of Mr A.A. Milne that on the day of the Authors' versus Actors' match, he was in the Secretary's office and one of the curtains in the office, a red velvet curtain, was missing.'

'And what the deuce was this Milne doing in the Club Secretary's office in the middle of the match?' asked Frobisher. 'Why was he not out on the field contributing to his team's efforts?'

'That, sir, is another matter altogether, and one that I am perfectly happy to explain to you at another time. In fact, I am quite certain that without knowing it Mr Milne and his movements on the day of the match lie at the very heart of this case. For now, however, I am convinced that the curtains can wait. The issue of the the utmost importance right now is that we concentrate our energies on finding Miss Gooch.'

'Why, Cough?'

‘If I am not much mistaken, sir, there is a most important tale to tell here about Mr Wilde’s death that involves Miss Gooch and, a man named Patrick McMasters ...’

‘The McMasters who was found dead on the square at Lord’s a few days ago?’

‘Yes, sir. And as I was saying, I believe that if we put Miss Gooch, Mr McMasters and the red curtain from the Club Secretary’s office together, we may be able to see our way out of this particular mystery.’

‘Very well, Cough. Then let us spare no efforts to find the girl.’

Chapter 46

Wednesday 21st August 1907

The Bat and Ball, Farnham

It was at what was, for him, an unusually early hour that Mr Rowlandson, the landlord of The Bat and Ball public house in Farnham, was up and about. Typically late to bed once he had locked up and cleared away after his evening's work, he tended also to be a late riser. This morning, however, for some reason he had found himself awake unaccountably early and unable to fall back to sleep.

By the rays of sunshine creeping around the edges of the curtains, he could see that it was a fine day and he could hear Tilly, his energetic labrador, moving around downstairs. He tried for a few minutes longer to force himself back to sleep, but it would not come and so he decided that he would get up and take her for a walk. The exercise would do them both good. He would take her up through the woods and to the cricket ground where she could chase down the rabbits to her heart's content. He pushed back the covers and swung his feet to the floor.

Twenty minutes later he found himself, slightly out of breath, leaning against a gate at the edges of the woods that covered the hill that rose up behind the pub. He really ought to do this more often. The fresh air made a very good start to the day, and he was unpleasantly surprised to note how unfit he had evidently become. But his thoughts were interrupted by a movement at the far side of the cricket field, over by the pavilion. He stepped back, as if by instinct, into the shelter of the trees, and he was glad that he had Tilly still on the lead. He had just taken cover behind the trunk of a large oak tree when a figure emerged from the door of the building. It must have

been the door opening that had caught his attention. To his surprise he saw that it was a solitary female. A cleaner, perhaps? But no; surely it was too early in the day for a cleaner to be up here. Besides, it was mid-week and the pavilion would not be in use until the weekend.

Pulling further back under the shade of the trees, he watched as the woman turned and he knew beyond doubt who she was. He had not seen her for several years, but the red hair made him absolutely certain that the young woman who had just emerged from the pavilion at such an odd hour of the day was none other than Margaret Graham.

Chapter 47

Wednesday 21st August 1907

Scotland Yard

‘No. He says he is quite certain that she has been sleeping there for several days,’ said Cough. ‘She knows the area well and must have taken a calculated risk that the pavilion would not be used during the week. And she might well have got away with it had it not been for Rowlandson’s unusual early morning walk.’

Once Margaret Graham had left the pavilion, Rowlandson had watched her until she was out of sight. He had then waited for several minutes longer to ensure she was not returning soon before he went to investigate. What he found inside the pavilion—a bag, a roll of blankets, a book or two, a small primus stove and several empty food tins—had left the landlord of The Bat and Ball in no doubt that she had slept there the previous night if not several nights. These objects, he had found stored neatly out of sight in a back corner beneath the bar. Whilst he carried out his search of the building, he kept his eyes and ears constantly on the alert. The fact that Margaret Graham had not taken these items with her was evidence that in all likelihood she intended to return. All of this, Rowlandson had imparted to Inspector Cough by a telephone call placed as soon as it was open from Farnham Post Office.

‘In which case, Cough,’ said Frobisher, ‘you have my full authority to take whatever steps you feel necessary in order to apprehend this woman, Margaret Graham or Madeleine Gooch, whichever she is. It looks as if you are right and that she holds at least one of the keys to this investigation.’

Chapter 48

Wednesday 21st August 1907

Farnham Cricket Club

It was at around half past seven that evening that Madeleine Gooch eventually returned to the pavilion at Farnham Cricket Club.

After Rowlandson's telephone call, Cough, Oates and a small team of officers had been dispatched to Farnham. They had met with the landlord at the Bat and Ball and he had led them up through the woods. Once they had ascertained that she had not as yet returned, they had taken up their positions secreted in the pavilion.

It was after hours of patient waiting that Cough and his team heard the first sounds of somebody approaching the building. Retiring to their places of concealment, they awaited further developments. Sure enough, within a few minutes the door to the pavilion was opened cautiously and they heard footsteps on the creaking floorboards.

From his position behind the door of the home team's changing room and using a well-placed mirror, Cough had no trouble in recognising the woman he sought. As soon as he was content that she was far enough from the entrance to make escape from his officers impossible, he stepped into the room.

'Good evening, Miss Gooch. Or should I say Miss Graham?' he said.

The young woman made a dart for the entrance, but found her way blocked by the bulky and familiar presence of P.C. Oates. She hastily looked around her, but seeing that all other avenues of escape were closed to her by other officers who had emerged from their hiding places, she simply raised her hands.

'Whichever you wish, Inspector. It seems my game is at an end.'

Chapter 49

Wednesday 21st August 1907

Doyle's Club, Pall Mall

'I understand they have made an arrest, Plum,' said Doyle.

It was later on the evening of Margaret Graham's detention, and the two men had met once more at Doyle's club on Pall Mall. Before them the pristine white of the tablecloth and the perfectly laid out cutlery, cruet and wine glasses supplied a sense of order and normality that neither man was feeling.

'Yes,' said Wodehouse. 'A young woman named Margaret Graham. I was informed earlier this evening by a member of the Metropolitan Constabulary.'

'I received a visit from them as well. They captured her as she was returning to the pavilion at Farnham Cricket Club where it seems she had been hiding out for several days.'

'Most disconcerting this whole business,' said Wodehouse. 'There is a certain neatness, though, a certain economy to the narrative. The way the solution to the mystery seems to hang around The Bat and Ball and the Cricket Club at Farnham.'

'As you say, as you say. Very neat,' said Doyle. 'It is the stuff of novels rather than reality you would say, were it not for the fact that we have actually lived through it. Are living through it.'

They fell silent as a waiter, impeccably accoutred in black trousers, white shirt, black bow tie and white waistcoat approached their table. He poured an inch of

a deep red wine into Doyle's glass and then stepped back to allow time for the obligatory tasting. Then, upon receiving the peer's nod of approval, he proceeded to fill the two authors' glasses, placed the bottle in the middle of the table and returned to his station to one side of the dining room. Once he had retired, they resumed their conversation.

'It seems, at least, that Inspector Cough has no further thought that we are guilty of any kind of fraud,' said Doyle. 'As much I learnt from the officer who informed me of Margaret Graham's arrest. Most considerate of him to tell us.' He took a long draft of the wine and rolled it around his mouth appreciatively. 'This experience, Plum, has made me appreciate simple things, such as a fine wine and a good meal in new ways.'

'I think you are right, Doyle. I was worried for some time that the blackmail attempt coming on top of the forthcoming publication of *Not George Washington* might not look good,' said Wodehouse, 'but it seems as though that particular line of thought is not part of the Inspector's enquiries.'

'Milne has had a worse time of it than us, by all accounts.'

'He has only recently been released from Marylebone Police Station, so I have heard,' said Wodehouse. 'A most unpleasant experience that must have been.'

'I wonder, though, what the real story is behind his leaving the game the way he did and what exactly he was doing in the pavilion when Wilde was killed.'

'That,' said Wodehouse, 'I am hoping we will find out tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow?'

'Yes. Just before leaving to join you here, I received a letter from Scotland Yard telling me that my presence is required tomorrow afternoon at Lord's. I am to present myself at the Library at two. You, I presume, will also be required to attend.'

'I have not heard so as yet, Plum, but then I would have had to leave home earlier than you in order to reach here in time for dinner. The missive no doubt awaits me when I return.' He turned his wine glass slowly by the stem as he spoke. 'So, the finale approaches.'

Part 4
The Result

Chapter 50

Thursday 22nd August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

It was at ten minutes to two the next day that Agatha and Monty arrived at the gate by the Lord's Tavern. The sun was pasted on a brilliant blue sky as they approached the constable on duty at the gate. They gave him their names and he, after consulting the list he had been given by Inspector Cough, allowed them access and directed them towards the rear of the pavilion.

They were met at the door by P.C. Oates who showed them into the Library, where a number of people had already gathered. An uneasy silence pervaded the room. Some were seated in the array of chairs and sofas the room had to offer, others were standing around the walls. On the far side of the room, near the window, stood the familiar figure of Inspector Cough.

'Ah, Miss Miller,' he said, coming towards her as she entered the room. 'And Mr Miller. Excellent. I am very pleased you are here. Do take a seat. We will be beginning in just a few minutes.'

As she had been bidden, Agatha sat in an armchair and looked around at the other occupants of the room. Monty settled, as Cough had indicated, into the seat next to hers. For the moment, at least, she was the only female present.

'I thought that the female of the species was not allowed into the hallowed pavilion at Lord's,' said Monty. 'I didn't really expect that you would be tolerated here. Inspector Cough must have pulled some strings.'

'No, Monty,' said Agatha. 'Even Lord's Cricket Club has had to make some movement to accommodate the demands of the times. Women cannot be shut out forever, you know.'

'Your sister is correct, Mr Miller,' said Cough. 'The Ground and Pavilion Regulations for the years 1907-8 are quite clear on the subject: "Ladies cannot under any circumstances be permitted to view the pavilion above the Ground Floor." As the Library is on the Ground Floor, however, there can be no objection to her presence.'

'Ah. I see,' said Monty, a trifle disappointed not to have scored a point over Agatha.

Done with the subject already, Agatha was looking around the room. She recognised all of the men surrounding her as players in the ill-fated Authors' versus Actors' match of the previous week. There were Mr P.G. Wodehouse and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle conversing in hushed tones by a bookcase against the far wall. Their group was completed by two others: Ernest Hornung and Mr A.A. Milne. Apart from these four, however, the occupants of the room remained in guarded silence, awaiting whatever denouement the Inspector had brought them together to effect.

They did not have long to wait. As soon as the hour struck two, announced in perfect synchronicity by a grandfather clock that stood in one corner of the room and the muffled, distant chime of the pavilion clock, Inspector Cough entered, accompanied by Chief Superintendent Frobisher, P.C. Oates and Francis Henchard,

the Club Secretary. The whisper of conversation from the group by the bookcase faded away. As ever, Henchard was impeccably attired. He was the image of propriety, though his hand insistently readjusted the knot of his tie. The four men made their way to the bottom of the stairs leading up to the Bowlers' Bar.

At a gesture from Cough, Henchard stepped forward and coughed to signal that the proceedings were about to begin. 'Good afternoon gentlemen, and Miss Miller,' he began. 'As the Secretary of the Marylebone Cricket Club, I wish you welcome to Lord's today, but it is with a somewhat heavy heart, as we are here to consider the most serious of matters. At the request of Chief Superintendent Frobisher and Inspector Cough, you have all been summoned here with regard to the murder of Mr Harold Wilde and the subsequent death of Mr Patrick McMasters, about which they wish to speak with you. And so, without further ado, here is Inspector Cough.'

Henchard stepped back and Cough moved forward. A momentary buzz of anticipation was quickly stifled as the Inspector began to speak. 'Thank you, Mr Henchard.'

The detective cast his eyes over the room and took in the array of men, ending his appraisal of his audience by looking at Miss Miller, the solitary young woman in the room, who had played so significant a part in reaching the solution to the case. He could not help but be aware of the array of talent present in the room. Here were men who made their livelihoods by their pens, whose lives consisted of the brilliant telling of stories. But he was the storyteller now, and he knew that of all the people in this room, he and he alone was the master of this tale. It was his to tell and the men before him, experienced authors or actors as they may be, were, for the

purposes of this gathering, the characters with whom he had to work in recounting his story.

He caught Agatha's eye and she gave him the briefest of smiles. It was all that he needed. Memories of his Lottie again shot through his mind, and gave him the impetus he needed. He launched into the narrative that he had so carefully spent the morning constructing in his head. 'The life of Mr Harold Wilde,' he commenced, 'came to a sudden and brutal end in this very building, in fact probably a few mere feet from where we are now, on the afternoon of Thursday last, the 15th of August. The beginning of the chain of events leading to his tragic death, however, and the death of Mr Patrick McMasters that followed it a few days later, has its roots at another cricket club at Farnham in Surrey on the occasion of a match between the Allahakhbarries and the Artists' XI in the summer of 1904.

'Mr Wilde was not actually playing on that occasion, but he was a keen cricketer, and he took the opportunity of a fine summer's afternoon, it seems, to enjoy a trip down into the country in order to watch some of his fellows at play. Some of you, of course, already know about the match to which I am referring. You, Mr Wodehouse, were playing on that occasion. And you, Sir Arthur, were also in Farnham that day.' As he spoke, he looked at the two men he had addressed for confirmation. Both nodded their assent but said nothing, their faces grave. 'It is not the match itself, however, but what took place after it was over that is of importance to our case. After the match had finished, you both retired to a local hostelry which is not far from Folly Hill, The Bat and Ball. You have yourselves both told me of this meeting, and the fact has been corroborated by Mr Rowlandson, the landlord.

'The subject of your conversation that evening turned, as it normally would I should imagine, to literary matters? Perhaps you could enlighten us, Sir Arthur.'

Cough looked at the peer, inviting him to speak.

'I say, Inspector. Is this really necessary?'

'Most necessary I am afraid, Sir Arthur,' replied Cough. 'If the truth of what has taken place here at Lord's over the last week is to be explained, I can have nothing but the full truth from everybody. And we are, as you see, a select gathering.'

Doyle tugged reflectively at the ends of his moustache, then began in a clear and deliberate tone to speak. There was, he saw, justice in the Inspector's request. If the truth of what had happened to Harold Wilde and Patrick McMasters were to be unearthed then everyone, at whatever potential cost to their reputation, had to offer their full cooperation. 'Our conversation at first turned, as it was wont to do on such occasions, to the events of the match,' he began. 'Who had batted or bowled particularly well or particularly badly. We soon moved on, however, to speak of our writing. It had been an important part of our friendship ever since we had first met at the inaugural dinner of The Crimes Club a few years previously.'

'You and Mr Wodehouse, then, were on terms of familiarity?'

'Certainly, Inspector. By the time of the Allahakhbarries match at Folly Hill, we knew each other well; well enough to speak frankly and honestly as good friends ought.'

'So, tell us please, Sir Arthur, about what precisely you discussed that evening.'

'I was engaged at the time in writing *Sir Nigel*, one of my historical novels. In spite of what the world seems to think, there is more to me and my literary output than Mr Sherlock Holmes.'

'The conversation did, nevertheless, come back to that particular gentleman did it not, Sir Arthur?'

'Damn it, Inspector, must you talk as if Holmes is real? It is bad enough that half the English-speaking world behaves as if Holmes were flesh and blood without an intelligent man like you doing so too.'

'My apologies, Sir Arthur,' said Cough, unperturbed by the author's sudden outburst.

Somewhat mollified, the peer continued. 'My apologies, Inspector, but you have no conception of the frustration I have had to bear since I invented Mr Sherlock Holmes. He has taken on, so it seems, a life of his own.'

'Please do not worry, Sir Arthur,' continued Cough who had not during the preceding exchange taken his eyes from the peer's face, but now glanced at P.G. Wodehouse seated next to him. 'Now where were we? Ah yes. Your conversation that evening did, in the end, turn to Sherlock Holmes?'

'It did, Inspector.'

'Please go on.'

'Very well.' Doyle coughed as if to expel some troublesome blockage from his throat. 'I am constantly troubled by the public for more tales featuring Holmes, and as you may have guessed from my reaction a moment ago, I occasionally find this

trying. Holmes has been the greatest aid to my literary fame, but he is also a millstone around my neck. Always the demand for more and more Holmes. The refusal of some members of the public to accept that he is no more than words on the page. A fiction.’ Doyle’s face flushed behind his copious whiskers. ‘Well, as our conversation that evening progressed, Wodehouse proposed, light-heartedly I believe, that he might write some Holmes tales on my behalf. That we might come to some suitable financial arrangement whereby the stories he wrote might appear in my name and he would take a percentage of the royalty.’

‘Light-heartedly, you say.’

‘Yes. I believe so. Light-heartedly. If for a day or two the possibility remained in the air unresolved, it lasted no longer than that and the idea went no further.’

‘And yet, Sir Arthur, Mr Wodehouse went on to write—it is to be published any time now, in fact—a novel in which a similar literary “arrangement” is contracted.’

‘*Not George Washington* is its title, Inspector,’ contributed Wodehouse.

‘Indeed, Mr Wodehouse. And a fine piece of work it is. Very droll as fiction, but perhaps not so amusing if it were fact.’

‘It is not fact, though, Inspector,’ said Doyle. ‘As I have already said, if ever we contemplated the idea it lasted no more than a few idle days at most.’

‘And I believe you, Sir Arthur,’ said Cough. ‘There were others, however, who took the discussion between you and Mr Wodehouse that evening at face value, are there not?’ For your conversation that evening in the rear parlour of The Bat and Ball had been overheard.’

‘It was a hot evening, Inspector, and as we took our refreshment, we had the window open. It seems that we were not alone as we believed.’

‘A circumstance, Sir Arthur, that would lead both to a blackmail attempt against yourself and Mr Wodehouse and to the deaths of Mr Harold Wilde and Mr Patrick McMasters.’ Cough paused and scanned the room, allowing these facts and the impression they were likely to make to settle in the minds of his listeners. ‘There was no love lost, I understand, between you and Mr Wilde, Sir Arthur?’

‘That is correct. The man had been pestering me for some time to allow an adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* for the stage. He felt, it appeared, that an operatic version of the tale, with himself cast as Holmes of course, would assure his fame and future fortune. A long run in the West End. A large pay cheque. I, of course, refused in spite of his repeated demands.’

‘But when Mr Wilde overheard your conversation at The Bat and Ball—Mr Rowlandson confirms that he was seen in the vicinity that evening—he had found, he believed a way of gaining from you precisely what he wanted.’

‘From about that time onwards, certainly, his approaches became increasingly persistent. I always found a way to put off his demands, but it was evident that he believed he had at his fingers’ ends some kind of power to make me comply in the end. Perhaps had he not been constantly in work with the company at The Savoy his supposed “knowledge” might have come into the open sooner. His demands were becoming more and more pressing, though. He had let drop on a number of occasions that he could ruin me if he would, but his threats never took any material form.’

‘And that was due, in your view, largely to his continued work for Gilbert and Sullivan?’

‘In part, Inspector, but I suspect that chance also had a large part to play in the matter.’

‘Would you explain, Sir Arthur?’

‘Of course. As chance would have it, in the period between the Allahakhbarries match at Farnham and the recent Authors’ match at Lord’s when he was killed, I have published only three Holmes stories, all of which had already been written by the date of the conversation at Farnham.’

‘Wilde had, in other words, no evidence. No Holmes stories, no proof, even if your conspiracy had gone ahead.’

‘Precisely, Inspector.’

‘Whatever your personal feelings towards Mr Wilde then, Sir Arthur, you had no personal motivation, either arising from a blackmail attempt or from guilt at perpetrating literary fraud, to kill Harold Wilde.’

‘None, Inspector.’

‘That leaves us with a mystery, though, does it not? Whoever did kill Mr Wilde was evidently at some pains to make it appear to be you. From a financial point of view, of course, it makes sense that you rather than Mr Wodehouse should be the primary target of a blackmail attempt. You are at the height of your success and career while Mr Wodehouse, talented as he is, is only at the beginning of his.’

‘My thanks for that, Inspector,’ said Wodehouse.

'*Not George Washington* was most enjoyable and I await your next book with anticipation. To return to our mystery, however, Sir Arthur. Whoever killed Mr Wilde, evidently a person or persons of the utmost ingenuity, seems to have attempted to try to frame you for his death. Why else would they have used your bat?'

'But how would they have known that I would be in the pavilion at the right time?' asked Doyle.

'Ah! Now there we come to what I initially thought was one of the most difficult matters in the case, Sir Arthur. It troubled me for some time. Then, however, it dawned on me that this need not concern me at all. The fact that your bat had apparently been used to kill Mr Wilde, the fact that you were being coerced by Mr Wilde, and the potential motivation you would have for murder became tied together in my head. In such a reading of the crime, your presence in the pavilion at the precise moment of Mr Wilde's death became, of course, of the utmost significance and needed to be accounted for. As the investigation progressed, however, it became evident that your appearance in the building at the time Wilde met his end was no more than chance. A fact that was demonstrably true, but of no direct relevance to Wilde's death. Your presence in the Long Room at that precise time was not necessary. In the event, however, it provided the murderer or murderers with the most convenient of smokescreens, and it obscured for some time other aspects of the investigation. Of far more interest, as it transpired, was the story surrounding Mr A.A. Milne.'

As if at some kind of signal in the ether, the eyes of everybody in the room turned to where Milne was seated.

'Many of the events that took place in this building on the day of Mr Wilde's murder seem to have involved the movements of Mr Milne,' said Cough. 'Unlike you, Sir Arthur, Mr Milne's presence in the pavilion was no mere whim of Fortune. He left the field of play before either Mr Wilde or you, Sir Arthur, and his presence in the building when Mr Wilde was murdered is of the utmost importance. As you were walking from the field, Sir Arthur, you saw Mr Milne on the roof terrace. Mr Milne initially admitted to being there. My initial impression was that he remained on the roof terrace throughout the critical period of time, only appearing in the lower regions of the building after Mr Wilde's body had been discovered by Sir Arthur. This impression Mr Milne was at first only too happy to reinforce, but it was a state of affairs that ultimately turned out to be untrue. Mr Milne was not on the roof terrace for the entire time. I had evidence from Patrick McMasters that placed Milne there, an account that confirmed the testimony of Sir Arthur. However, McMasters left the balcony before Mr Wilde was murdered, and there were no other witnesses to prove that Mr Milne remained on the roof terrace.'

'On the contrary, two witnesses stated that Mr Milne was not there. First, Mr Jerome Kern. He was on the far side of the ground with a clear view of the roof terrace at the crucial period, and he states with certainty that it was empty in the few minutes before Sir Arthur emerged on the lower terrace and announced his discovery of Wilde's body. Second, Miss Madeleine Gooch, who gave me a positive identification of Mr Milne who she saw, she says, on the stairs near the Club Secretary's office at around the time of Mr Wilde's death.'

'Why, I had to wonder,' said Cough, turning his body and addressing himself to Milne directly, 'would Mr Milne have wished to mislead me on the matter of his whereabouts?'

'I have already confessed to you, Inspector, and so I might as well do so to the assembled congregation,' said Milne. His features were fixed and serious, more serious than many of those present had ever seen them before.

'Very well, Mr Milne. If you wish,' said Cough.

'We are mostly men of letters and thespians here,' Milne commenced, 'and we have all known what it is like when starting out on our careers. The uncertainty. The desire to succeed. The disappointments. The rejection slips. And then the sudden hope of a chance offered.' Milne did not look around as he spoke, but remained focused on Inspector Cough. Around the Library heads nodded their understanding. They knew the feelings and the situations to which the young man alluded all too well.

'Well, in the days preceding the Authors' match last week what seemed to be such a chance had, it seemed, been presented to me. Please, I am not offering this as an excuse or a justification for my behaviour; I am simply explaining.'

'Thank you, Mr Milne. Please proceed,' said Cough.

'I received an anonymous letter. Whoever it came from evidently knew that I was to be playing in the match here at Lord's. The letter said very little, except that I should make my way to the office of the Club Secretary at a specified time on the day of the match.'

'So that explains your wish to leave the field when you did,' said Doyle.

Milne nodded by way of response and went straight on with his narrative. 'I left the field in plenty of time and made sure I was in a place where I should be easily visible but not much missed when it came to the time to make my *rendez-vous*. I was

somewhat nervous, and I smoked a cigar. The message indicated that I was likely to learn something considerably to my advantage at the forthcoming meeting, whatever form it was to take and with whomsoever. I was, as it transpires, naïve in the extreme.'

'That need not concern us now, sir. Please confine yourself to telling us what happened next,' instructed Cough.

'Very well, Inspector. My apologies. I went, as and when the note instructed, to the Club Secretary's office. I was circumspect and had, I believed, made my way there unobserved. In this, it appears, I was mistaken.'

'The facts, Mr Milne.'

'Yes, of course. Upon reaching the office and upon receiving no response to my knock, I tried the door and, finding it open, I let myself in.'

Henchard bridled somewhat when he heard this, outraged no doubt at the young man's temerity in entering his office without permission.

'Tell us, Mr Milne, what did you find there?'

'I found nobody, Inspector. The room was empty.'

'Thank you, sir. And what of the room itself? Was all as it should be?'

'Well, I had never been in there before, you understand,' said the young man looking, as he spoke, in the direction of Henchard who was fingering the knot of his tie, looking blankly at the opposite wall of the Library. 'As far as I could tell,' continued Milne, 'the room appeared neat and tidy with one sole exception.'

'And what was that exception, Mr Milne?'

‘A strange one, Inspector. One of the curtains was missing.’

‘Thank you, Mr Milne,’ said Cough. ‘Your unwise and, as you called them yourself, naïve actions on the day of the match had you in the frame for the murder of Mr Wilde for quite some time, as the writer of the note you received no doubt intended. It put you in very much the right place at very much the wrong time. The subsequent murder of Patrick McMasters, however, when you were the guest of His Majesty in Marylebone Police Station made me reconsider. Had you been guilty of the first murder, a second murderer was now required, and while possible this did not seem the most likely of explanations. And when, after paying a visit to Mr Rowlandson, the landlord of The Bat and Ball, I learnt that on the night of the Allahakhbarries match in 1904 McMasters had been seen following Harold Wilde away from the pub, it seemed to me far more likely that the murders of the two men were connected to some other cause connected to that night. In short, I began to believe that the murder of both men was connected in some way to the blackmail plot against Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr Wodehouse.’

‘I do not believe that you committed the murder of Mr Wilde, dislike him as you told me you did, Mr Milne. Such a dislike is not, it seems, a feeling unique to you. Mr Wilde had, it seems, a most profound ability to create feelings of intense dislike in almost everybody he met. But that is beside the point. As I said, I do not believe you to be the killer, and so we move on. Let a night in Marylebone Police Station Prison teach you wiser ways for the future.’

At a sign from Cough, Milne settled back into his chair, a look of relief on his face.

'Let us not, however, forget the absence of the red curtain,' continued Cough. 'When I was in the Club Secretary's office myself, both curtains were missing. Mr Henchard had sent them for repair. These curtains have a further part to play in the events of that day. But for now, let us leave Mr Henchard's office with just the one curtain in its accustomed place.'

Chapter 51

Thursday 22nd August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

The room filled with an uneasy silence as Inspector Cough paused for a moment in his tale. The springs of a chair creaked as somebody moved in an attempt to find a more comfortable position. To Agatha, hanging on every word Inspector Cough spoke, it seemed that the temperature in the room had palpably increased.

'We need now to return to the discovery of Wilde's body,' said the detective. The chronology of the events of a crime were, he had learnt in his years on the force, paramount in establishing the logic and the momentum of a murder. In the telling of the tale, however, chronology sometimes had to give way to stronger narrative forces. 'The body, was it not Sir Arthur, was in the centre of the Long Room when you returned there after your visit to the changing rooms?'

'That is correct, Inspector.'

'Your bat was by its feet and a puddle of blood was just beginning to gather around the head?'

'Yes.'

'And yet,' Cough continued, 'there were no traces of blood to be found anywhere else on the floor or the walls of the Long Room. Surely, we should have expected, given the ferocity of the blows that had been dealt to Mr Wilde's head, that there should have been a quantity of blood shed around in the vicinity of the murder. And yet, no such evidence was to be found in the Long Room. No such evidence

indeed, as I discovered in my subsequent investigations, was to be found anywhere in the pavilion.'

A murmur of consternation could be heard in the wake of Cough's observations.

'So what conclusions are we to draw from this remarkable fact?' asked the detective, who proceeded without waiting for an answer to his question. 'Firstly, that while Mr Wilde's body was discovered in the Long Room, that is probably not where he met his end. It is most unlikely given the short time Sir Arthur was in the changing room that Wilde was killed there. Besides, in such a public space, so visible from the field of play and the terrace right outside the windows, it is a most dangerous place to commit a murder.

'Secondly, we have the absence of blood. Mr Wilde died in a violent attack during which a succession of terrible blows must have rained upon his head, and such blows would certainly have occasioned blood to be found in the area near the scene of the killing, not merely puddling around the head. Furthermore, Sir Arthur's bat, whether the murder weapon or not, bore no traces of the victim's blood. The bat, I believe, was placed with the body in order to divert attention away from the true facts of the case. It was an impromptu touch intended to create a misleading diversion.'

'Then how, Inspector, did Wilde's body come to be in the middle of the Long Room?' asked Wodehouse.

'An important question,' said Cough, moving slightly forward into the room. 'When I was leaving the Long Room on my very first visit, I discovered a fragment of red material caught on a hinge of the door that connects the Long Room with the Long Room Bar. As we heard from Mr Milne only a few moments ago, one of the

curtains from the Club Secretary's office was missing at around this time. I later ascertained, when I was in the Secretary's office, that both curtains were missing. According to Mr Henchard they had been sent to the repairers. If indeed one of the curtains had been torn, the curtain of which I had found a fragment caught in the doorway to the Long Room Bar, then a repair would certainly have been needed. But how to explain the presence of one of the curtains outside of Mr Henchard's office at such a crucial time in the chronology of Harold Wilde's murder? That was the question. What, I asked myself, if the material had been used to make possible the moving of the body without leaving a trail of blood. Furthermore if, as I came to believe to be the case, Wilde's head had been wrapped in the curtain before the fatal sequence of blows was struck, that would also account for the absence of blood spatters wherever the murder took place.'

'Most ingenious, Inspector, but in that case, surely, there would be evidence of blood on the curtain to which you refer,' said Doyle.

'You are right, of course, Sir Arthur, and so there may well have been, but by the time this information was gathered and the possibility occurred to me, the curtains had already been removed and apparently sent for repair. If I am right, however, and we accept this version of events, the curtains are of the greatest significance.'

Doyle nodded his head, appreciative of the skill with which the detective was constructing his narrative.

'I am not yet finished with the curtains, however,' said Cough. 'They make one more appearance in the tale, and then we can leave them to one side.'

'The red material I saw Madeleine Gooch pick up in the window of the Long Room?' asked Agatha.

'You have hit upon it, Miss Miller,' said Cough. 'The red material you observed her pick up when you were on the outfield in front of the pavilion. After our interview when you told me of this, I sent Oates with another officer to investigate, and sure enough in one of the windows behind the shutters they discovered some minuscule traces of blood. The blood, it is my belief, of Mr Harold Wilde that had at last seeped through the material of the curtain.'

'So this Madeleine Gooch,' asked Wodehouse. 'Is she the perpetrator?'

'That,' continued the detective, 'is the question we need to address next. And that is a story that, like so many others in this case, has its roots in Farnham on the occasion of the Allahakhbarries match in 1904.'

'We know Sir Arthur's conversation with Mr Wodehouse that took place that evening in the rear parlour of The Bat and Ball was overheard by Harold Wilde and also, in all probability, by Patrick McMasters. That supposition, I believe, opens interesting possibilities.'

'We have already heard how Mr Wilde, seeming to rely on some kind of power of coercion he felt he held over Sir Arthur, was attempting to force him into agreeing to a musical adaptation of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. That was not the end of the blackmail attempts was it, though, Sir Arthur?'

The peer's head sank a little before he replied. 'No, Inspector. As you know, Wodehouse and I recently received written communications attempting to extort money from us.'

'Communications that arrived after the death of Mr Wilde, is that not correct?'

'Quite correct.'

'Meaning then, that unless Mr Wilde wrote to you from beyond the grave, somebody else was also in possession of information they believed connected you

to what would have been the literary scandal of the age. Do you think that Mr Wilde might have had a partner in his enterprises?’

Doyle reflected for a moment, his eyes wandering over the paintings hung at intervals around the walls of the Library. ‘No, I do not think so, Inspector. Wilde struck me always as a profoundly self-centred and rather solitary man. Knowledge of the kind he believed he had, he would have kept very close to his chest as a sort of personal pleasure and comfort.’

‘That is my impression also, Sir Arthur,’ said Cough. ‘And so, this other person or persons, because we cannot be sure it was an individual acting alone, was somehow independently in possession of the details of your conversation that fateful evening at The Bat and Ball.’

‘We must assume so, Inspector.’

Cough nodded his head in agreement, then turned his attentions to P.G. Wodehouse. ‘It was you, Mr Wodehouse, who went to meet the blackmailer in Farnham after advertisements that were placed in the *Evening Standard*.’

‘Yes, Inspector.’

‘Can you tell us who it was that you met?’

‘I recognised him at once. I had seen him around the ground on the day of the match here at Lord’s, but I did not know his name. It was not until after he was found dead in the middle out there,’ said Wodehouse gesturing in the direction of the field of play, ‘that I became aware that he was Patrick McMasters.’

As Wodehouse spoke the name, a suppressed gasp came from the rear of the room where the Club Secretary stood. ‘Are you well, Mr Henchard?’ asked Cough.

‘Quite well thank you, Inspector,’ he replied, adjusting the knot of his tie. ‘It is simply that I am shocked to hear that one of the Club’s employees, a man who I trusted implicitly, should have been involved in such a low enterprise.’

Cough paused for a moment before proceeding. ‘And yet he was, Mr Henchard. As we have already established, Mr Rowlandson, the landlord of The Bat and Ball, remembers very well the evening of the match in question. Mr Barrie and the other members of his team always, it seems, create something of an impression. That evening he had gone to stand at the door of the establishment—it was a fine evening and he enjoyed taking a quiet moment or two with his pipe in the night air—when Mr Wilde emerged from the rear of the premises and made his way towards the station followed at a distance by a man he positively identifies as Patrick McMasters.

‘Now, we cannot be certain of what Mr McMasters did or did not hear that evening of course. Taken altogether, however, his presence at The Bat and Ball on the evening of the Allahakhbarries match, his following of Harold Wilde who had, I think we can agree, gained knowledge that evening of what he believed was a literary conspiracy between Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr P.G. Wodehouse, and his subsequent attempts to extort money from these two gentleman can leave us with very little doubt.’

Henchard said no more, but shook his head ruminatively as if still in disbelief.

‘But what of Madeleine Gooch, Inspector?’ The question came from Agatha Miller. Throughout the preceding conversation she had sat largely in silence, a look of the profoundest attention on her face quite unlike the slack expression her brother Monty wore.

‘Yes of course, Miss Miller. Madeleine Gooch. That is where we were, and it is to her that we must return. We traced her lodgings in Kentish Town and her landlady was able to supply us with some most illuminating information. First, that she was engaged to a young man named Patrick, although she could not recall a surname. Second, that Miss Gooch received a weekly letter from Farnham. A letter from a Rowena Graham.’

‘And so, we are faced with two issues in relation to Madeleine Gooch. First, was she the killer of Harold Wilde? And second, who is the Rowena Graham who wrote with such religious regularity to her?’

‘Let us take those questions in turn. Did Madeleine Gooch murder Mr Harold Wilde? It is clear that she could have had both the means and the opportunity. She was certainly in the pavilion at the time Wilde was murdered, and there is no shortage of objects that could have been used as the murder weapon readily available in the building. We also have Miss Miller’s testimony that she saw Miss Gooch behaving unusually shortly after the murder and, in all probability, handling the red curtain from the Club Secretary’s office that I believe was used during the murder. So far, so good, but what could be the motivation for such an act? Well, we have heard already that her landlady in Kentish Town knew that Miss Gooch was engaged to be married to a man named Patrick, and that this young man was Patrick McMasters seems, from a letter found by P.C. Oates in her lodgings, to be all but certain. We also know from Mr Wodehouse’s evidence that the blackmailer he met when he made his trip down to Farnham was McMasters. In addition to all of this, we know that McMasters had lived and worked for some time in Farnham prior to taking up his position as groundsman at Lord’s.’

'Putting all of these pieces of information together, it seems to me not unlikely that McMasters, engaged to her as he was, would have shared with Miss Gooch the knowledge he had gathered one summer's evening in 1904 outside the rear windows of The Bat and Ball. If it proved true and the great Sir Arthur Conan Doyle were involved in a literary scandal that they could turn to their financial advantage, that would provide them with a solid source of income for their married life together.

'There was a problem, however, and that problem existed in the form of Mr Harold Wilde who, McMasters knew, had also overheard the fateful conversation between the two authors, and who could also turn this knowledge to his advantage. If, then, I am correct in supposing that McMasters was indeed the man to whom Miss Gooch was engaged, we can identify a clear enough motive for murder. Opportunity, means and motive. The three pillars of any murder investigation; and there we have them, all three.'

Cough looked out over the faces assembled before him and weighed their attention and silence. He was the story-teller now, and he held his audience of authors in the palm of his hand.

'And yet,' he continued after a brief pause, 'I find myself unwilling to accept Madeleine Gooch as the murderer of Harold Wilde. We have heard from Mr Milne that his presence in the pavilion had been engineered by the writing of a note. If his presence in the building were part of an attempt to frame him for Wilde's death, the killer would have to be certain that Wilde would also be in the building at the same time. Another note, perhaps? With a similar promise and the same time for meeting given in order to tempt Wilde away from the match? There must have been some means of luring him to the pavilion.'

'Miss Gooch would, I am quite certain, have been capable of orchestrating such a plot. She has from the beginning of this investigation appeared to me to be a very capable human being. However, the ability to do a thing and the actual execution of it are not the same. Were it only Mr Wilde who had been murdered, I might have thought her the culprit. The engagement of Miss Gooch to Patrick McMasters and the evidence that McMasters had reason to see Wilde as a barrier to their financial well-being would provide sufficient motive. But Mr Wilde's is not the only death we have to consider here. Two days later, McMasters was himself found dead. Are we to suppose that, having cleared Harold Wilde from their path, Madeleine Gooch would then go ahead and murder the man to whom she could now be married with a modicum of financial security? It makes no sense.'

'So, what conclusion do you draw, Inspector?' asked Agatha, whose gaze had never once shifted from Cough's face as he had given his lengthy explanation.

'There must, Miss Miller, I am convinced, be another person lurking behind all of the events that have taken place at Lord's over the last week. I have become increasingly convinced that this person, whoever it may be, must have connections with both Lord's and Farnham. The connection between these two places has become so strong that the logic of the situation demands it.'

'There are, if you recall, two issues that interested me with regard to Madeleine Gooch. I have dealt, so far, only with the question of whether she was the killer of Harold Wilde.'

'I have forgotten the second issue, Inspector,' said Wodehouse.

'The matter of Miss Gooch's correspondent from Farnham,' replied Cough, turning to face him. 'Rowena Graham.'

'Who is this Rowena Graham, Inspector?' asked Agatha.

'At first she was no more than a name to me, Miss Miller,' continued Cough. 'A name conjured by an old woman in Kentish town. But after paying a visit to Farnham, Mr Rowlandson's evidence began to put some flesh on the bones of the name. Rowena Graham was the mother of a serving girl who worked at the local manor house: one Margaret Graham.'

'And how is this of interest to the case, Inspector?' asked Doyle.

'In this way, Sir Arthur. Mr Rowlandson informed me that Miss Graham, a very beautiful young woman by all accounts, was known to be involved romantically with the groundsman of the local cricket club.'

'Patrick McMasters,' said the peer.

'The very same, Sir Arthur,' said Cough. He paused a moment to allow the implications of this information to register with his audience, and he was not disappointed. 'In short,' he continued, 'Margaret Graham proved to be none other than the Madeleine Gooch who, two years later, is found working in the pavilion at Lord's on the day of the murder of the unfortunate if universally unpopular Harold Wilde.'

'This is all very interesting, Inspector,' said Milne, 'but if, as you say, Madeleine Gooch was not behind the murders of Wilde and McMasters, why is she relevant to the case?'

'A very good question, Mr Milne. Miss Gooch certainly did not kill either man. She was, however, the writer of the note that summoned you to the meeting in the pavilion that day. We have concrete evidence to confirm that. Why she did so is

another matter. But I will not explain that to you. There is someone else in this room who is much better placed to recount this particular part of the tale.' As he had delivered himself of these words, Cough had moved deliberately until he stood face to face with Francis Henchard, the Club Secretary. 'Mr Henchard would, perhaps, like to explain.'

For a split second, the Club Secretary and the detective looked each other in the eye, but then Henchard made a break for the door, near which he had stood throughout the whole of Cough's long narrative. The Inspector was too quick for him, however, and quickly grabbed hold of his blazer, arresting his movement, and before he could make good his attempted escape, Henchard found himself engulfed, as many a would-be fugitive from the law had done before, in the vice-like grasp of P.C. Oates.

'I would not advise you to try to match forces with P.C. Oates, Mr Henchard,' said Cough. 'He has for the last three years been crowned as winner of the Metropolitan Police Force's boxing championship.'

The Club Secretary nevertheless continued to struggle in vain for several seconds before accepting the inevitable. His body relaxed, but his face remained contorted in a combination of fury and fear.

'A wise choice, Mr Henchard,' said Frobisher, who had appeared at Cough's side. 'Now, I can easily ask P.C Oates to apply his handcuffs or we can, if you prefer and if you give me as a gentleman a promise of your compliance, proceed without the need for them. Suffice it to say that in a room so full of able-bodied men, I do not believe you would make much of a success of any attempt to make good your escape.'

'I will make no more trouble, inspector. You have my word as a gentleman.'

'Very good, Mr Henchard,' said Frobisher. 'We will not need the handcuffs, Oates, but do not let him go.' As his superior had bidden him, Oates retained a firm grip of the Club Secretary's blazer collar.

'Now,' continued Frobisher, 'I want to hear the rest of this sorry tale.'

'May I take a seat, Inspector?' asked Henchard.

'By all means. I suggest that one.' He indicated a nearby armchair.

Escorted by Oates, who took up a position immediately next to him, Henchard settled into the chair. All eyes were upon him, and all registered astonishment. Could this really be the impeccable, composed Club Secretary that they all knew?

'Now, explain to us if you will, Mr Henchard, how you first became acquainted with Madeleine Gooch or, as you knew her then, Margaret Graham.'

The Club Secretary barely managed to raise his eyes to look at Cough as he forced himself to speak. 'You have no idea what it is like to live in the kind of home I grew up in, Inspector,' he commenced.

'What kind of home is that, sir?'

'I suppose many would call it privileged,' Henchard continued. 'The big house on the hill, the Lords of the Manor, whatever that means in this day and age. The outside world sees the wealth, the servants, the carriages, the leisurely lifestyle. What they do not see is the claustrophobia, the *ennui*, the endless days punctuated only by the occasional social occasion or domestic crisis.'

'Tell us please, Mr Henchard, where your home was.'

'I lived at the Manor House in Farnham.'

'You are, in fact, the younger son of the household.'

'That is correct, Inspector.' Henchard leant forward in the chair, his hands thrust deep into his trousers pockets. 'The famous younger son of the English nobility. The one who will not gain the family title, the family wealth or any of the advantages that go with being a member of the landed gentry.'

Cough was unmoved by the Club Secretary's self-pity. Problems of this sort, he had come to learn were measured in purely subjective scales. 'And when was it,' he pursued, 'that Margaret Graham first came to work at the Manor House?'

'I am not quite certain as to a date, Inspector, but it must have been at some point in the summer of 1904. I recall the first time I saw her upon returning from a match at Folly Hill. She was passing through the hallway as I entered the house. Her glorious hair captured my attention at once.'

'She made quite an impression upon you, I am to gather?'

'Yes. I might as well own at once that I there and then fell in love.' Henchard was one of those men, Cough observed to himself, who once presented with the facts will immediately come clean and tell all that they have to tell, not seeking protection in layer after layer of lies and prevarication. He rather respected that, in a way. It at least had the virtue of making his job easier.

'That must have been awkward, sir,' said Cough. 'I cannot imagine that Margaret Graham would have been the kind of match your parents had in mind, even for a younger son.'

Henchard winced visibly at the “even”, and in that reflexive gesture was sublimated the pain and insecurity he had lived with all his life. ‘No, Inspector. Margaret was not the kind of woman I was expected to marry. I may have had none of the privileges of my older brother, but that did not mean that the expectations placed upon my behaviour and my choices were any the less stringent. It is such an old, old story, so dully predictable: the rich young man without sufficient occupation falling in love with the beautiful servant. I had not even the character to be original. I told nobody except Margaret herself, who I hoped might not be bound by the same kinds of prejudice I knew my family would feel.’

‘But she was not interested?’

Henchard’s head fell further as Cough spoke these words. ‘No, Inspector. She was not interested. She was already spoken for, as they say.’

‘She was already involved in another relationship, you mean?’

‘Yes. With a young man who was groundsman at the cricket club.’

‘And his name, sir?’

‘You know very well already, Inspector, that his name was Patrick McMasters. I do not see your object in making me rehearse what you already know all too well.’
Henchard’s tone was petulant, immature.

‘You must allow me, Mr Henchard, to work the story in my own way and in my own time. So, Margaret Graham was engaged to marry Mr McMasters. You could not simply accept this situation could you, though, Mr Henchard? In spite of your protestations about the plight of younger sons of the gentry, you were the affluent young man; you could provide for her and who knew but in time her views might not

change. You could afford to bide your time, but as the weeks went by and Miss Graham remained resolute, your hatred of Patrick McMasters brooded and festered. He had succeeded where you had failed, and this became yet another painful grievance for you to nurse. Further evidence of life's harsh treatment of Francis Henchard.'

'You certainly do not spare a chap's feelings, Inspector,' said Henchard.

'Where murder is concerned, sir, I do not spare anybody anything,' said Cough. 'Tell us now, if you will, how you became aware of Miss Graham's and Mr McMasters' plan to blackmail Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr P.G. Wodehouse.'

'How do you know of that?' asked Henchard.

'Well, there had to be some reason for you to kill Harold Wilde, sir,' said Cough.

'Kill Harold Wilde? Me?'

'Yes, Mr Henchard,' said Cough. 'There is no advantage to be gained in denying it now. Jealousy towards Mr McMasters has been your mastering passion ever since you first discovered that he stood between you and any kind of romantic relationship with Margaret Graham. Your dapper exterior may suggest that you are model of calm and decorum, but you cannot, at times, prevent your true and more agitated nature from emerging in spite of yourself.' As if on cue, Henchard's hand strayed to the knot of his tie. The tell-tale action of the body that the mind could not override. 'You knew of the plans that Miss Graham and Mr McMasters had for blackmailing Sir Arthur and Mr Wodehouse,' continued Cough. There was no

questioning in his intonation. 'Was that how you managed to persuade Miss Gooch to write the letter that lured Mr Milne into the pavilion that day?'

'Yes,' said Henchard. 'I knew blackmail was their plan for a financially secure future and I could use that against them.' His head hung down, unable to maintain eye contact with the people in the room. 'With a regular stream of money coming in from two well-known and respected authors, both keen to maintain their public reputations, they would have been able to marry and set up home. The major difficulty they faced was that Harold Wilde also knew. If only she had selected me instead she would not have had to worry about financial security, but it was always McMasters for her.'

'She had no interest in you, Mr Henchard. That is the truth of the matter, is it not? Your infatuation for her was no secret in Farnham. I heard of it from the landlord of The Bat and Ball, and so I can only assume that the fact was common currency. And nobody likes to have his private life trumpeted abroad. No, your failure to win Margaret Graham's affections must have cut you to the heart, and the wound must have been a constant trouble to you. But at the same time, you could not let her go. You could not let *them* go. You had to keep them close. If you could not win Margaret Graham, you could not lose her either, and if that meant you had also to keep Patrick McMasters, then so be it. You provided them both with work once they left Farnham. Am I correct?'

By way of affirmation, Henchard could summon only a slack nod. He slumped lower in the armchair and as he did so, undid the buttons of his blazer.

'Until one day it all became too much for you to bear.'

‘Do you blame me?’ hissed Henchard. His voice suddenly snapped taut against the words, his body tensed and his jaw took on a hard, set expression and he sat up straight again. P.C. Oates tightened his grip on the collar of his jacket. ‘Do you really blame me? Seeing them both there under my very nose? I couldn’t live without her, but I could not bear to have McMasters there always.’

‘And so your mind turned to Harold Wilde, the other bearer of the “knowledge” about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr Wodehouse. Nobody knew, of course, that the idea of producing fraudulent Sherlock Holmes stories had been rejected and had come to precisely nothing. No new Holmes stories had appeared in the interim that they could use to put their plans into motion. For literary fraud to be proven, there has to be a literary work in the first place, and Holmes remained resolutely absent. They had only what they had heard and what they wanted to believe to guide their actions. And you, always a clever and composed man, saw your way not to a fulfilment of your romantic dreams. Margaret Graham or Madeleine Gooch, whichever you like to call her, would never be yours, but you could exact a cold and calculated revenge. That is where Harold Wilde came in, is it not?’

‘You knew that the Authors’ versus Actors’ match was forthcoming here at Lord’s, and you concocted your plan. Wilde and another unsuspecting innocent...’

‘Me,’ interjected Milne.

‘Yes you, Mr Milne. Harold Wilde and you would both be lured to the pavilion with a veiled promise of work or of learning something to your advantage, in the sure knowledge that the presence of the two of you in the building at the time would automatically be put together in any subsequent investigation. I put them together myself at first once I had corroborating evidence of your presence in the building

from Mr Kern and Miss Gooch. Am I right, Mr Henchard?' asked Cough, maintaining wary eye contact with the Club Secretary, who had not moved a muscle.

Again, Cough received no more than a tense nod of the head. Cough and Frobisher, alert to any sign of change in the man, moved a fraction nearer to him.

'Harold Wilde's murder was a warning to them. You knew their game, their plans to extort money from Sir Arthur and Mr Wodehouse, and you wanted them to know your power over them. If you could kill him, you could and would expose them.'

'Hence,' said Agatha, 'Miss Gooch's frightened face at the window and her removal of the red material. It was not accusation for the killing of Harold Wilde that she feared, it was fear for her dreams and her future with Patrick McMasters.'

'Precisely so, Miss Miller,' said Cough. 'At this point, Miss Gooch cannot have been fully aware of the nature of the threat she and her fiancé faced, but the message must have appeared to her clearly enough, and she was in a state of deep fear.'

'I was, Inspector.' The voice of a young woman sounded unexpectedly in the room. Unheard by anyone, she had opened the door and now stood framed in it. Behind her stood two officers of the Metropolitan Police who had, as instructed by Cough, brought her to the room to listen and watch as the scene in the Library unfolded. How long she had stood in the open doorway nobody in the room knew, but evidently she had heard enough. 'I was afraid. If I had learnt anything of Francis Henchard, it was that his passions once stirred were not easily settled again. I was working in the pavilion that day, as you know, and as soon as I heard the calls for help coming from the Long Room I made my way there. The body of Mr Wilde was

spread out in the middle of the room, and before I knew it there were people everywhere. But it was Mr Henchard who caught my eye. Everybody else was looking at the dead body, but not Mr Henchard. He was staring at me as if he had eyes for nothing else. It was then that I knew. I could read the warning in his eyes, and poor Patrick paid for it with his own life a few days later, as you know.'

'What was this warning, Miss Graham. I will use your real name, if you have no objection.'

The young woman smoothed the material of her dress against her thighs. The movement of her hands was slow and pensive. 'His look spoke to me quite plainly, Inspector. It told me that he knew all about our plans to use the information Patrick had picked up when he overheard Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and Mr Wodehouse's conversation in Farnham. I am sorry,' she said, turning to face the two authors. She did not linger over her apology or wait for any response, but continued straight away. "Look what I have done to Harold Wilde," his expression seemed to say. "Think about what I could do to you too." He approached me and whispered as he passed me that I would find in one of the windows a red curtain. That it had come from his office and that I was to see it was effectively and secretly removed, then sent along with the other curtain from his office to be cleaned as quickly as possible. I was terrified and complied.' She paused in her recollections and shuddered as she continued. 'When Patrick was found dead a few days later, I knew that he must be behind his death as well.'

'From the first moment I entered the family's service at the Manor House, he was infatuated. I could see it in his eyes. Whenever he could, he would steal the opportunity to speak to me, and grew more and more cunning in his methods of

engineering meetings between us. My answers to him grew briefer and briefer, but the less I said the greater his passion seemed to grow. I could do nothing to turn his passions away. How he came to know the plans Patrick and I had to gain money I do not know, but from the first time he mentioned it to me I have never known a moment's peace. Nor has—I mean had—Patrick. We were completely at his mercy.'

'How did you come to know of Mr McMasters' and Miss Graham's plans to attempt blackmail, Mr Henchard? And how did you know Harold Wilde was also in possession of knowledge of a potential Holmes fraud plot?' asked Cough.

Henchard looked at Cough for a moment as if contemplating guarding his secret, but evidently decided that there was nothing to be gained by concealment. Unless it were the vanity of a criminal who, once detected, feels the need to set his own cleverness before the world that has at last caught him out. 'You have been to The Bat and Ball, Inspector. You have seen for yourself how the woods spread up the hill to the rear of the property. The same woods that hid Patrick McMasters as he watched Harold Wilde at the window of the rear parlour were more than capable of hiding another man. It is really quite like a scene out of a Shakespearean comedy.'

He laughed as he concluded his speech and then he made a break for freedom. Oates found himself unexpectedly holding firm to the collar of a blazer that no longer held the Club Secretary. Henchard had slipped out of his jacket and now eluded the constable's frantic attempts to grab him. He bolted first for the door, but this was rapidly blocked by the officers who had accompanied Margaret Gooch to the room and he diverted his steps to the stairs that rose along one wall running from the Library up to the Bowlers' Bar.

Cough and Oates in swift pursuit, he took the stairs three at a time and when the detective, followed by the other occupants of the room, entered the bar, Henchard was already at the open window leading on to a balcony which afforded a fine view of the Lord's ground.

'Come, Mr Henchard,' said Cough, panting heavily after his unwonted exertions. Without the need for any instruction, P.C. Oates began to make his way slowly towards the Club Secretary, handcuffs at the ready. 'You do not have to say anything, but it may harm your defence if you...' began Cough, but he stopped when Henchard raised one leg and straddled the balcony rail.

'Wait there, Oates,' said Cough before turning his attention back to the Club Secretary. The bulky policemen stopped in mid stride. 'There is nowhere for you to go, Mr Henchard. I suggest that you come quietly.'

'You are quite wrong, of course, Inspector,' said Henchard. His voice was preternaturally calm and authoritative and had the effect of cutting Cough off in mid-sentence.

'In my solution to the case, Mr Henchard?'

'Oh no,' said the Secretary, lifting his other leg on to the rail of the balcony. He appeared now only as a silhouette against the brilliant afternoon sun. 'As far as that goes, you are pretty well perfectly correct. The odd small detail here and there, perhaps, I could correct you on, but they are ornaments merely. Most ingenious of you, in fact, the way you have come to the truth of the matter. I never thought that this would be traced back to me. But then, my father always said that I had too high an opinion of my own intelligence. It seems that he was right.'

'In what respect is the Inspector wrong then, Mr Henchard?' asked Frobisher who had now sufficiently recovered his breath to chance speech.

'Why, in saying that there is nowhere for me to go,' said Henchard, looking triumphantly at the crowd assembled before him—the detective, the Chief Superintendent, the array of well-known authors and actors, Margaret Graham and the other young woman, Miss Miller. 'There is always down.'

As he spoke these words, he turned away, and slipped off the balcony rail.

For a second nobody moved, but then the whole room was in turmoil. A heavy thud was heard from below as Henchard's body hit the seats on the terrace. Cough and Oates were the first to reach the balcony and looked down upon the broken body of the Club Secretary draped across two rows of seats beneath them. His stillness told them all they needed to know.

Chapter 52

Thursday 22nd August 1907

Lord's Cricket Ground

Agatha stood in the roadway behind the pavilion and looked up at its darkened back one final time. She was on the point of leaving and had just settled her hat on her head when she heard a voice behind her. 'Please do not leave just yet, Miss Miller.'

'I must, Inspector,' said Agatha, turning to face Cough. 'My brother has already gone, you see.' Monty's back was visible heading towards the gate on St John's Wood Road.

'Of course, miss,' the Inspector said, 'but I am certain that he will wait for you a moment or two.'

Agatha watched as Monty disappeared out of sight. A few minutes would not harm. She turned back and looked at Inspector Cough.

It was with some difficulty that Cough mastered himself and marshalled what he wished to say. 'You know, Miss Miller, you really are the most extraordinary young woman. If anyone had told me a month ago that I would have allowed a girl of only seventeen to play such a significant role in one of my investigations I would never have believed them. It can be no secret to you, Miss Miller, that you have touched a chord in me. Often we do not miss things at the moment when we lack them. It is at some later date when we have those things again by chance that we realise how we unknowingly missed them. That is when we suddenly become aware of the gap. You have helped me fill one of those gaps in my life, Miss Miller. And for that I shall eternally be grateful to you.'

'You have been most accommodating to me and my ideas, Inspector.'

'There is more to it than that, Miss Miller,' he continued, on the verge of saying more. But now was not the time. He had moved one step closer to reconciling himself with Lottie's death. No, now was not the time. He would speak with Ida later. 'But never mind. I have valued all the insights you have brought to the case. You have the most fertile imagination. I have to say, you have a mind made for crime. I am only pleased that you have turned that mind to its solution rather than its commission. Any detective who found his mind pitted against yours would have the most astonishing run for his money.'

'I think that I should be thanking you for that rather back-handed compliment, inspector.'

'Indeed you should, miss. Indeed you should. And I am sure, if I could only persuade the Metropolitan Police force to open its doors to female investigators, that you would make a great contribution to the force.'

'I certainly have gained the taste for investigation, Inspector. As, however, the Metropolitan Police is not likely any time soon to share your enlightened views, I may well turn my imagination to the realms of fiction. Fictional detectives are, as we know, all the rage and perhaps I might contribute one of my own to the literature.'

'Well I, for one, would be proud to read anything you might produce, miss.'

'Well, thank you, Inspector. Who knows, one day I might manage it. Ever since my father died when I was only eleven, I believe I have been very aware of sudden and unexpected death. After he died, whenever my mother went away I was haunted by daydreams of her meeting her own end in a train crash, or falling from a cliff. I believe that death in any form holds no surprises for me. It is the one great fact of life and perhaps I should make it my life's work.'

The sound of horses' hooves and passing vehicles could be distantly heard in the silence behind the pavilion. Agatha was distracted by them briefly and looked slightly away as she spoke again. 'Are you a gambling man, Inspector?'

'I can't say that I am, miss.'

'Now I am surprised. I would have thought that all detectives were gamblers.'

'Why is that?'

'Because, Inspector, without taking the risk of placing a wager no result is possible. Place the bet and you may win, or you may lose. Place no bet and you can do nothing but stay where you are. No, I would have thought that all detectives were innately gamblers, whether they know it or not.'

'Well, since you put it like that, miss...'

'I suppose I am over-burdened with imagination, and it seems to me that detection is all about the risk and the potential return. It is a game of the mind. It was my sister who first introduced me to the great literary detectives, Inspector. 'The Blue Carbuncle' was the first story I came across. Sherlock Holmes. And from that point on I could not have enough. 'The Red-Headed League'. 'The Five Orange Pips'. I loved them all. But we women have a new role to play, you know.'

'I am certain of it, Miss Miller.'

'Anna Katherine Green managed it after all, and Mrs Braddon and Mrs Henry Wood all succeeded against the expectations of their times. Maybe I am destined to follow in their footsteps. I wouldn't be at all surprised, you know, if detective fiction didn't turn out to be dominated by women. This is a new century and women will not settle for the old order. They want a piece of the pie as the Americans say. And detection, you know, might prove to be just their medium. You men should not have the world all your own way.'

'With young women like you, Miss Miller, I do not think we shall.'

Agatha smiled. 'But now, Inspector, I really must go. My brother, as you see, has gone ahead without me and I must catch up with him.'

'Then this is goodbye, miss.'

'It is, Inspector. But who knows, our paths may cross again someday.' She had already half turned. 'Goodbye, Inspector,' she said, and he was left to watch as she ran without another word along the shady roadway towards the gate.

When she emerged on to St John's Wood Road, she turned to her left and saw Monty up ahead. She cast a final glance back to where Inspector Cough stood yet in the shade behind the pavilion and she waved before heading after her brother.

The sun was bright in the sky and the afternoon was hot, but she was filled with an energy she could not fully explain, and she ran in spite of the quizzical looks of the other pedestrians. She would catch Monty before he reached the underground station.

Critical Essay

Introduction

In *Murder for Pleasure*, Howard Haycraft paraphrases Somerset Maugham, who foresees a time 'when the police novel will be studied in the colleges, when aspirants for doctoral degrees will shuttle the oceans and haunt the world's great libraries to conduct personal research expeditions into the lives and sources of the masters of the art' (1941: viii). *Dead in the Long Room* and this critical essay are a testimony to the accuracy of Maugham's prophecy. Having completed my novel *Dead in the Long Room*, this critical essay provides the academic space within which to engage in an extended critical consideration both of the Golden Age detective novel and of my own creative response to the genre. In engaging with such matters, the following essay foregrounds a set of issues surrounding the genre traditions of Golden Age detective fiction, which is here taken to refer to the works produced by writers of detective fiction largely in the United Kingdom in the inter-war period. It considers the ways in which these genre features both emerge from and shape critical perspectives on the form and offers a personal reflection on the influence of these features on the writing of *Dead in the Long Room*.

The relationship between the creative and critical domains of a PhD in creative writing functions around peculiar tensions. Parker (2014: 185) identifies 'the potentially problematic formulation of a research question in ... practice-led higher research degrees' and suggests that this risks a fundamental fragmentation of the academic project into 'two separate enterprises: one practical and the other theoretical.' She goes on to argue that this requires a radical rethinking of 'the problematics of the formulation of both research question and research answer'

(186). In generating an effective answer to the conundrum Parker poses, it helps to suggest that the critical-creative 'divide' is essentially an academic (and unhelpful) dichotomy. It is my contention in this essay that creative and critical domains, so far from necessitating division, actually offer profound opportunities for unified thinking, bringing together the 'creative' nature of critical reading and analysis and the 'critical' dimensions of writing creatively. This is perhaps especially the case given that *Dead in the Long Room* is a novel written in response to Golden Age detective fiction, a genre supremely aware of its own fictionality, and as such of the intersection between creative and critical domains.

It is appropriate therefore, in seeking to forge this connection, to take as a starting point a creative perspective on criticism drawn from a Golden Age novel. Francis Wheatley Winn, the narrator of J.C. Masterman's novel *An Oxford Tragedy* observes, in terms that highlight the apparent conflict between the two: 'How easy is criticism, how woefully difficult is construction!' (1939: 45). My experience of writing *Dead in the Long Room* and this critical essay, by contrast to Winn's view, has been that both critical and creative activity are enhanced when they are brought into fruitful connection. Indeed, Robert Scholes (1985) has commented on the invidious potential of separating what he terms 'literature' from 'non-literature' in thinking about English as a subject in both its creative and its critical manifestations.

For this reason, at the outset of this critical essay I wish to adopt the term 'enacted criticism', which I take to be a significant framing of the relationship between criticism and creativity. This captures the spirit in which I approach the task of considering my creative work in critical relation to the genre I have written both

‘within and against’ (Lasky 2013: 14)¹. The following essay discusses the ways in which *Dead in the Long Room* and its compositional processes might be understood in relation to ‘relevant theory, social and political contexts, and the processes of composition and revision undertaken’ (14). These ideas are what Lasky broadly identifies as a ‘poetics’ of creative work.

The contexts and processes to which Lasky refers, naturally, do not emerge in isolation from one another, but are perhaps best understood as symbiotic elements of one textual ‘event’ shared by a writer and a body of readers. This is the concept of ‘enacted criticism’ I have posited. The outcomes of this shared ‘event’ may be differentiated in terms of outcome but remain fundamentally connected as modal functions. Creative-critical writing and creative-critical reading are interdependent processes in shaping the potential meanings of literary texts. As Eco (1994: 3) observes, ‘Every text, after all, is a lazy machine asking the reader to do some of its work.’ Writing and reading function around shared bodies of text and both are interdependent, as the work of *inter alia* Barthes (1974), Bakhtin (1981), Bruner (1986) and Knights & Thurgar-Dawson (2008) demonstrates. As previously observed, this is perhaps especially true when the novel in question is a work written in *hommage* to the Golden Age detective novel, a genre that is explicitly aware of its own ‘createdness’ and which is characterised by its dialogic self-reflexivity.

To take the analysis a step further, therefore, this essay explores the ways in which *Dead in the Long Room* in itself represents an act of criticism (Parker 2014); or to borrow the terms of Gulddal & Rolls (2016: 1) the essay considers *Dead in the Long Room* as a text operant at the ‘critical-creative nexus’. The novel and this

¹ I am conscious here of working at the liminal edges of the distinctions Scholes draws in *Textual Power* (1985: 24) between interpretation (‘text upon text’) and criticism (‘text against text’).

essay should therefore, for the purposes of this PhD, be read not as two separate texts, but as co-texts. It is my hope that the following essay, in relation to the novel that precedes it on the page if not always in thought, will achieve a balance whereby, in Franks' words 'development of creative practices and research methods are interwoven, producing not a two-volume product but rather a single piece of work in which each part—the creative and the critical—reflects and reinforces the other' (2016: 3). This reflects Guillaumier's views regarding the importance of 'experimental space' (2016: 355), a space comprising both creative and critical-reflective dimensions as '[w]ithout observation and critical thought, no creative endeavour, process or project can be both successful and sustainable' (2016: 354).

In this spirit of creative-critical endeavour, or 'enacted criticism', *Dead in the Long Room* is my attempt at playing the 'game' of Golden Age detective fiction, a game summarised by John Dickson Carr (one of its greatest exponents) in 'The Grandest Game in the World' (1963). In this essay, Carr summarises this 'game' as follows:

The detective story is a conflict between a criminal and a detective in which the criminal by means of some ingenious device – alibi, novel murder method, or what you like – remains unconvicted or even unsuspected until the detective reveals his [sic] identity by means of evidence which has also been conveyed to the reader. (1963: 309)

The playing of the game has been a pleasure, and I take some comfort from Carr's concluding remarks. Nothing in the detective story, he assures his readers 'has ever gone out of fashion, and nothing ever will, provided only that the old trick can be

worked in a new way' (344). The test of the writer's skill is, he observes, 'in the drive and nimbleness and strategy of their play' (344-5). It is my hope that the following essay will reveal such nimbleness and strategy in my playing of the game.

Subjunctivizing reality: the power of 'what if?'

In exploring 'fictivity' and its role in Golden Age detective narrative, the ideas of Jerome Bruner have proven enlightening. In *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, Bruner (1986: 11) distinguishes between two interwoven 'modes of thought' that he argues function simultaneously within literary texts: the 'narrative' (the functional elements of tale-telling in and on their own terms, as story) and the 'paradigmatic' (the grander dimension of meaning-making and extrapolation of a tale).

For Bruner, these two modes of thought or 'cognitive functioning' (related yet discreet methods of textual intervention) provide 'distinctive ways of ordering experience, of constructing reality' with significant differences in their 'procedures for verification' (11). Importantly he does not conceive of 'narrative' and 'paradigmatic' modes of thought hierarchically, but insists that they function symbiotically to liberate the potential of the 'paradigmatic imagination' (13). The word 'imagination' is particularly important here in relation to detective fiction and its narrative methods. It is the dimension of the 'paradigmatic imagination' that opens the space for readers (including detectives) to explore potential meaning. This, it can be argued, is what opens the broader meaning-making possibilities of fiction texts.

Bruner argues for the meaning-making, truth-revealing potential of literary narrative and explores how the process of reading such narratives works. In doing so, he draws on a characteristically eclectic range of intellectual resources including

reader-response theory, American pragmatist philosophy, Russian formalist linguistics and French post-structuralism, experimentally combining these diverse resources. His is truly a model for creative reading (Scholes 1985; Knights & Thurgar-Dawson 2008). Literary narrative permits readers (including detectives) to perform 'virtual re-tellings' that transform texts (and crime scenes as texts of a sort) in ways that he described as 'trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties' (26).

To attempt to illustrate this process at work Bruner employs an experiment. Using 'Clay' from James Joyce's *Dubliners* (1914, 2000), he analyses how readers' re-tellings transform the original text, using Tzvetan Todorov's (1977) concept of 'transformations'. Transformation, in Bruner's interpretation, is the way in which a 'simple, expository and non-subjunctive' statement may be elaborated to become 'psychological' and 'contingent and subjunctive' (29). These elaborations focus in part on the actions of verbs. Appropriately enough in the current context, Bruner uses the sentence '*x commits a crime*' to exemplify his meaning, and shows how six simple transformations and six complex transformations (by modifying the verb phrase) could place the activity described into 'a landscape of consciousness' (30). So while a simple transformation of mode could subjectify the action by inserting a modal auxiliary ('*x might commit a crime*'), providing an implicit context, a complex transformation ('supposition' being one example) would begin to produce a richer psychological reality (e.g. '*x foresees he will commit a crime*'). This process of transformation, a process of permitting 'discourse to acquire a meaning without this meaning becoming pure information' (Todorov 1977; quoted in Bruner 1986: 31), demonstrates how readers (again including detectives) might engage with 'the

connective web that holds a narrative together in its depiction of both action and consciousness' (30).

For Bruner, the most interesting feature of re-telling is readers' 'management of subjunctivity' (33). The literary narrative text, he speculates, 'needs the subjunctivity that makes it possible for a reader to create a world of his [sic] own' (37). The contingent and subjunctive in the narrative mode do not lead to settled conclusions or 'certainties', as they might in the paradigmatic mode, but permit 'the varying perspectives that can be constructed to make experience comprehensible' (37). It is fictional narrative's capacity to create powerful 'gaps' in sense that opens up the greatest areas of potential for detectional narrative. For this reason, I propose that the writing of a new literary text such as *Dead in the Long Room* operationalises Gulddal & Rolls' (2016) creative-critical nexus, and becomes a large-scale operation in subjunctification. All literary texts by *force majeure* must function as an exercise in creative engagement with (at least one) genre. As such they are constantly posing on a grand scale the subjunctive question 'what if'?

This is certainly the case in relation to Golden Age detective fiction, within which tales and the telling of tales (including the ubiquitous lies to which detectives frequently recur) prove to be not solely a means of conveying story, but a function of the story in itself. Where other literary creations might seek to highlight their 'realism', Golden Age crime texts are frequently at pains explicitly to highlight their own 'fictionality'. So, for example, Edwards (2016b: 20) observes how from early in the genre's history it became an 'in-joke for Detection Club members to reference each other in their books'. In so doing, fictionality is embedded as a point of reference, and such reflexive intertextual references to other works of detective fiction or the idea of creating fiction itself are a defining feature of the genre.

Golden Age crime writing's recursively self-referential nature is a means by which writers can explore their own genre and the ways in which it creates meaning by spinning their own tales explicitly in relation to what has gone before. Such critically-informed literary re-enactment allows writers of crime fiction (including me in *Dead in the Long Room*) to engage in processes of 're-doing', 're-making' and 're-knowing' the genre of Golden Age detective fiction (Brooks 1984).

In so doing, the writers of Golden Age detective fiction operationalise the space between Bruner's 'narrative' and 'paradigmatic' domains. In this interstitial space they are able to engage in acts of exploratory ('writerly', dialogic and carnivalesque) creative synthesis or recreation. This is a space of creative possibility; of 'what if?'. In this sense, their practice is also fundamentally interactive, bringing to mind Bakhtinian dialogic, using the language and other spaces of the text as vehicles between authors and their precursors (who 'speak' through their own creative work):

every word is directed towards an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. (Bakhtin 1981: 280)

Such dialogic functions, however, also posit the necessity of a dialogic relationship between readers, authors and the texts they share and in so doing envision readers as co-creators of textual meaning.

These ideas in their turn relate interestingly to readers' willingness and ability to engage in interpretive reading. Bakhtin (1981) and Barthes (1974) recognise that

processes of interpretation are affected by the extent to which the meaning of a text is perceived as 'fixed'; the extent, in Bruner's terms, to which a text encourages or discourages readers' use of subjunctivising 'space'.

The concept of 'enacted criticism' is an attempt to capture the idea that to some extent every act of creative writing is a 'knowing' construct embodying a writer's critical appreciation of and response to their own reading: a subjunctivising response to or 'enacted criticism' of the genre they are working with.

Dead in the Long Room is set in 1907, prior to what is traditionally considered the Golden Age, which is generally marked by the publication of E.C. Bentley's seminal 1913 novel *Trent's Last Case*. Several characters in *Dead in the Long Room* are closely associated with the era of Golden Age crime writing. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was closely involved with the genesis of the Detection Club² and published Sherlock Holmes stories well into the Golden Age era³. A.A. Milne, whilst best known as the creator of *Winnie the Pooh* (1926), also wrote *The Red House Mystery* (1922) — one of the most celebrated Golden Age detective novels—and Agatha Miller was later to become, by marriage, Agatha Christie—arguably the most significant crime novelist of all time. Although *Dead in the Long Room* is set in 1907, then, it is in many senses framed in relation to the Golden Age era, which was to prove the greatest influence on the writing and conceptualisation of the novel.

I have argued elsewhere (Green 2021; Green & Dalrymple 2021) that it is in the very nature of Golden Age detective fiction to encode within itself a dialogue with its own literary form. In this sense, *Dead in the Long Room* naturally builds upon

² Doyle was invited, but declined, to become the Detection Club's first president, a role taken in his stead by G.K. Chesterton.

³ *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* was first published in 1927.

Golden Age crime writing, operationalising what Gulddal & Rolls (2016) call the 'creative-critical nexus', and in so doing challenges '[t]he dichotomy of production and reception' (2) in relation to literary text. The writing of *Dead in the Long Room* is fundamentally a critical response to genre. Golden Age crime narratives, and *Dead in the Long Room*, can and should be read as mutually constitutive meaning-making 'spaces'; texts within which form is constantly (re-)negotiated within a literary context. Similar properties of crime fiction have also been noted by *inter alia* Parker (2014), Rowland (2001), Symons (1994) and Knight (1980). As such, extensive reading of the works of Golden Age detective fiction became a necessary (and constant) aspect of the writing of *Dead in the Long Room*.⁴

Interesting in this relation to the idea of 'enacted criticism' is Heidegger's proposition in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (44) that the 'projective saying' of literary works releases the creative possibilities of language to forge articulations and meanings which are ordinarily hidden. Literary texts, Heidegger suggests, possess particular and distinctive properties or affordances for the debate and realisation of meaning and the 'selves' that lie behind them. They are, in other words, to be conceived in relation not only to their own fictional worlds, but also to hinterlands of genre and of the 'knowledges' both epistemic and ontological of the readers and the writers that cluster around them. Scholes again proves illuminating here, asking readers to 'open the way between the literary or verbal text and the social text in which we live' (1985: 24).

Works of Golden Age detective fiction represent a substantial endeavour to 'shape the world' and in so doing to open up such a 'way'. They are interesting not

⁴ See Bibliography for a full record of the wider reading undertaken in preparation for and during the completion of this PhD.

only in that they create imaginative engagements with the world and the fictional microcosms they represent, but in that they inherently critically (re-)evaluate their own form, and in so doing relocate readers' relationship with ideas of meaning and the fixity of interpretation. The authors of the Golden Age and their fictional detectives, through their interactions with the world around them and the crimes they investigate, not only interpret that world and its social frameworks, but also shape them in two senses:

- by adopting, undermining or challenging social frameworks (e.g. in moral, social, political, philosophical, literary and ethical domains);
- by engaging in an internal 'dialogue' they seek to define the narrative terms by which such domains are to be 'written' and 'read'.

As such, detective narratives must be seen not simply as socially inquisitive and/or instructive. Instead they are to be seen as ludic acts of social (self-)criticism, written in self-consciously playful interaction with themselves and with one another. The space of the literary text, therefore, becomes a locus of literary-critical interrogation, a function related, perhaps, to the introspective tendencies of many of the characters in the pages of Golden Age narratives (Saunders 2019).

The idea of 'enacted criticism' is visible time and again and to such an extent in the Golden Age crime novel, that self-reflexivity can rightly be considered a genre feature in its own right. This is perhaps why the form lends itself so well to comedy and pastiche, as explored by Shaw (2014) in his study *Jolly Good Detecting: Humor in English Crime Fiction of the Golden Age*. In his study, Shaw points out the importance of '[i]nversion, overturning, ribaldry and joyous play' (2014:6) in the crime

novels of the Golden Age. Taken together, this represents a sustained engagement with what Bakhtin (1965) terms the carnivalesque.

Julian Symons, himself a fine crime novelist, picks up on a similar aspect of Golden Age crime writing when he observes: 'The line between the comic and the serious in the detective story is a fine one' (1985: 87). The presence in *Dead in the Long Room* of overtly humorous authors such as P.G. Wodehouse and A.A. Milne draws upon this feature of detective fiction of the Golden Age. There are passages in the novel, such as the conversation at the Crimes Club dinner and in the parlour at the Bat and Ball between Wodehouse and Doyle on the occasion of the Allahakhbarries match in 1904⁵, where such features come very much to the fore. So, for example, in the following passage from Chapter 3 of the novel, Wodehouse and Doyle discuss the comic potential of the relationship between Holmes and his reliable companion Dr Watson. Wodehouse asserts that all great literature, including crime writing, must be 'humorous at heart'. This view he goes on to explore in relation to Doyle's own Holmes and Watson, styling them 'the perfect comic duo.' Holmes, Wodehouse humorously sums up as follows:

The violin-playing, the casual drug use and his regular urges to dress up suggest that he is a restless attention-seeker who, whatever he might say to the contrary, likes nothing more than to be constantly in the public eye. He is probably an actor *manqué* and he has all the thinly-veiled comic bluster that goes with that. Also, if I am not much mistaken, he suffers from what all great comic heroes have—a deeply-rooted schoolboy angst and inferiority complex that he systematically seeks to take out on the powers that be.

⁵ See Kevin Telfer's excellent book *Peter Pan's First XI* (2011) for a fascinating account of J.M Barrie and his cricket team.

And Watson, in his analysis 'is the straight-man counterfoil to Holmes's comic genius. Clever enough to act as a walking record book for his companion's *outré* brilliance but essentially living a life of confusion and misunderstanding.'

Their dialogue is a good example of the ways in which the creative dimension of fiction is used as a vehicle for enacted critical thinking. By using the terms of the genre as the basis for the writers' dialogue, I am in the position to use the characters to present critical ideas of my own in relation to the form and the ways in which it functions. And so, Wodehouse is able to draw the conclusion that:

Crime, like comedy, is a rebellion against the *status quo*. Crime and comedy both take as their starting point the principle that what is respectable and acceptable must be undermined. The difference is one of intention only. Crime is always selfish, whereas comedy is always generous – crime undermines by taking away, but comedy undermines by giving.

Examples of overtly comic Golden Age detective fiction abound. Alan Melville's *Quick Curtain* (1934) and *Death of Anton* (1936), A.A. Milne's *The Red House Mystery* (1922) and Caryl Brahms's *Casino for Sale* (1938) are all good examples⁶.

Many other novels of the Golden Age retain a generally more serious exterior but retain a keen sense of the comic potential of the form. An excellent example of this can be found in *Partners in Crime* (Christie 1929, 2015), one of a series of novels featuring the married detective duo Tommy and Tuppence Beresford. In this

⁶ A much later example of the comic cricketing detective novel is *W.G. Grace's Last Case* (1984) by the comedian and writer Willy Rushton, in which the great English cricketer finds himself embroiled, much as do the 'real life' characters in my novel, in a murder case.

novel, Christie's detectives, proprietors of Blunt's Brilliant Detective Agency, humorously entertain themselves by adopting the roles and methods of a variety of classic detectives from Father Brown and Sherlock Holmes via John Thorndyke and Richard Sheringham to Christie's own Hercule Poirot. Christie alerts us from the outset to what she is doing: Tommy and Tuppence look at the contents of a library shelf containing 'detective stories by the leading masters of the art' (1929, 2015: 23). In solving the crimes in the ensuing set of interrelated stories, they undertake an experimental comic game in literary detection in which they set out deliberately 'to try different styles, and compare results' (23). The title of the book, *Partners in Crime*, in itself captures the critically self-reflexive nature of Christie's project. The partners in crime alluded to might be Tommy and Tuppence Beresford themselves as a detective partnership; in turn, however, they are also in partnership with Christie, their creator, and in partnership with the literary detective models whose methods they apply in the various cases they investigate. Playful reflexivity is integral to the very fabric of the book. In a final twist, both the Beresfords and Christie are, of course, in collusive partnership with the readers of the book, who are required temporarily to accept the 'reality' of Tommy and Tuppence as distinct from the fictionality of the other literary detectives whose work they test from the comfort of their bookshelf.

Such use of and allusion to other figures from the literary detective canon is a common feature of Golden Age detective fiction. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is ubiquitously referenced, as are Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin and Gaston Leroux's Joseph Rouletabille. A good example comes from *The Rasp*, a 1924 novel by Philip McDonald, whose series detective Anthony Ruthven Gethryn at one point embodies within himself the great detectives of crime fiction: 'I am Dupont, I am

Lecoq, I'm Fortune, Holmes and Rouletabille' (424). Another example comes from *Trent's Last Case* in which the eponymous detective, himself frequently name-checked by later writers of detective fiction, reflects on his rise as an investigator and recalls how in his first case he 'did very much what Poe had done in the case of the murder of Mary Rogers' (1913: 38).

Death in a Literary Context

As the preceding examples make apparent, Golden Age detective fiction makes considerable use of intertextual reference. Wider critical reading in the work of *inter alia* Edwards (2016b), Symons (1985), Shaw (2014) and Rowland (2001) demonstrates that the building of a web of literary contexts within the works of the writers of Golden Age detection was more than a surface trope of the genre, but was instead an essential element of its textual functioning. As Rowland (2001: 12) observes: 'Golden age crime novels refer repeatedly to their own genre.' Detection narratives are simultaneously epistemology and ontology: a way of knowing and a thing to be known. This overlapping of domains makes a strong argument for the value of 'enacted criticism'. Rowland approaches this when she identifies how 'the detectives' evolving selves draw the reading consciousness into the imaginary world of the novel' (23). Readers are drawn complicitly into the game of denying fictionality not in spite of but because of the detective genre's positioning of story in its various domains and the different functions it fulfils. As Rowland concludes: 'The genre becomes wittily artificial in its references to itself *as artifice* in an intertextuality of crime fiction' (24). These propositions all relate very effectively to the world of *Dead*

in the Long Room, where Inspector Cough and the authors regularly engage in discussion of the literary form of the detective narrative and its component parts.⁷

Such ideas are also explored by Gillis (2019) who observes that S.S. Van Dine (1927), in his introduction to *The World's Great Detective Stories: A Chronological Anthology*, is less interested in the literary genealogy of detective fiction than he is in 'the intertextual connections between and across texts' (12). The same may be said of Dorothy L. Sayers' taxonomic approach to the detective story in the first of her anthologies: *Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror* (1928). This kind of intertextual weaving (and textual interweaving) was of interest to me as I developed my knowledge of a wide range of Golden Age texts and in its turn became significant to me in the writing of *Dead in the Long Room*, which seeks both critically and creatively to enact such a process.

An excellent example of the explicitly 'literary' nature of Golden Age detective fiction is to be found in Michael Innes' 1936 novel *Death at the President's Lodging*. In this novel, Inspector Appleby is called upon to investigate the death of Professor Umpleby, the Master of St Anthony's College. The characters' names alone demonstrate the literary games with which Innes engages in making his detective and his victim nominal reflections of each other. On visiting the scene of the murder, Appleby is at once struck by the extent to which the scene of the murder appears to be a literary construct. Appleby, viewing the 'fantastic death-chamber' (22), reflects how '[m]ystery stories were popular in universities – and even among the police' (22-3). Building on this foundation of 'stories', he then proceeds consciously to use his knowledge of such narratives as the basis for his initial 'reading' of the crime scene.

⁷ Barzun (1984) also considers the idea of the aesthetics of crime.

In so doing, to such an extent does he accept ‘the extraordinary power of the Word’ (23), that he finds himself ‘half-prepared to accept the artificial, the strikingly *fictive*, as normal’ (23); a position he shares with the knowing Innes and his equally knowing readers. Appleby’s view of the ‘text’ of Umpleby’s murder takes into account its literary constructedness, and he is prompted to consider: ‘*Why* had Umpleby met his death in a story-book manner? For that his death had been set in an elaborately contrived frame seemed now clear’ (23). Pressing his logic of ‘story’ (the murder scene as a text to be read), Appleby draws the striking inference that Umpleby has ‘died in a literary context; indeed he had in a manner of speaking died amid a confusion of literary contexts’ (23). Ultimately, Appleby goes so far as to say that in the crime scene he encounters ‘there was contrivance in a literary tradition deriving from all the progeny of Sherlock Holmes, while in the fantasy of the bones there was something of the incongruous tradition of the “shocker”. Somewhere in the case, it seemed, there was a mind thinking in terms both of inference and of the macabre.... A mind, one might say, thinking in terms of Edgar Allan Poe’ (23).

The existence of a similarly knowing ‘mind’ is also evident in *Dead in the Long Room*. The placement of the bodies of Harold Wilde and Patrick McMasters in the middle of the Long Room and on the square at Lord’s respectively serves to highlight the ways in which the murderer has contrived the circumstances of the discovery of the bodies. In each case the scenes are composed deliberately to achieve the maximum theatrical effect but also to deceive. As in Innes’ novel, the bodies are used to shape the ways in which the murders are to be read or misread.

Appleby and Dodd, the local policeman, both seem to be well aware of the literary demands placed upon them and display a deep-seated need to ‘read’ the scene of the crime and to place it as a ‘fictive’ event (Grauby 2016; Gill 1990). Not

only do they draw on Poe and Conan Doyle, they also place Umpleby's murder in defined moral literary frameworks drawn from the Bible and John Bunyan. This is a death that occurs and is investigated in a self-confessedly literary fashion. The moral 'narratives' invoked by the Bible and *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1987) sit alongside the fiction of Doyle— 'all the progeny of Sherlock Holmes' (23)—and Poe to enable Appleby to engage with the 'story-book manner' (23) of Umpleby's murder. So far from proving merely derivative as one might suspect, it is the very 'fictive' nature of Umpleby's death that provides Appleby with the inspiration to engage creatively with and to 'read' the 'confusion of literary contexts' (23) he encounters at the scene of the crime. Both the act of murder and the processes of detection are conceived in textual terms; both are locked and unlocked by a self-conscious 'bookishness'.

Inspector Cough in *Dead in the Long Room* is similarly 'bookish' in his approach to detection. His lengthy conversation with A.A. Milne in Chapter 13 demonstrates how he sees his work in literary terms. Cough's thinking about his processes of detection relates explicitly to literary composition:

I am a crime writer of sorts. As a case unfolds and new information becomes available, I have to piece together a coherent narrative, you know. I have to find some way of telling myself the story of what might have taken place. It isn't easy, of course, because the story is in a constant state of flux.

He sees his own 'writing' of cases in relation to (but also in contrast to) literary crime:

I haven't the luxury of being like Dr Watson in your friend Conan Doyle's tales; I don't have the wonderful advantage of hindsight as I construct my narratives.

And as has been observed previously, the inclusion of literary allusion in the narrative serves to prove the 'reality' of Cough's world:

The trouble is that unlike your friends Sir Arthur and Mr Hornung, I don't have the luxury of fiction. The crimes I deal with are all too real. Like the death of Mr Wilde. All too real.

The self-conscious literary complexity of some Golden Age detective fiction can be illustrated by Russell Thorndike's gruesome contribution to the Detection Club's collaborative work *Six Against the Yard* (1936), 'The Strange Death of Major Scallion'. In this story, Thorndike knowingly and systematically sets out, in true carnivalesque fashion (Bakhtin 1965), to collapse discursive boundaries within the detection narrative. Firstly, he presents his narrator as drawing the inspiration for his murder from the criminological literature of which he is an avid collector: 'I made a close study of murder as an art' (1936: 153). Going back as far as the Newgate Calendar in search of a template for the 'perfect murder', the narrator and murderer shortlists ten exemplary homicides, refining this in turn to two murders, one involving nicotine poisoning, and the other effected by the grotesque introduction of poison-bearing beetles into the body of the victim. Thorndike's murderer uses both methods, the horrific climax to the tale coming as he uses a trail of treacle running from the insects' lair into the mouth of the prone victim who is pinned, in a bizarre moment of theatre, to the murder scene floor. The narrator presents this second exemplary murder as historical, having been perpetrated in the late eighteenth century by 'that ingenious smuggler parson Doctor Syn, sometime Vicar of Dymchurch-under-the-wall in the county of Kent' (153). Syn, however, was in fact the literary creation of Thorndike himself, first appearing in *Doctor Syn: A Tale of the Romney Marsh*

(1915). The character was no doubt firmly in the public imagination when 'The Strange Death of Major Scallion' appeared in 1936 as he had recently returned to print twice in 1935 and in a fourth volume, *The Further Adventures of Doctor Syn* of 1936. It is *The Further Adventures of Doctor Syn* that contains the 'beetles murder' in a chapter entitled 'The Crawling Death' (159-67). Thorndike's contribution to *Six Against the Yard*, therefore, functions according to a set of self-referential intertextual references which, as Inspector George Cornish (a former C.I.D. detective called in as adjudicator in the competition to write the 'perfect murder) observes, would have been familiar material for many readers. Characterising Doctor Syn as 'one of the best known characters in modern fiction' (*The Detection Club* 1936: 190), Cornish turns the author's literary device on its head, expressing his confidence that the police investigating Scallion's death or the coroner presiding at the inquest are likely to have read the Syn stories and would therefore penetrate the narrator's fiction of the death as misadventure. He considers it likely that they would question whether nicotine ingestion was indeed the result of excessive smoking and whether the beetles preyed upon him opportunistically after he was pinned to the floor:

the stage-setting of the death recalls that of a murder in fiction, and the book describing this murder is one of those in the library of the man who, according to his own story, tied down the Major to the floor' (191).

Cornish's astute reading of Thorndike's tale demonstrates the extent to which both writers and readers of Golden Age detective fiction put their intertextual knowledge of the form to use.

Dead in the Long Room also functions within a web of literary contexts. This is in part a necessity of the cast of the novel itself. Conan Doyle, Hornung, Wodehouse, Milne, Chandler and Agatha Miller (Christie) are not and cannot be literarily neutral characters; each of them inevitably has the potential to import into the world of the fiction, whether implicitly or explicitly, their own particular 'take' on the writing and reading of detective narrative.⁸ This is a level of 'knowledge' that I consciously wrote into the pages of *Dead in the Long Room*. Readers familiar with these authors' works are likewise possessed of literary context that they may weave into the fabric of my novel in a fashion similar to the kinds of creative reading Cornish envisages in relation to Thorndike's tale.

This stream of metadiscourse is constantly at play in the novel and can add layers of pleasure for knowing readers. An example comes when Doyle and Wodehouse discuss Doyle's anathema towards Sherlock Holmes and his love of his historical novel *Sir Nigel* in Chapter 5. Similarly when Agatha, Monty and Inspector Cough discuss Wodehouse's novel *Not George Washington* in Chapter 27, a level of literary knowledge serves to enrich the experience of readers who know these texts. Importantly, however, in neither case would a lack of knowledge of the texts alluded to diminish readers' capacity to engage effectively with the unfolding mystery of *Dead in the Long Room*.

Literary contexts are ubiquitous in *Dead in the Long Room*. So, for instance, the novel begins with Agatha Miller's arrival at Lord's, an arrival that is at once cast within the milieu of the crime novel as we see the streets of St John's Wood from her perspective as a teenage reader of crime ('Fosco. Glyde. Holmes. Watson. The

⁸ In writing these characters, reading of biographies and autobiographies of the authors and studies of their work was essential research work: Christie - Barnard (1980), Cade (1998), Christie (1977), Morgan (2017); Doyle - Coren (1995), Wade (2013); Milne - Thwaite (1990); Wodehouse - McCrum (2004).

ghosts of literature walked these streets'). Later in the novel, Agatha's reading of the novels of Anna Katherine Green provides a further crime and detection context upon which her view of the events of the novel is based. In the following passage, Agatha speaks with Raymond Chandler:

'Well, Mr Chandler, I admire anyone who can make their way in the world of letters. My especial interest, however, is crime writing. Sherlock Holmes. Father Brown. The early detectives in Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens. And let us not forget the women,' said Agatha. 'Anna Katherine Green is a particular favourite of mine.'

The ways in which Anna Katherine Green's work colours Agatha's role in *Dead in the Long Room* is also explicit in a later conversation with Cough, during which the Agatha reflects:

If there were anything to learn from her reading of Anna Katherine Green and her other favourite writers of crime, it was that mysteries frequently turned on the apparently trivial.

And Green is named, alongside Mrs Braddon and Mrs Henry Wood, as a specific role model for the young Agatha as a woman who has succeeded in the world of mystery and crime writing.

Agatha's engagement with the world of crime and detection in the novel is, then, explicitly predicated upon her reading of other detective fiction in the best tradition of the genre. These literary models are employed as a 'filter' on Agatha's perspective for the reader. Whether analeptic or proleptic, it is the terms of detective

fiction (whether in classic pre-Golden Age, Golden Age or hard-boiled manifestations) that shape Agatha's capacity to think about the fictional world she inhabits in *Dead in the Long Room*.

There are also more explicit ways in which detective fiction as a genre functions within *Dead in the Long Room*. As befits such a self-reflexive genre, the nature of detective fiction is itself the subject of regular discussion in the novel, building in an integral way upon the metafictional tropes of Golden Age detective fiction identified by *inter alia* Edwards (2016b, 2017), Rowland (2001), Watson (1971) and Shaw (2014). A particularly good example of the self-reflexivity of the Golden Age novel can be found in *Smallbone Deceased* (1950, 2019) by Michael Gilbert. The following passage, typically self-deprecatory and ironic in its pitting of detective fiction against the supposedly 'real' depiction of detective work, is worth quoting at length:

'The trouble with you,' said Inspector Hazlerigg, 'is that you read too many detective stories.' He pivoted slowly round in the Horniman swivel-chair.

'How do you make that out?' said Bohun.

'Admit,' said Hazlerigg, 'that you expect me to spend my time sitting here asking a million questions. Occasionally moving round the office in a catlike manner, popping up unexpectedly when people are talking to each other, stooping to pick up minute scraps of paper and invisible threads of wool; all the time smoking a foul pipe or playing on a mouth organ or quoting Thucydides in order to establish a character for originality with the book reviewers—'

'Well—'

'Then, at the end of about seventy-five thousand words I shall collect you all into this room, and inaugurate a sort of verbal game of grandmother's steps, creeping up behind each of the suspects in turn and saying Boo! to them in order to make them jump. At the end of which, when everybody is exhausted, including the reader, I shall produce a revolver, confess that I committed the crime, and shoot myself in front of you all.'

'Well,' said Bohun, 'omitting the melodramatic conclusion, isn't that just about how it's done?'

'As a practical method of detection,' said Hazlerigg, 'it would be about as much use as leaving an open creel beside a trout stream and expecting the fish to jump into it.'

He scratched his nose thoughtfully, watched a small girl teasing a cat on the other side of New Square, and went on: 'So far as I've found out, there are only two ways of fishing for men. One is to drop a grenade into the water: you might call that fishery by shock. The drawback is that you haven't always a grenade of the appropriate size and power ready to your hand. The other method is more laborious but just as certain. You weave a net. And you drag it across the pool, backwards and forwards. You won't get everything at first, but if your mesh is fine enough and you drag deeply enough, everything must come up in the end.'

'Well,' said Bohun. 'I can quite understand why the detective story writers don't set about it in your way. They'd never get any readers.'

'You're right,' said Hazlerigg. 'It's a damned dull process.'

(Gilbert 1950, 2019: 73-4)

The account of detective fiction here offered illustrates the extent to which Golden Age detective fiction is genre-aware. The detective, Hazelrigg, critiques his entire *modus operandi* in the terms of detective fiction and its publishing market, establishing a realm of metafiction that is the lifeblood of the form, including the obligatory ironic devaluation of the genre and its methods as being in real terms 'about as much use as leaving an open creel beside a trout stream and expecting the fish to jump into it'.

The great New Zealand crime writer, Ngaio Marsh, is similarly explicit in her critique of real and fictional crime in *Death at the Bar* (1939, 2000), in which Roderick Alleyn (Marsh's serial detective) discusses the matter of routine and procedure, their relation to the demands of criminal investigation and their more problematic connection with detective fiction:

Routine is the very fibre of police investigation. Your novelist too has now passed the halcyon days when he could ignore routine. He reads books about Scotland Yard, he swots up police manuals. He knows that routine is deadly dull and hopelessly poor material for a thriller; so, like a wise potboiler, he compromises. He heads one chapter "Routine", dismisses six weeks of drudgery in as many phrases, cuts the cackle and gets to the 'osses. I wish to the Lord we could follow his lead. (134)

The 'routine' is an essential but often overlooked element of detective fiction. Sequences of important but often narratively uninteresting procedure are usually quickly passed over. We are simply informed that 'the following day' or 'several

weeks later' significant information (the result of extensive procedural work) has come to light to further the investigation. In *Dead in the Long Room* I took the opportunity to highlight such procedural issues on the basis that they are not always as dull as Gilbert and Marsh paint them. Oates' and Cameron's investigations at the property in Kentish Town (Chapter 40) and the surrounding discussion of fingerprints as an historically emergent method in detection play a significant role both in the unfolding of the murder mystery and in the telling of the tale.

The connections thus established between the content of the murder mystery and the means of its unlocking are firmly established. Other examples abound. In the *Case of the Gilded Fly* (1944, 2009) by Edmund Crispin, Gervase Fenn draws significant connections between literary criticism and detection: 'Detection and literary criticism really come to the same thing: intuition...Once the idea has occurred to you, you can work on substantiating it from the text – or from the remainder of the clues...I'm the only literary critic turned detective in the whole of fiction' (64-5)⁹. However, he later goes on somewhat disingenuously to state that: 'If there's anything I profoundly dislike, it is the sort of detective story in which one of the characters propounds views on how detective stories should be written. It's bad enough having a detective who reads the things' (123).

In *The Man from the River* (1928) by the married Golden Age detective duo G.D.H. & M. Cole, Wilson, the detective figure, comments of Mr Brandreth (a busybody local lawyer) that: 'That kind of chap doesn't commit a murder, except in novels that must have "unexpected" endings' (686), thus constructing such characters' roles as a function of Golden Age detective narrative.

⁹ This connection is particularly interesting in relation to the idea of 'enacted criticism' set out in this essay.

In Philip McDonald's *The Rasp* Anthony Ruthven Gethryn, the amateur detective extraordinaire, asks:

Ever read detective stories, Deacon? Good ones, I mean. Gaboriau, for instance. If you do, you'll know that the "It" is very often found among a bunch of "unlikely and impossibles". And one of my chief stays in life is my well-proved theory that Fiction is Truth. The trouble is that the stories are often more true than the real thing. And that's just where one goes wrong, and sometimes gets left quite as badly off the mark as the others. (1924: 401)

The role of Francis Henchard in *Dead in the Long Room* provides a good example of what Gethryn is talking about here. As the secretary of the Marylebone Cricket Club, he is in many senses above suspicion; representative *par excellence* of the respectable *status quo*. It is his role as representative of Lord's Cricket Ground and, indeed, of establishment values more broadly, that is likely to lead to his initial exclusion from both readers' and Cough's thoughts.

The preceding examples illustrate the ubiquity of metafictional self-awareness in Golden Age detective fiction. In a more recent novel, however, suspicion surrounding the position of the textual detective of Golden Age fiction is voiced by Lucas Corso, a central character in Arturo Perez-Reverte's *The Dumas Club* of 2003. Corso engages in an extended critical discussion of the detective novel form¹⁰. In the following passage he illustrates the role of storytelling in the work of the

¹⁰ Such discussions are also a regular feature of *Dead in the Long Room*. Cough, Doyle, Milne, Wodehouse and Agatha Miller all engage in similarly discursive consideration of the form.

detective, highlighting the narrative importance of the composition of an agreed, though not necessarily factually underpinned, version of events:

All Sherlock Holmes or Poirot have to do is imagine who the murderer is and how he committed the crime. They invent the rest and tell it as if they knew it was a fact. Then Watson or Hastings congratulate them admiringly and say, "Well done, sir, that's exactly how it happened." And the murderer confesses. The idiot.' (2003: 235)

Corso, later in the novel, returns to the essential critical intertextuality of detective fiction, observing: '... in an investigation a book is more helpful than the outside world. It's self-contained, with no interruptions. Like Sherlock Holmes's laboratory' (2003: 269). Whilst he claims that the book is self-contained, however, his drawing upon the image of Holmes in itself demonstrates that far from being 'self-contained' the life of the book in detective fiction reaches beyond its covers and becomes self-generating and fundamentally intertextual. Indeed, when Corso eventually comes face-to-face with Boris Balkan, the frame narrator of *The Dumas Club*, 'the book' again becomes a central image. Balkan addresses Corso as a 'participant' in a book, an overriding narrative that has somehow directed his actions:

'Congratulations,' I said, closing the book as if his arrival had interrupted my reading. 'You've managed to play the game right to the end.'

'Game?' he managed to say hoarsely.

'Yes, game. Tension, uncertainty, a high level of skill ... The possibility of acting freely, but according to obligatory rules, as an end in itself. Together

with a sense of tension and pleasure at the difference from ordinary life ...'
(2003: 283)

The emphasis upon 'obligatory rules' and the questionable 'possibility of acting freely' opens for consideration the extent to which detective fiction and its readers are or are not free to engage in interpretation¹¹. This relates closely to my own methods in *Dead in the Long Room*, in which Inspector Cough is profoundly aware of his own position as producer of detective stories¹².

Balkan also locates Corso's story within the context of a world of other books; a web of intertextuality:

'There they are.' He made a sweeping gesture to include the whole library.
'They look still and silent but they talk amongst themselves, even though they seem to ignore each other. They communicate through their authors, just as the egg uses the hen to produce another egg.' (2003: 284)

As the preceding examples demonstrate, the production of the work of detective fiction is inevitably located within an intertextual and genre-forged 'dialogue'. This can also be seen as what Bakhtin (1981) might refer to as a Menippean game, and Perez-Reverte captures this, in terms reminiscent of Huizinga (1955) and Caillois (2001), through the voice of Balkan:

¹¹ Scholes' (1985) definition of interpretation as '*text upon text*' is again an important concept here.

¹² In producing these stories, creative-critical responses to the cases/ 'texts' he faces, Cough moves into the third of Scholes' domains, criticism. In criticism, Scholes argues, we move from the '*text upon text*' dynamic of interpretation to a '*text against text*' dynamic where the operations of the literary text are brought into often contradictory and conflicting relation with broader meaning-making societal patterns and demands.

In matters of literature, the intelligent reader may even enjoy the strategy used to turn him into the victim. I believe that enjoyment is an excellent reason for playing. Or reading a story, or writing one. (284)

The reader (and by extension the writer, who is also a 'reader' of detective fiction) is posited as a willing ('sacrificial') victim, as a self-denying (but simultaneously game-playing and self-rewarding) 'player' of the detective fiction 'game'¹³. And so, Balkan positions Corso as detective-reader-writer:

It was you who filled in the blanks [in the story] on your own, as if it was a novel based on trickery and Lucas Corso a reader being too clever for his own good. Nobody ever told you that events were actually happening as you thought. So the responsibility is entirely yours, my friend. The real culprit is your excessive intertextual reading and linking of literary references. (300)

This is precisely this kind of *faux-naïf* intertextual reading that the Golden Age detective novel simultaneously eschews and demands, whereby readers at one and the same time have to accept the fictionality that the text itself both explicitly demands and denies.

This is also well exemplified in A.A. Milne's play *The Fourth Wall* (1928), in which two central characters define their purportedly 'real' experiences of crime by reference to fictional representations. First Jimmy Ludgrove:

¹³ John Dickson Carr's 1963 essay 'The Grandest Game in the World' comes again to mind here.

JIMMY: Oh, I don't know. It seems to leave a lot to chance. All right in a story book, but would Uncle Arthur do all the things he was expected to do? And if he didn't, what then? (57)

Then Susan Cunningham:

SUSAN: It's silly, but I suppose my nerve's gone suddenly. It was just like working at something in a book before, but now it's – it's getting so close to us. (64)

Milne also provides a more extended, humorous and deliberately subversive (carnavalesque) version of this trope in his novel *Four Days' Wonder* (1933):

Jenny realised that the thing to avoid was taxis, because taxi-drivers always remembered when they had driven a fair girl in a biscuit-coloured hat and green georgette to Waterloo Station, and they nearly always heard her say to the porter: 'Bittlesham Regis, it's the three-ten isn't it?' and then they always went to Scotland Yard and, after waiting a little while, were shown into the Inspector's room, and told him all about it. So she went to Bloomsbury by omnibus, and was very glad that omnibus drivers didn't remember so well, or want so much money. (39)

In *Murder in Piccadilly* (1936, 2015), Charles Kingston also deliberately opts to highlight the fictionality of his own work, offering explicit critical commentary on the processes of literary composition as his central detective, Chief Inspector Wake, ruminates:

Wise and dapper Superintendent Melville had taught him... that in a real life mystery the key had to be made to fit the lock, whereas in fiction it was the key that was first manufactured. (175)¹⁴

The world of detective fiction is again Wake's automatic frame of reference when, later in the novel, he is tailing a suspect:

His first decision in a moment when more than one decision had to be made, was to dive into the nearest doorway, but mingled with the same thought was a glimmering of the danger of imitating the police sleuth of fiction. (274)

The danger, we are to imagine, is that the criminal, well-versed in the same detective fiction narratives will be expecting precisely this, and that the investigator will therefore lose the advantage.

Here, as in the other examples cited, it is as if all detectives in Golden Age fiction go around self-consciously defining themselves and their every action against what other literary investigators do. This thinking becomes 'written in' as an element of the genre. We have an endlessly fictionally 'aware' set of characters who 'read' and 'write' their actions in this way simultaneously to hold off and embrace the blurring of fiction and reality within their fictional frames. This is also a significant element of *Dead in the Long Room*, where Inspector Cough explicitly considers the

¹⁴ The appositeness of this to the process of writing detective fiction is demonstrated in the purported epistolary exchange between John Rhode and Milward Kennedy at the outset of *Ask a Policeman* (1933), in the course of which Rhode reveals how he has often been quizzed about his compositional methods ('Do you think of a Murder and then work it out, or do you think of a Solution and do it backwards?' (1933: 1). See Green & Dalrymple (2021) for a fuller analysis of this Detection Club collaborative novel.

construction of his own emerging narrative of the murders of Harold Wilde and Patrick McMasters in relation to the works of the authors he is, by force of circumstance, both investigating and investigating with.

As this discussion has illustrated, writers of detective fiction formulate a genre-based discussion with themselves. The form of the detective novel is fundamentally dialogic in nature (Bakhtin 1981; Bakhtin 1984), creating a recursive and stylised interaction between genre-knowledgeable writers, readers and even characters. In the final chapter of Kitchin's *Crime at Christmas* (1934, 2015), this dialogue is reproduced in the form of a question-and-answer session between the narrator and an imagined reader. This is entirely appropriate as the detective story genre is constantly generating questions; it is constantly and explicitly 'wondering' about the creative possibilities of its own form as the detective (and the reader) seek to weave from the mass of inter-connecting threads of both 'real' and 'potential' stories a final tapestry of 'truth'. Readers, like detectives, are weavers of possibility, compositors, (re)creators of story.

It is precisely these possibilities that *Dead in the Long Room*, with its proliferation of authors of detective fiction, seeks to encode and exploit. This metafictional, metadetective dimension is a central element of the novel. The 'terms and conditions' of detective fiction (its core genre features and the explicit discussion of them within the fictional frame) become, in *hommage* to the Golden Age novels to which it critically and creatively responds, one of the core currencies of *Dead in the Long Room*. With its array of literary characters, it deepens the irony and further encodes and embeds such ideas within the fabric of the fiction, using these to create its own sense of literary context for the events surrounding the deaths of Harold Wilde and Patrick McMasters. Whether explicitly or implicitly, 'real' characters

within the fiction are creatively 'aware' of their own situations and as such consciously 'read' and 'write' their own positions within the emerging detection narrative in fictive terms, building up layers of playful irony both for themselves and for readers of the novel who are, in their turn, reading the 'real' characters through the lenses of their actual creative output. So, for example, knowledgeable readers of detective fiction are able to appreciate the conversation in Chapter 6 between Agatha Miller and Raymond Chandler which juxtaposes their very different approaches to detective fiction, ending in Agatha's reflection that 'crime had to be altogether more genteel in her view. Altogether a more palatable affair. Even murder did not have to appear absolutely brutal'.

The figure of the detective

The recognisable figure of the detective began to emerge in the Victorian era. Some of these were police detectives; seminal literary creations such as Dickens' Inspector Bucket (*Bleak House* (1863)) and Wilkie Collins' Sergeant Cuff (*The Moonstone* (1868)) and a raft of comparable figures in the works of writers such as B.L. Farjeon (father of the celebrated Golden Age writer J.J. Farjeon), Headon Hill and M. McDonnell Bodkin. Others, like Robert Audley in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) were amateur sleuths. Female detectives also have their genesis in the Victorian era through such creations as Collins' Marian Halcombe (*The Woman in White* (1860, 1987)) and Magdalen Vanstone (*No Name* (1862, 2009)), and in the anachronistic female detectives of Andrew Forrester (*The Female Detective* (1864, 2016)) and William S. Hayward (*Revelations of a Lady Detective* (1864, 2013)). These early detective figures (a combination of professionals and amateurs, upper

class and lower class, males and females) demonstrate that from the outset detective fiction was founded upon experiment and intertextual dialogue.

Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes and Chesterton's Father Brown built on these earlier detectives and in their turn provided the bedrock for the writers who formed The Detection Club. In the works of Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh, Margery Allingham, Gladys Mitchell, Anthony Berkeley, Freeman Wills Crofts, George Bellairs and others, the archetype of the Golden Age detective emerged in figures such as Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple, Lord Peter Wimsey, Inspector Roderick Alleyn, Albert Campion, Mrs Bradley, Roger Sherringham, Inspector French and Inspector Littlejohn respectively. The on-going power of such archetypes is evidenced by the enduring figure of the series detective: Inspector Morse (and associated spin-offs), Adam Dalgleish, Dalziel and Pascoe, Rebus, Agatha Raisin, Hamish Macbeth and a plethora of others. Inspector Cough in *Dead in the Long Room* is intentionally created in response to a number of images of the detective and his name encodes his debt to this tradition setting him in relation to two seminal figures from the detective fiction canon: Wilkie Collins' Sergeant Cuff (1868) and Gil North's Sergeant Cluff (1960; 1961).

Anthony Berkeley Cox, as quoted by Sayers (1932: 7) in the Introduction to her *Second Omnibus of Crime*, observes a shift in the focus of detective fiction such that the genre's focus is becoming 'a puzzle of character rather than a puzzle of time, place, motive and opportunity'. There is, perhaps, an assumption here that the character of interest will be the perpetrator of the crime, but there is no reason why the character of interest should not be the detective (Binyon 1989). This is the model I have adopted in *Dead in the Long Room*. For certain, Francis Henchard and his motivations in committing the murders of Harold Wilde and Patrick McMasters are of

interest to the reader, but of more interest are likely to be the development and workings of the characters of Inspector Cough and Agatha Miller.

Dead in the Long Room is deliberately established and placed in self-referential relation to other works of Golden Age detective fiction, and Inspector Cough is to be understood in relation to other detectives. Not all detectives in Golden Age detective fiction are flamboyant and eccentric characters. Whilst Hercule Poirot, Lord Peter Wimsey and Gervase Fenn, amongst others, are colourful and larger-than-life characters, some writers seek to distinguish their detectives by their very normality. So, for example, Inspector Cotter in J.C. Masterman's *An Oxford Tragedy* is the prototype of normality: 'Anyone less like the detective of fiction it would be impossible to imagine' (1939: 53). However, it is this pronounced normality that serves precisely to set him apart in readiness for his function in counterpoint to Brendel, the brilliant Viennese amateur detective and visiting lecturer at St Thomas's College, Oxford.

In *Dead in the Long Room*, Inspector Cough is similarly marked by his normality, which establishes his credibility and his distinction within the novel. He is placed in overt dialogue with a range of authors and (by implication and extension) with their detectives. This places readers in an interesting and potentially problematic relationship with the detective. By virtue of the authorial *imprimatur*, the textual detective sees with privileged eyes, hears with privileged ears and speaks with a privileged voice. This exposes in its most glaring form what Gulddal calls 'the authority differential' (2016: 11) between the reader and the detective. Golden Age detective fiction and *Dead in the Long Room*, however, choose to expose this differential precisely for what it is: a generic convention that in and of itself is constantly open for negotiation in both Barthesian and Bakhtinian terms. The

narratives of crime that the detectives of Golden Age fiction (including Inspector Cough) create are always provisional and contingent upon the best evidence available at the time. Such evidence emerges through the novel's dialogue, action and settings, all of which are subject to reinterpretation in the light of emerging evidence. Readers also have access to a dimension of the narrative that remains unavailable to the detective: the novel itself. The physical (or e-) book provides a dimension within which the reader alone can function. Cough cannot step out of the narrative that contains him, and this leaves alive the possibility, should readers wish to avail themselves of it, of returning to his words, actions, inferences and conclusions.

Readers are, therefore, placed in a privileged extra-textual position from which they can either comply with detectives, accepting on their own terms the verdicts of Hercule Poirot, Miss Marple, Russell Thorndike or Inspector Cough. Alternatively, the textual space of the detective novel allows ample opportunity for readers to question detectives' 'readings'. Indeed, detectives in many ways build doubt into their processes of detection. The language of detectives in Golden Age novels is frequently marked by the kinds of subjunctivising conditionality suggested by Bruner (1986). Ultimately, fictional detectives may prove to be what Gulddal (2016: 13) calls 'the guarantor of interpretative truth'. However, their utterances are frequently marked by tentativeness. Much of the time, Golden Age detective narrative is a place of uncertainty rather than certainty, a literary space for telling possible stories and exploring theories.

In the unravelling of this conundrum, it is useful to return to Barthesian analyses of 'readerly' and 'writerly text'. Detectives are interestingly placed,

depending upon whether they are viewed from the perspective of writers, readers or the characters/participants in the fiction. In each situation, the locus and role of the detective in relation to the text shifts. A 'readerly' interpretation, for instance, sees detectives as potentially fallible investigators of crime. Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot and others frequently make mistakes (and are even prepared sometimes to admit them). Such mistakes, however, are always temporary and are replaced, often through acts of personal assertion, by new and correct information that leads to the solution of the crime.

Eyal Segal (2010: 154) sees detectives as central in establishing the narrative closure of detective stories; as being 'a paradigm case of strong closure'. As Sweeney (1990: 50) observes: 'Nothing is more definitive, complete, and single minded than the ending of a detective story. It is less a resolution than an erasure'. Golden Age detective novels and the conclusions their detectives offer, however, are often much less stable and significantly more self aware than such views might imply. To offer a Barthesian gloss on such observations, Golden Age detective fictions are doubly 'writerly'; they allow fictional sleuths the 'in-text' freedom to interpret widely how crimes might have been committed, whilst also allowing readers the freedom to develop their own extra-textual readings of detectives' solutions. That this is ultimately a subversive mode of self-critical engagement is demonstrated by the willingness of many experienced and knowledgeable readers of detective fiction.

Inspector Cough and detectives of the Golden Age

The treatment and role of the authors in *Dead in the Long Room* is in its turn overlaid by the irony that Inspector Cough very much conceives of his work in narrative and

fictional terms. He expresses this view very clearly to Milne in Chapter 13. As the official detective of the piece Cough is, in genre terms, the ultimate narrative ‘voice’ of the novel, responsible for the construction of the final reading and re-telling of the crime (Gulddal 2016).¹⁵ Gulddal is suspicious of the idea that detectives are infallible ‘readers’ and interpreters of crime. He challenges the view that detectives come up with *the* reading of the crimes they investigate, considering instead that they simply come up with a possible retelling of it. He ponders why, given that a hermeneutics of suspicion lies at the heart of Golden Age detective fiction, readers who are apparently suspicious of everything that happens do not extend the same doubt to detectives themselves and the solutions they offer. He observes that in so prioritising the ‘voice’ of the detective, the genre ‘provides its own interpretation and underwrites it with the authority and intellectual prowess of its protagonist’ (2016: 11). Where readers allow detectives such unchallenged control of meaning, they make them not only the interpreters, but also ‘the guarantor[s] of interpretative truth’ (12). In so framing the character and ‘voice’ of the detective, Gulddal argues:

The classic detective novel is structurally tilted toward the ending as the moment where the mystery finds its solution, and social order is re-established. The ending is meant to offer narrative closure by tying up loose ends and demonstrating that all individual events are part of a coherent picture.’ (2016: 13)¹⁶

¹⁵ In this respect Hark’s views (1997: 111) are also interesting, observing the conundrum faced by readers in that detective narratives tease them into ‘believing ourselves Barthesian producers of textual meaning only asking us to sit still while the detective’s final explanation turns us into the most passive of consumers’.

¹⁶ It may well be, however, that this situation is similar to the watching of a magic trick. As most audience members do not want to know how the trick was done, preferring to remain in a state of amazement at the ‘magic’ of the moment, so readers of detective fiction may prefer to accept detectives’ asserted solutions rather than exerting the right to develop their own.

The 'end-orientation' Gulddal identifies is thus a further example of reader complicity. It hinges upon readers' relationship to the idea of 'authority' in the novel and therefore brings into question the distinction between detectives and authors. This is a distinction that is deliberately blurred in *Dead in the Long Room* where multiple authorial voices, including my own and that of Inspector Cough vie with the voices of the 'real' authors of detective fiction. As Gulddal goes on to conclude, therefore, my novel explores at the critical-creative nexus (Gulddal 2016: 14) 'the status of fiction as a subversive counterpoint to the authority of the master detective'.

Detectives are charged in genre terms to come up with an 'authorised' solution. This, however, may be understood in a number of ways some or all of which may apply to the versions of events detectives settle upon:

1. 'authorised' in that they are sanctioned by or given the seal of approval of the authorities;
2. 'authorised' in that they are permissible;
3. 'authorised' in that they are [re-]tellings of tales as they may (or may not) have happened.

What, we might rightly ask however, is the situation of Inspector Cough in trying to establish his 'authorial' voice and rights over the competing narrative voices of the authors of detective fiction he is investigating and working with? And what of my own position as the author of *Dead in the Long Room* who writes them all? These genre-specific ironies are neatly captured by Książopolska who observes the situation of 'the character intuiting his [sic] own fictional status' and in so doing 'attempting to gain control by becoming the author of the text' (2016: 37). Golden

Age detective fiction for all that it might be structurally tilted as Gulddal (2016) suggests towards the voices and loci of detectives, is alive with the kinds of narrative power games envisioned by Barthes (1974) and by Todorov (1977) in his classic analysis of fictional narratives.

One of the ways in which I worked with this In *Dead in the Long Room* was by using Cough as a means of exploring the role of doubt and changing stories in shaping the emerging narrative. He is used, in many ways, as a fictional exponent of Brunerian 'subjunctification' in action, as a locus for narrative transformation as he slips between the narrative and paradigmatic dimensions of the text and as he subjects the emerging details of the case to a variety of simple and complex transformations.

There is, nevertheless, a sense in which Inspector Cough belongs to the traditional line of infallible detectives. Readers are asked to comply with his 'reading' of the case as it is set out in the final scenes of the novel. However Cough, perhaps more explicitly than other detectives in the Golden Age genre, understands his work very much in terms of its literary properties. Although a detective, he explicitly sees himself as a constructor of crime narrative, and as such is fully aware of the kinds of limiting judgement that might be applied to himself and his work. As such, Cough embodies the capacity to 'read' himself as a fictional detective and to understand his role within the literary text. The process of the composition of *Dead in the Long Room* obliged me to consider the character of Inspector Cough both retrospectively (in the light of other writers' presentation of similar detective protagonists) and also prospectively (in order to make possible his developing 'solutions' to the case). Readers' sense of Cough's character, his methods, his conclusions and so on are

continually 'in play' as his character and his detective work are negotiated within the intertextual frame of Doyle's, Christie's and Milne's own work in the genre.

Cough, as such, fulfils a central function in establishing and retaining artistic unity through the novel, whilst simultaneously emphasising the subjunctified nature of the space of detective fiction, where meanings and significances can 'float' some considerable distance from their original semiotic moorings. As Sayers' introduction to *The Floating Admiral* (1931) recognises, pluralities and ambivalences are intrinsic to detective fiction, despite the tendency of the genre to allege the existence of unitary meanings and irrefutable truths. The processes of shared composition the members of the Detection Club engaged in during the writing of this collaborative novel led the writers to see that clues and situations often opened up a plurality of potential readings and were not as 'fixed' as they might seem. Considering detectives as characters and the kinds of pompous pronouncements they often make, she observes:

We are only too much accustomed to let the great detective say airily:
 "Cannot you see, my dear Watson, that these facts admit of only one interpretation?" After our experience in the matter of *The Floating Admiral*, our great detectives may have to learn to express themselves more guardedly' (xix).

Indeed, use of either facts that allow of only one interpretation or detectives who want them, is considered suspect by John Dickson Carr. In 'The Grandest Game in the World' (1963: 340), he states: 'the detective who seeks after facts with only one interpretation is chasing marsh-lights with a butterfly-net.'

Nevertheless, the extent to which the kinds of interpretation Carr suggests relate to any genuine kind of alternative is open to question. If, as Rowland (2010) suggests, detectives are cast as versions of mythical redeptor grail knights, then readers may in reality have little freedom. Other conceptualisations of the questor, however, in which detectives are seen as searchers after meaning, may leave readers feeling more able to bring into question their readings of crimes and their solutions. The different ways in which readers might 'place' themselves in relation to the narrative predicate different reading 'spaces', and these in their turn have implications for readers' relation to detectives (amongst other characters) and their use of language. Readers may develop positions in relation to:

- the roles and affordances *of* language
- responses *to* language
- willingness/ability *to interpret* language.

In other words, such perceived relations have implications for Bruner's subjunctification.

This returns us to one of the central propositions of this critical essay: that literary detectives are characterised by their persistent recourse to the seminal question 'what if?' Whatever the situation or milieu they are investigating, it is their constant challenging of apparent circumstances that enables them to unearth the facts and solutions (or 'truth') that lie beneath the surface. The discovery of such solutions is the result of detectives' often idiosyncratic methods; be it Holmes' deduction, Poirot's 'little grey cells', Thorndyke's 'invaluable green case' of chemicals (Freeman 1912) or Dr Manson's 'little box of tricks' (Radford & Radford 1946). However, it is detectives' willingness to listen to the nagging 'what if?', their

determination to subjunctify contingent circumstances and to pursue potential explanations, that ultimately opens the way for discovery, allowing them to 'read', to 'write' and 're-write' the narrative until a coherent 'telling' of the crime emerges. This process, of course, mirrors and provides an implicit commentary upon the related work of the author behind the narrative; 'enacted criticism' functioning at the nexus between creative and critical domains (Gulddal & Rolls 2016).

Dove (1990: 30) suggests that detectives work, as the narrative progresses, to 'narrow the field and reduce the number of alternative interpretations available to readers'. The space of the detection narrative, however, remains a space of plurality and textual instability. Golden Age crime narrative, in these terms, ceases to be either a determinant or a determining account and becomes instead a provisional or exploratory space within which potential meanings ('what ifs?') are differently proposed and interrogated by the author (writer-teller), the reader (reader-writer-teller) and the detective (reader-writer-participant-teller). The space of Golden Age detective fiction self-consciously highlights and operationalises the dialogic processes of reading and writing. By virtue of their respective positions relative to the literary text, readers, writers and detectives are all differently positioned to fulfil both functions. In *Dead in the Long Room*, these three roles become repeatedly entwined. Agatha Miller is a reader of crime, a putative writer of crime and an active participant in the investigation. Inspector Cough is explicitly presented as a creative 'reader' and a creative 'writer' of crime narrative, as evidenced by his conversations with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Miller, A.A. Milne and others.

Particularly interesting is the way in which the literary narrative encourages these differently-placed readers to perform virtual re-tellings of the crime situations they encounter. These re-tellings constitute acts of transformative creativity,

representing personalised and often shifting 'ownings' of story which serve at once to fix (albeit a provisional fixing) and to pluralise meaning. The very act of (re-)telling tales is a creative and iterative process of literary projection (Heidegger 2002). The subjunctification required in the narrative-building act, leads the author/reader/detective to work with the emerging 'facts' of the crime and to reshape these into potential solutions. As such the tale and its many potential re-iterations represent what Bruner calls a 'trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties' (26).

This constantly shifting set of interactions around a plethora of potential 'writings' and 'readings' is the stuff of Golden Age detective fiction. Authors, readers and detectives work creatively with co-existent plural possibility in both narrative and paradigmatic dimensions (Bruner 1986). The iterative construction of narrative (and its embedded reconstruction of the central crime), is a quintessentially experimental and transformative (or subjunctive) activity. Detectives, for example, draw upon a variety of narrative, psychological, moral and inductive/deductive processes to craft summative (though not necessarily 'true') accounts of crime based on information (of varying reliability) received from witnesses called upon to recount their version of elements of the tale. These accounts authors, detectives and readers are at liberty either to own or to reject according to their own schemas and so the emerging narrative becomes an inherently dialogic literary space. In *Dead in the Long Room*, Inspector Cough encounters, as is typical of the Golden Age genre, a wide array of accounts relating to aspects of the case he is investigating. These multiple and varying accounts, he has to sift, considering how he will use them in his final account of what actually took place. Cough is profoundly aware of the responsibility of this aspect of his work as he constructs his narrative of the crimes.

So self-aware were writers of Golden Age crime that dialogic interaction and narrative experimentalism between writers and readers was deliberately written into their work. Competitions where readers would write in with solutions to incomplete mysteries, and collaborations and 'round-robin' tales by members of the Detection Club (and other groups of crime writers) such as *The Floating Admiral* (1931), *The Anatomy of Murder* (1936), *Six Against the Yard* (1936), *Ask a Policeman* (1933) and *Double Death: a Detective Story* (Sayers et al. 1939) are useful examples. The coherence and neatness or otherwise of these processes of 'writerly' interaction (Barthes 1974) is not the point; it is the process of story-reading and story-making that is the salient concern, bringing our attention back again to the idea of 'enacted criticism'. A more recent example is Skvorecky's *Sins for Father Knox* (1988), in which readers are challenged to identify which of Knox's canonical rules of detective fiction (1929) are being broken, and where in the various stories these infringements occur.

A good example of such dialogue comes in Chapter 3 of *Dead in the Long Room* where Doyle and Wodehouse engage in a detailed if tongue-in-cheek (Shaw 2014) debate surrounding the Sherlock Holmes stories: their textuality, their composition, their methods. This discussion is taken further when, in Chapter 5, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (2001) and the phenomenon of the publication of the Holmes tales in *The Strand Magazine*, becomes the focus of a significant discussion preparatory to the potential literary fraud plot that Wodehouse fleetingly proposes to Doyle in Chapter 5. On other occasions in the novel, Agatha Miller engages in discussion with Inspector Cough. In the course of these conversations, Agatha offers an exposition (much in the mould of the metafictional explorations of Golden Age detective fiction considered earlier in this essay) of her views on detective fiction. A

good example of this comes in her conversations subsequent to the discovery of Harold Wilde's body with Doyle and Chandler, two very different exponents of the detective genre. Through these conversations we are given access to some of the critical and creative positions that might have informed Christie's and Chandler's early development as crime writers.

In another example is Doyle's conversation with his brother-in-law, E.W. Hornung, shortly after the discovery of Wilde's body. Hornung reminds Doyle of Holmes' famous principle:

'But what is it Holmes always says? "Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, ...'

"... must be the truth."'. Doyle finished his own aphorism.

Almost immediately they are joined by Agatha Miller who recommends that Doyle 'exercise his grey cells'.

For the reader of detective fiction, the specific allusions to *The Sign of Four*, that 'when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth' (Doyle 2004: 111) is unavoidable, as is the proleptic reference to Christie's own Hercule Poirot when she advocates to Sir Arthur the importance of exercising the 'grey cells'. The language of the text becomes slippery here. These words and ideas function in the narrative at different levels, depending upon whether they are taken to be the words of 'real' authors, the words of their fictional versions in the novel, or mine, as the author of *Dead in the Long Room*.

In a similar fashion, Milne and Cough have a lengthy discussion in Chapter 13, during which the knowledgeable reader of crime fiction will find allusions to Milne's own later crime writing, both fiction (*The Red House Mystery* and *Four Days Wonder*) and drama (*The Fourth Wall*). The conversation also allows Cough to expound his own position with regard to the construction of detective narratives. There is no doubt that Cough sees himself as a 'writer' of detective narratives. In this discussion with Milne, as we have already seen, Cough compares his situation with that of Dr Watson. He considers the difference between a narrator such as Watson, writing with the benefit of hindsight, and himself as detective-narrator having to work in a constantly evolving present. In the best spirit of Golden Age crime writing, in making this comparison Cough casts himself, by fictional sleight of hand, as 'real' (and therefore superior?) in relation to the stuff of detective fiction to which he refers. This encodes a doubly writerly (in the Barthesian sense) position whereby fictional sleuths, even when (and perhaps because) denying their fictionality, are afforded the freedom to interpret widely how crimes might have been committed. By the same logic readers, should they so wish, are free to develop their own readings of the information with which they are presented. According to the traditions of 'fair play', a code to which I have faithfully adhered in *Dead in the Long Room*, Cough does not have access to anything that is not also available to the reader (Van Dine 1928), and as such, his methods and solutions are open to scrutiny and even dispute should readers see fit (Bayard 2001; Bayard 2008; Gulddal 2016).

Other examples of these kinds of intertextual play are also present in *Dead in the Long Room*. P.G. Wodehouse's *Not George Washington* becomes a significant intertextual device within the plot as its content in some ways mirrors the proposed

plan for collaboration/fraud between Doyle and Wodehouse.¹⁷ Added into this element of the plot is the fact, as explored in the novel, that Wodehouse and Milne did both in fact make money by publishing literary pastiches/parodies of Holmes: Wodehouse with 'Dudley Jones, Bore-Hunter' (1903a), 'Sherlock Holmes' (1903b), 'The Parrot' (1903c) and 'The Prodigal' (1903d); and Milne with 'The Rape of the Sherlock' (1903). Thus, the idea of working with the fictional characters of others (and especially Sherlock Holmes) is instantiated at both fictional and metafictional levels within the novel.

Dead before Wicket: cricketing crime fiction

Another significant creative literary context for the writing of *Dead in the Long Room* was a surrounding body of 'cricketing crime'. Cricket and crime have a long and illustrious connection, and this was central to the genesis and development of *Dead in the Long Room*. Before and throughout the writing of the novel and this critical essay, I have pursued a course of reading of Golden Age and other crime texts that make use of the milieu of cricket (Green 2016). Crime and violence, of course, permeate cricketing lexis; a batsman may 'steal' a single or hit a 'swashbuckling' drive; a bowler might deliver a 'savage' bouncer or a 'wrong-un' to 'annihilate' the tail-end. The potential brutality of the game is perhaps most enduringly captured in the events of the notorious 'Bodyline' Ashes series of 1932-3 when, as a response to the legendary batting of the Australian Don Bradman, an England side, boasting the talents of its most famous fast bowler Harold Larwood, and captained by Douglas

¹⁷ Milne's early book *Lovers in London* (1905) is also important for a brief moment in Cough's investigation.

Jardine deliberately bowled on the line of the batsmen's bodies. The ensuing outraged response of the Australian nation and its media can be imagined.

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that there should be a corpus of crime fiction that takes cricket—'the English enigma' as Hercule Poirot calls it in *Four and Twenty Blackbirds* (ITV 1989)—with its high sporting and cultural stakes as its setting. Edwards (2020b) identifies the general usefulness of sporting settings for crime tales, including cricket. Indeed, he makes some use of cricket and The Long Room at Lord's in his recent Golden Age inspired novel *Mortmain Hall* (Edwards 2020a). With its emphasis upon notions of 'fair play', cricket provides a natural partner for detective fiction, and particularly detective fiction of the Golden Age. The idea of 'fair play', for example, is highlighted by A.A. Milne who, in his Introduction to *The Red House Mystery* (1922: xi) observes: 'This is what we really come to: that the detective must have no more special knowledge than the average reader'.

In keeping his imagined reader abreast of the detective's knowledge, Milne goes on to offer a brief exposition of the ways in which the narrative, and the narrative voice of the detective, should be shaped:

Death to the author who keeps his unravelling for the last chapter, making all the other chapters but a prologue to a five-minute drama. This is no way to write a story. Let us know from chapter to chapter what the detective is thinking. For this he must watsonize or soliloquize; the one is merely a dialogue form of the other, and, by that, more readable. (1922: xi).

Milne identifies the essentially dialogic nature of the detective novel as a form, by his very coining of the verb 'to watsonize' entering into dialogue with Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. The writing of detective novels is, therefore, conceived in terms of a critical relationship centred on the negotiation of meaning between writers and readers, mediated by the pivotal character of the detective and by the demands of the genre. Such 'watsonizing' forms a key component of *Dead in the Long Room* as Inspector Cough engages in a variety of 'dialogues' with himself, with Agatha Miller, with Constable Oates and a number of other characters as the narrative progresses. These 'watsonizing' dialogues effectively ensure that readers are given access to all of the information with which the detective is working, thus ensuring the fair playing of the game.

Let us consider a few examples that have provided the specific backdrop to *Dead in the Long Room*, a novel consciously writing both 'into' and 'against' the traditions of cricketing crime. Sir Peter Wimsey, Dorothy L. Sayers' famous detective, is a competent cricketer, as are the various members of the Authors' XI in my novel, and perhaps most especially Sir Arthur Conan Doyle¹⁸. On his way to a First at Oxford, Wimsey finds time to represent the University, and in *Murder Must Advertise*, Sayers (2016) offers an intricate and significant account of a cricket match. E.W. Hornung, who also features in *Dead in the Long Room*, was the creator of Arthur J. Raffles, a 'gentleman thief' who plays cricket for the Gentlemen of England; a team comprising amateurs, from the days when unpaid wealthy and often aristocratic cricketers played alongside paid and socially inferior 'professionals'. Like George

¹⁸ Doyle was no mean cricketer, playing First Class cricket on no fewer than 10 occasions for the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC). On one occasion, he famously dismissed the England and global cricketing legend W.G. Grace. The occasion is reported in one of Doyle's rightly lesser known literary efforts, 'A Reminiscence of Cricket' (1922). On another occasion, facing the bowling of Bill Bradley, Doyle's trousers caught fire when a fast ball struck a vesta case that he had omitted to remove from his pocket.

Fraser MacDonald's *Flashman*, Raffles is a cricketing cad, and stars in a sequence of short stories and one novel.

Hornung was himself a keen cricketer, playing on a number of occasions for the Authors' XI, including the occasion of the 1907 match at Lord's that features in *Dead in the Long Room*. Besides his brother-in-law, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, his team-mates on this occasion included such varied writers of crime fiction as the comic novelist P.G. Wodehouse (whose work often portrays humorous criminal activity) and A.A. Milne who, though best known for *Winnie the Pooh* (1926, 2016), produced a best-selling crime novel, *The Red House Mystery* (1922, 2008). He also wrote *Chloe Marr* (1946, 2017) and *Four Days Wonder* (1933), two typically oblique works of crime fiction, and a play, *The Fourth Wall* (1928).

In a number of ways the members of the team playing in the Authors' XI, provide an obvious context for the composition of *Dead in the Long Room*. The presence of the writers themselves as characters within the fiction provides a background context of crime writing and in many ways encourages the breakdown of the epistemic-ontological dimensions of the fictional world. Cricket provides not only the ontological subject for fiction, but also the epistemological vehicle for that fiction; a means by which the ideas and structures of the work of detective fiction can in themselves be understood. The Prologue to *Dead in the Long Room*, 'The Scorebook', is a creative working out of this proposition, drawing as it does explicit connections between the cricketing scorebook and ideas of detective narrative. This section of the novel is intended to prepare readers for the narrative 'terms' of the ensuing work of detective fiction. Referring to the particulars of the cricketing scorebook, the Prologue identifies how the sparse details it contains differ from yet also relate to the narratives of detective fiction:

This collection of names, letters and numbers can convey only so much. Purporting to tell all, the scorebook in fact conceals much. It feeds but does not satisfy. Would the reader of a crime novel be satisfied if they were told nothing more than that Person X was shot or stabbed by Person Y? To a certainty, not.

As such the scorebook becomes, if only by contrast, in itself part of the tapestry of the novel to come. As the Prologue proceeds, the scorebook is used as an imagined access point to the tale of murder to follow. The bald facts and figures of the scorebook become a representative 'skeleton' of information, a set of clues upon which the author and the detective must build their case:

The author in such a situation is like a detective. The facts of the case are gradually revealed and must then be transformed into the emerging outlines of a narrative. Who bowled to whom, how many runs were scored and over how long, the point at which the various wickets fell? Who went to see whom, how did they feel about it, and why did they do what they did as a result ... yea verily unto the act of murder itself?

The remainder of *Dead in the Long Room* sets out for readers the ways in which Inspector Cough and Agatha Miller build a case from the bare factual bones of the crime with which they are presented and unearth.

Dead in the Long Room also builds on my reading of other cricketing crime novels in making use of the game's metaphoric connotations. So, for example, the Honourable Devereux Lyminster (better known as Blotto, from Simon Brett's *Blotto*,

Twinks and the Rodents of the Riviera (Brett 2012)), is an unreformed schoolboy at heart who could have stepped straight from the pages of P.G. Wodehouse. Towards the end of the novel, faced with an evil villain intent on world domination, it is not the enforced marriage of his sister that truly enrages Blotto, but the fact that the villain (his old school pal 'Buzzer' Bluntleigh) has stolen his cricket bat. In *Dead in the Long Room*, the cricket bat serves a far different purpose. As the supposed weapon in the murder of Harold Wilde, it becomes in many senses the inversion of the kind of public-school values Blotto invokes. Instead of representing ideas of 'fair play' and 'decency' the bat becomes the symbol of criminality, though this later proves to be a red herring. In the case of both Brett's novel and my own, cricket is assumed to stand as a moral guardian; the bat, whether through positive or negative association, becomes the definer of acceptable behaviour. In the case of Brett's novel, the cricket bat is reunited with its true owner and transforms into Excalibur, a fearsome instrument of justice with which Blotto single-handedly proceeds to defeat an army of 'Buzzer' Bluntleigh's henchmen. The possibilities of a cricket bat are used differently in *Dead in the Long Room*, where Inspector Cough's rejection of the bat as murder weapon serves not to undermine but to reinforce its sacrosanct status.

Kerry Greenwood's *Death Before Wicket* (2008), featuring the Australian flapper-detective Phryne Fisher, contributed to the writing of *Dead in the Long Room* in a different way. A tale of theft, murder and academic intrigue set at Sydney University, cricket peppers the talk of the Dons and their students and the novel features a staff versus students match during which one of the students is ingeniously poisoned. Here cricket serves, as it does in *Dead in the Long Room*, as an unfolding metaphor for the twists and turns of criminal investigation. In the morally disrupted world of crime, cricket stands firm as a measure of civilisation and personal

morality. One of the Dons reflects ruefully upon the fact that one of his students (at the very heart of the crime, as it transpires) should also be capable of executing beautiful cover drives. It is clear that the man's crime pollutes the Don's reverence for the game. The equation of cricket with moral and societal rectitude provides ample opportunity for irony and subversion in Greenwood's novel, and I also make use of this ironic disjunction in *Dead in the Long Room*. In opting to set my novel at Lord's, the historical centre of the cricketing world (with other significant scenes occurring at and around Farnham Cricket Club), cricket and its social-moral overtones are central in *Dead in the Long Room*.

Adrian Allington's 1939 novel *The Amazing Test Match Crime*, also employs cricket, 'the King of Games and the Game of Kings' (35), as the benchmark of moral and social standards. Against this moral bastion are pitched confused outsiders, such as the Bond-like villain of the piece (the Professor who is endlessly bemused by what he calls 'Cricket'), and characters such as Ralph the Disappointment who finds the game confusing and is, by his own admission, 'no pukka fella' (57). Such contrasts also underpin the unfolding narrative of *Dead in the Long Room*. Jerome Kern and Inspector Cough, for example, appear in distinction to *aficionados* of the game: Doyle, Hornung, Milne, Wodehouse and Agatha Miller.

The Test Match Murder by Alfred Tack (1948) is a more conventional Golden Age crime novel, set against the preparations for a fictional Lord's test against Australia. As the England team prepares for the match at Ascote Hall, the ancestral home of Sir Edwin Ascote, the crime novelist George Brent is called in to investigate the mysterious death of Wilfred Sinclair. It is not long before more deaths follow, threatening the security of the team, the Ashes and the hopes of the nation. Similarly *Dead in the Long Room*, with its array of famous crime authors, deliberately conjures

with the idea of novelist as participant. As explored elsewhere in this critical analysis, Golden Age crime fiction is deliberately self-referential. As such the presence of the novelist-as-participant is an especially powerful trope¹⁹.

The presence of other ‘authorial’ voices within Golden Age fiction texts creates a destabilising force within the unfolding narrative; the detective’s narrative voice and developing reading and representation of crime are established as if in competition with those of the authors in the text. The Golden Age form in and of itself encodes the figure of the author as simultaneously teller and participant within the unfolding narrative. This is significant in *Dead in the Long Room* where it occurs both explicitly (in the dialogue of the novel) and implicitly (related to readers’ knowledge of these other authors and their works). The dialogic potential this opens up between the text and its readers liberates ‘conversations’ in both creative and critical domains. The existence of such intra-, inter- and supra-textual dialogues calls into question the traditionally established dichotomy between the creative and the critical, serving to illustrate the significance of processes of ‘enacted criticism’.

A Six for the Toff (1955) is one of a sequence of novels by John Creasey starring Richard Rollison, the eponymous ‘Toff’. The novel establishes The Oval (the novel’s major setting) as a cricketing manifestation of the Garden of Eden, a paradisaical space temporarily put out of joint by the sordid incursion of crime (Auden 1948). *Dead in the Long Room* transports the cricketing Eden north of the Thames to Lord’s. Provincial versions of the idyllic ‘space’ of the cricket field also exist in Farnham Cricket Club, which plays a significant role in the narrative, and to a lesser

¹⁹ Particularly famous examples are Agatha Christie’s Ariadne Oliver, who often appears alongside Hercule Poirot, and Harriet Vane in Dorothy L. Sayers’ Lord Peter Wimsey novels. An interesting variation on the trope is Ngaio Marsh’s Agatha Troy, who is an artist rather than an author.

extent Torquay Cricket Club, which provides a cricketing context for Agatha Miller and her involvement in the tale. Rowland (2001) identifies the important relationship that exists between crime writing and its location either in rural or urban contexts. In one sense, the rural idyll is defiled by crime, but in another sense it provides the natural location for murder. The contrast between the apparent perfection and tranquility of the landscape and the brutality of murder is stark.²⁰ The starkness of the contrast and its potential impact is exemplified in Chapter 6 of *Dead in the Long Room*, when Doyle and Hornung take some fresh air on the terrace after the discovery of Harold Wilde's body: 'Never mind the rolling fields of England, your Blake or your Wordsworth' observes Doyle. 'If there is a finer stretch of turf than this anywhere in the country, I'll eat my bat.'

Serious 'play': Playfulness and Pleasure in Detective Fiction

Appropriately enough having just discussed at some length the importance of the game of cricket, I now move on to consider the concept of 'play' in detective fiction and *Dead in the Long Room*. Playfulness and pleasure are essential components in the production and reception of literary texts. In *The Parliament of Fowls* (383, l. 15), Chaucer reflects on the balance between 'lust' and 'lore', thus conceiving of literary texts as 'spaces' of entertainment and playfulness, as well as of learning. Heidegger, in 'The Origin of the Work of Art' (2002: 44), proposes that literary works release unique creative possibilities for the forging and articulation of meanings that would otherwise remain hidden. Such views signal the unique place of literary texts in allowing writers and readers to play with potential meanings and the 'selves' that lie

²⁰ C.B.H. Kitchin's observations in *Crime at Christmas* (1934) about the role of the 'corpse' in detective fiction as foil to the safe domestic space of many Golden Age novels are also of interest and relevance here.

behind literary production. Each text represents a creative ‘playspace’ within which the known world and its potential meanings can be broken down and reshaped.

The classic Golden Age detective novel takes as one of its central dynamics the interplay of narrative possibilities. Competing versions of events, shifting motivations and the significance of sometimes misleading clues of place and time, engage readers in the central intellectual challenge (a critical as well as a creative process) of unmasking the malefactor before the novel’s denouement. Readers of Golden Age detective fiction are engaged quite deliberately in a competition²¹ or race with the detective; what Champigny (1977: 4-5) refers to as the ‘ludic interest’ of the detective narrative. Todorov’s classic analysis of the genre has shown how detective fiction offers not one story but two: the ‘absent but real’ narrative of the crime itself, and the ‘present but insignificant’ story of detectives’ efforts to uncover the truth (1977: 45–6). In negotiating the ontological-epistemological gulf and interplay between these two narratives, each detective novel is distinctive in its use of motifs, conventions and expectations. Self-reflexivity serves as a means of defining a detective novel’s shape and keeping each new example of the genre fresh²². The result is an engaging dynamic of play and ultimately, as *inter alia* Rowland (2001), Edwards (2016b), Scaggs (2005), Delamater & Prigozy (1997) and Green (2021) argue, a degree of generic self-criticism.

Dead in the Long Room draws upon the genre’s signature ludic dynamics and its literary practices. It is written into the DNA of Golden Age detective fiction that it should offer a variously implicit or explicit commentary on its own inherently playful dynamic. In order to illuminate the innate textuality of my novel and of Golden Age

²¹ As Hühn observes, the detective novel’s elaborate structure ‘presents a number of entangled writing-and-reading contests’ (1987: 459).

²² See here John Dickson Carr’s observations in ‘The Grandest Game in the World’ (1963) about playing the detective fiction ‘game’

novels more broadly, it is useful to consider Roland Barthes' (1974) concept of the 'writerly text' and Jerome Bruner's (1986) notion of 'subjunctification'. Mikhail Bakhtin's notions of carnival (1965) and polyphony (1981) also help to illuminate the intrinsically ludic design of *Dead in the Long Room*. Owing to the profoundly intertextual nature of Golden Age detective fiction and its 'offspring', it is important to acknowledge a fundamental underpinning collaborative function within the genre; a function that inevitably engages authors and readers in a variety of kinds of literary and detective game-playing.

Arthur Conan Doyle captures the derring-do playful nature of detective fiction in Sherlock Holmes' timeless and infectious cry that 'the game's afoot'. And ever since, metaphors associated with sport and a variety of other kinds of game or challenge have peppered the form. Here, for example, in *The Corpse in the Waxworks: A Paris Mystery* of 1932 we see John Dickson Carr, arguably the most famous proponent of the locked room mystery, employing the metaphor of the reverse chess game in an attempt to capture the work of the detective:

A chess game can be a terrible and enthralling thing, when you play it backwards and blindfolded. Your adversary starts out with his king in check, and tries to move his pieces back to where they were at first; that's why you can't apply rules or mathematical laws to crime. The great chess player is the one who can visualize the board as it will be after his move. The great detective is the one who can visualize the board as it has been when he finds the pieces jumbled. He must have the imagination to see the opportunities that the criminal saw, and act as the criminal would act. It's a great, ugly, terrific play of opposite imaginations. Nobody is more apt than a detective to say a lot of windy, fancy things about reasoning, and deduction, and logic. He

too frequently says 'reason' when he means 'imagination.' I object to having a cheap, strait-laced pedantry like reason confused with a far greater thing.

(1932, 2021: 256)

As we have already seen Edwards (2020b), in the 'Introduction' to his collection *Settling Scores: Sporting Mysteries* comments on the suitability of sporting settings for detective mysteries; a suitability of which *Dead in the Long Room* takes full advantage.

For other writers, different metaphors have been pressed into service when trying to capture the work of the detective, but in all cases the comparisons are to skilled and intellectual labour. So here, J.C. Masterman in *An Oxford Tragedy* compares the detective first to an historian and then to a surgeon:

And that's where the detective comes in; he's like a historian, tracing the hidden threads, diving into the forgotten past, exposing the plans and the motives of men, or like a surgeon, cutting down deep into a malignant growth, till at last he reaches its hidden source and origin. (1939: 27-8)

In *Dead in the Long Room*, I make use of similar metaphors for detection. When discussing the detection of crime with Inspector Cough in Chapter 15, for example, Agatha employs the metaphor of the dance:

Dances have their rules, Inspector. A waltz can only be in triple time and a polka in quadruple time. They would not work in anything else. And I have a feeling that detection is the same. It has its rules and its own particular tempo. Try to force it to fit to a different time and it will simply refuse, or at best it will be somehow out of sequence. No, an enquiry cannot be rushed —

it must unfold in its own time. I learnt at my classes in Torquay that the most talented dancers are those who best shape their bodies, their minds and their movements to the dictates of the music. I suspect that the best detectives are those who most effectively shape their solutions to the complex dictates of their witnesses' accounts.

In adopting this metaphor, I seek to capture the intricate and patterned physical activity of the dance, seeing in this a useful reflection of the movements of the detective narrative. Unlike metaphors of sport or chess, however, both of which imply a more or less confrontational dynamic, pitting criminals and detectives against one another, dance captures an activity that brings the two participants together in the creation of a shared narrative.

Thwaite (1990: 210-1) draws a key distinction between thrillers and detective fiction: 'Thrillers rely on the hunt and the chase. The detective novel is an intellectual game.' As this indicates, 'play' is a central feature of detective fiction of the Golden Age and, indeed, of detective fiction more broadly. Edwards (2016b: 7) observes how, in the wake of the First World War, Britain was swept by what he calls 'play fever'. In so doing he sees the emergence of Golden Age detective fiction as a particular literary response to social demands; as a form of ludic response to societal trauma and the need to rebuild.

It is perhaps for this reason that the fictional space of Golden Age crime has been understood by some to reside in such a particular and 'cosy' literary milieu (Knight 1980; Hughes 2016). Shaw (2014) also addresses the idea that Golden Age detective fiction is a 'comforting' form, relating this directly to the element of play:

To say dismissively that crime literature is relaxing is, however, to pinpoint one of the chief reasons why it is favoured by both the puzzle-makers and the humourists. It is for fun and for the personal enjoyment of the writer as much as for the reader. (159)

This was one of Raymond Chandler's²³ great 'bugbears' about the Golden Age detective novel, which he referred to as 'an arid formula which could not even satisfy its own implications' (1950: 522). This is a view, according to Bernthal (2019), with which few of the Golden Age novelists (probably excepting the word 'arid') would have had much dispute. It is in their self-conscious awareness of the parameters and the limitations inherent in the form that the writers of Golden Age detective fiction often find the greatest spur to their creativity, seeking by their ingenuity and artifice to transcend these. This is the 'game' (Carr 1963) that provides so much of the pleasure of Golden Age detective fiction. In many ways it can be seen as a genre about a genre, a mirror in a mirror, and as such its capacity for 'serious play' in the form of self-aware reflection is almost infinitely recursive. An interesting response to this idea is found in Kitchin's 1934 novel *Crime at Christmas*. In considering the nature of murder and the idea of the corpse in Golden Age fiction, he offers the opinion that it is not there to be 'realistic'; indeed, it is hardly even there to be the primary focus of the tale. It is there to provide a reason for the game of detection and to feed into (and to provide a frisson around) the congenial comfort of life. It is, he suggests, there to serve as a foil to domesticity and comfort; to 'bring out the

²³ Given his antagonistic relationship with the Golden Age crime tradition and his seminal role in developing the 'hard-boiled' crime novel, Chandler's presence in *Dead in the Long Room* is significant. The use of his voice and views as direct counterpoint to those of Agatha Miller is one of the important 'games' that I have played in the course of my novel. The interplay of authorial voices and the writers' differing views of crime and detection is central to my process in *Dead in the Long Room*.

prettiness of the chintz in the drawing-room and the softness of the grass on the Vicarage lawn' (1934, 2015: 237-8).

The process of writing *Dead in the Long Room* has clarified my view that far from representing a form of literary 'comfort' and stasis, as responses such as W.H. Auden's 'The Guilty Vicarage' (1948) might suggest, Golden Age crime writers, the detective figures they created and their readers are in fact engaged in a far less secure and stable project that seeks constantly not to reinforce, but rather to undermine itself. Indeed, as Gulddal & Rolls (2016: 3) suggest, rather than becoming enmired in its own form, much Golden Age detective fiction is 'predicated on mobility rather than the stasis of genre rules and conventions'. Self-conscious and parodic rule-breaking are staple features of the genre and often lead to the most creative and challenging dimensions of texts for writers and readers alike. Symons suggests that works of Golden Age detective fiction are often 'no more than entertaining verbal or visual puzzles to which some kind of story was attached' (1994: 5). It is my contention, however, that the literary 'games' of detection are in and of themselves one of the key functions of such narratives, and that these games can in and of themselves render the detective narrative an unsettling and challenging ludic space (Huizinga 1955). Detective narratives engage out of narrative necessity with what Bayard (2001: 20) refers to as 'the game-playing dimension'.

As the extracts explored earlier from *Death at the President's Lodgings*, *Smallbone Deceased* and other texts indicate, Golden Age authors offer their readers a shifting and self-critical literary landscape within which meanings and moral codes are far from 'fixed' and 'safe', where the narrative space is open to a variety of games, and where, indeed, narrative itself is both the site and the subject of critical interrogation. Works of Golden Age detective fiction and contemporary

manifestations of the form, such as Martin Edwards' *Gallows Court* (2019) and *Mortmain Hall* (2020a), and my own *Dead in the Long Room*, represent a dialogic exploration of their genre and its possibilities. In *Dead in the Long Room* I set out to engage in a variety of creative and playful ways with the unsettling and discomfiting nature of detection narrative by making, in the best tradition of Golden Age detective fiction, the narrative itself a problematised space.

Książopolska (2016: 39) asserts, in relation to Agatha Christie's classic *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* (1926, 2002), that the competition in Golden Age detective fiction 'is never between the detective and the murderer but always between the reader and the author'. This point of view requires both readers and writers to see the functions and formulations of Golden Age detective narratives as a particular form of game that operates according to sets of tacitly agreed 'rules', such as those of S.S. Van Dine (1928) or Ronald Knox (1929), the 'fair play' rules as adopted by the elite members of the Detection Club.

The Barthesian 'writerly text'

The idea of competition is particularly relevant to Golden Age detective fiction.

Authors writing in the genre knew that they were writing for a well-informed and genre-knowledgeable readership. The nature of clues and plot devices adds a well-understood body of narrative methods and highlights a range of known possibilities as the tale unfolds. In the heyday of Golden Age detective fiction, such knowledge and expertise on the part of readers was harnessed in the form of readers' competitions. An excellent example relates to *Behind the Screen* (1931), one of the collaborative works of members of the Detection Club. Broadcast audience members and magazine readers of the tale were encouraged to engage in their own

competitive sport: they were invited to write to *The Listener* to propose their own solutions to the mystery. Details of this intriguing competition can be found in *The Scoop & Behind the Screen* (1984: 228-9)

This competition illustrates the rich context of competition and gameplay that so often underpins Golden Age detective fiction, and the extent to which writers of the form encouraged readers to become involved in creating potential solutions of their own; in so doing demonstrating that the writers of detective fiction saw their readership as anything but passive recipients of received meanings. Such principles also lie behind *Dead in the Long Room*. The prevalence of ideas of gameplay suggests interesting connections to Barthes' distinction in *S/Z* (1974) between 'readerly' and 'writerly' texts; texts which respectively discourage or encourage readers to challenge the premises and parameters of the fictive world with which they are presented. In Golden Age detective fiction, textuality actively opens spaces for contestation and disputation: spaces within which, in spite of detectives' apparently godlike pronouncements, competing versions of events are possible. In the case of the *Behind the Screen* competition, this was captured in the questions posed by Milward Kennedy. Some of these questions, such as Question A1 were redolent of the 'readerly' text, where closed or restricted options are represented by a multiple choice ('Was Paul Dudden's death Murder, Suicide or Accident?'). Others, however, were more open, evaluative or 'writerly' in nature: 'By whom were the wounds in Dudden's neck inflicted? When? Where? With what motive?' Here readers are presented with a wider scope to consider the potential implications and meanings of the text. Readers are invited, in effect, to become active 'writers' of the potentialities of the tale; to engage in Brunerian acts of subjunctification. Still other questions offer the opportunity for fuller 'writerly' engagement with the text. Question

C, for example, requires readers, in not more than 200 words, either to outline how 'a charge of murder could be brought against one or more persons, and what persons' or to 'outline the strongest arguments available for the defense' should a trial for murder ensue (1984: 219).

As this competition suggests, readers of classic detective fiction are in some senses at least allowed as much freedom as the textual detective, Inspector Rice. Readers' own interpretations and imaginative responses to the literary text, however, hold an interesting position in works of detective fiction. Whilst on one level readers are encouraged to participate in the 'game' of reconstructing the events of the crime and in seeking to 'unmask' the murderer, in another sense they are obliged to submit their own views to the ultimate 'authority' of the textual detective. As much is suggested by the *Listener* competition for *Behind the Screen* (1930). The competition, of course, had to be judged upon the 'correctness' of responses according to the authorised solution, and Rice the detective thus exerts a 'readerly' power over the text. Whatever the 'writerly' possibilities suggested by the detective fiction form (and of the collaborative 'play' readers and writers might engage in), there nevertheless exists an inevitable tension surrounding the ultimate and sanctioned solution of the textual detective. Whilst no competition of this sort is attached to *Dead in the Long Room*, the principles upon which such competitions are based, relate to the novel. Readers are free to engage in similar acts of questioning and creative projection in relation to the unfolding narrative. In fact, such predictive and 'playful' processes are a fundamental aspect of reading and interpretation.

This discussion has highlighted the importance of ideas of 'play' in relation to the reading of Golden Age detective fiction and the ways in which this might be conceived by both writers and readers. The on-going theorisation through practice of

these ideas is further evidenced in relation to the next of the Detection Club's collaborative endeavours, *The Scoop* (1931). Unlike in the case of *Behind the Screen*, the authors contributing to this novel worked to a shared design from the outset. Dorothy L. Sayers, who was evidently prominent both as instantiator of these works and as spokesperson and apologist for the group, clearly sees in the writing of these collaborative works a sustained forum for theorisation. Her commentaries on the processes of collaboration provide a fascinating insight into the ways in which the 'game' of writing and reading detective fiction is played²⁴. In the case of *The Scoop*, she tells us, the plot 'was planned in rough outline by all the authors in the committee before the broadcasting of Chapter 1' (The Detection Club 1930, 1984: 228). Once this initial planning exercise was complete, each contributor was then left relatively free 'to develop his [sic] own style and method', but reference back to the shared design was required in the development of key incidents and plotting, and 'any point of detail which arose in the course of working the chapter out being decided in consultation with myself and his other fellow-authors' (228).

In a typical Golden Age reflexive gesture, competition and collaboration prove to be features not only of the writing process, but of the narrative of *The Scoop* itself as we see the *Morning Star* journalist Dennis Oliver investigating the murders in parallel with the Yard's Chief Inspector Bradford before they ultimately combine forces towards the end of the book when a murder attempt is made on another staff member at the *Star*. Such dynamic interactions between text and metatext are a typical feature of Golden Age detective fiction and are dynamics present in multiple ways in the text of *Dead in the Long Room* where we have not only multiple

²⁴ Other practitioners who have interestingly commented on their own methods in writing crime are Patricia Highsmith (1983) and P.D. James (2009).

detectors of crime (Inspector Cough and Agatha Miller in the main plot of the novel, and Doyle and Wodehouse in the novel's blackmail sub-plot) but also multiple writers of crime: the members of the Authors' XI, several of whom are crime writers, and Cough who also perceives his own work quite explicitly in this way.

The impetus behind the compositional 'play' of Golden Age detective fiction relates to and builds on a suggestion made by Sayers in the *Listener* correspondence relating to *Behind the Screen*. She suggests that '[t]here is no reason at all why a perfectly "correct" detective story should not be produced, even where the plot is not planned in collaboration' (229). So long, she goes on to observe, as 'each writer writes with a definite solution in mind and lays his clues properly, those clues can be picked up and worked to a satisfactory conclusion by a subsequent writer' (229). Whilst in one sense these observations might be taken to relate to the very specific contexts of collaborative composition, her remarks are nevertheless apposite to any writer (or reader) of Golden Age crime. The self-reflexive nature of the form with its knowing intertextuality encourages the idea that works within this genre are, in some sense at least, all works of a more or less collaborative nature; works built around a set of shared principles within which it is expected that writers will play fair. In this sense, also, we might understand the 'writerly' dimensions of text that place the reader as (a sometimes complicit) collaborator in the functioning of the literary text and in the acceptance of its meaning. Such principles lie very much at the heart of *Dead in the Long Room* which sets out, as do Golden Age novels of detection, to reconsider and artfully reframe the game they are playing (Carr 1963)

In the writing of *The Floating Admiral* (1931), which provides a further interesting example of how the writing of detective fiction functions, all contributions

were prepared independently and serialistically. Sayers outlines how: 'each contributor tackled the mystery presented to him in the preceding chapters without having the slightest idea what solution or solutions the previous authors had in mind' (1931: xviii). The novel thus provides an opportunity for a collaborative testing of Sayers' earlier contention that rational method and adherence to what we might recognise as Bruner's 'narrative' mode will produce a satisfactory and logical result if all contributing authors attend sufficiently to each other's implicit textual promptings and clues, 'playing fair' by the rules of the game. Thus, the contributors were not simply writing into the void in an elaborate and extended form of the game of consequences. Instead, they were required not only to produce their own chapter but also to supply the 'solution' towards which they were working.

The rules of Golden Age detection, whether followed or not, provide ways of reading. In the same way as thinking 'outside the box' is still framed in terms of 'the box', so detective fiction, no matter how far it may stray from its own rules, is still defined and read in relation to them. The rules, whether adhered to or not by a writer can be applied by a reader, and in such a situation a writer who breaks a rule can either delight or frustrate a reader. Agatha Christie's seminal novel *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* provides an example of triumphant rule-bending. The novel's continued capacity to enthrall readers is in no way diminished by the eventual revelation that Dr Sheppard, the narrator, is himself the murderer. On other occasions, however, rule-breaking can lead to frustration, as in the case of Father Ronald Knox's own contribution to *Six Against the Yard* (1936, 2014) in which Ex-Superintendent Cornish (a retired and highly successful detective charged with trying to unravel the purportedly 'perfect murders' perpetrated on paper by the novelists)

leaps straight in with the complaint that ‘Father Ronald Knox hasn’t played fair!’ (1936, 2014: 92).

In this respect, Golden Age detective fiction provides writers and readers alike with plentiful scope for ranging into Bruner’s ‘paradigmatic mode’ by including shock reversals, masqueraded identities, repurposing of clues, and the reconsideration of events from multiple new angles in the light of newly-discovered information. In the interests of playing fair—although we might question how far this is genuinely ‘fair’ on the reader—information is not left unrevealed, but writers of Golden Age detective fiction will frequently place a clue or a key piece of information at a point and time where its relevance is unlikely to be appreciated. It is not until the detective has skilfully reconstructed the material that its significance becomes apparent. In *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, to which I have already referred, Dr Sheppard never outright lies as he narrates the events surrounding Ackroyd’s death (Bayard 2001; Książopolska 2016), he simply systematically omits to reveal elements of the truth.

‘Fair play’, therefore, does not preclude elements of trickery and sleight of hand. The writers of Golden Age detective fiction frequently seek to hide the solutions to their murder mysteries (and the clues that lead to these solutions) in plain sight. Significant in this game is what Bayard (2001: 25) refers to as ‘distraction’: a method whereby ‘all the tension of the work is directed, through a detailed organization of invisibility, toward the prevention of thought’. It is the equivalent of the magician’s sleight of hand; a process by which readers are either genuinely ‘distracted’, or a process they willingly choose not to see in order to keep alive the ‘magic’ of the trick played upon them. Serafini (2019: 24) captures something of this collusive relationship when he observes the importance in Golden

Age detective fiction of 'a convoluted plot, clues and red herrings, a gothic atmosphere, a series of bizarre but tacitly accepted coincidences'.

Čapek (1924), commenting on the important role of chance in the solution of crime in detective fiction, also draws our attention to the importance of clues:

But what would all reason, all method, all universal information avail if in some special and miraculous way a lucky chance did not serve the detective? At the right moment chance will bring him [sic] to the right spot; chance brings unexpected revelations across his way, and should his foot slip, instead of breaking his nose as it would in all certainty happen to you or me he would fall just on the very footprint of the fleeing criminal. (10)

Chance in relation to clues plays an important role in *Dead in the Long Room* when Agatha Miller, returning to Lord's Cricket Ground, encounters Madeline Gooch waiting for an omnibus and as a result comes into possession of a shopping list that will in turn confirm Madeline Gooch as the writer of a letter that becomes central to the solving of the crime. Other examples occur when, on her morning walk by the Thames with her brother Monty, Agatha passes the offices of Cassell and Co. and sees the advertisement for P.G. Wodehouse's forthcoming novel *Not George Washington*, and when the composer Jerome Kern happens across Inspector Cough's advertisement calling for information that has been placed in the newspapers.

This in turn draws our attention to the work of the detective and their finding of clues. Here again, Čapek provides an insight:

When a detective enters a room he doesn't look around for the feeling of twenty years of peaceful life, but for the scratch on the door or the dust which has been wiped off from the mantelpiece. All things exist only for the clues they leave behind; people themselves are only the sum-total of their own clues. (1924: 11)

The use of clues and their relation to the characters that lie behind them relates interestingly to both the creative and the critical functions of detective narratives. The role of clues in the forming of the detective's account of the crime is the creative 'building' of a story (and a construction of human motivations) based upon a critical selection from the range of clues available, some of which will be reliable and useful, some of which may well be red herrings. An example of this from *Dead in the Long Room* is Cough's finding of the red thread in the doorway connecting the Long Room and the Long Room Bar which readers may or may not connect with the red curtains in Frances Henchard's office (a real clue that will eventually prove to be of significance in solving the mystery). The cigar ash that Cough and Oates find in the upper areas of the pavilion, by contrast, proves to be a distraction.

Inspector Cough in *Dead in the Long Room* is well aware of the extent to which he needs regularly to revise the story of the crime he is writing in the light of new evidence, as he tells Milne in Chapter 13:

I have to produce crime reports for all of my cases, of course. I suppose that qualifies me as a writer in some sense. I often feel that as a detective I am a crime writer of sorts. As a case unfolds and new information becomes

available, I have to piece together a coherent narrative, you know. I have to find some way of telling myself the story of what might have taken place. It isn't easy, of course, because the story is in a constant state of flux.

In this, Cough's ideas intersect with the later ideas of the real life Milne who, in his Introduction to *The Red House Mystery*, reflects upon the different relationship between clues and the detective and clues and the author:

A scar on the nose of one of the guests might suggest nothing to a detective, but the explicit mention of it by the author gives it at once an importance out of all proportion to its face-value. (1922, 2008: xi).

Clues and the narratives spun around them are one of the most significant forms of 'play' in Golden Age detective fiction.

It is also interesting to acknowledge the dramatic overtones of the word 'play'. Golden Age detective fiction is rife with elements of literary 'theatre'²⁵ with its often artfully 'staged' murders, its dependence upon carefully orchestrated 'exits and entrances', its use of the props of murder, the denouement 'performances' of Hercule Poirot and a string of other detectives as they present their brilliant solutions to admiring audiences, melodramatic villains and helpless victims, costumes and disguises.

²⁵ Many writers of Golden Age detective fiction also produced mystery plays for the stage, for radio and in later years for the screen (both large and small). Ngaio Marsh was a celebrated theatre director and set a number of her novels in theatrical settings, such as *Enter a Murderer* (1935) and *Opening Night* (1951), as well as *Vintage Murder* (1937). Agatha Christie wrote 16 plays, some for the stage and others for the radio. Her legendary play *The Mousetrap* is still running in London's West End where it is joined at the time of writing by a production of *Witness for the Prosecution*.

Dead in the Long Room: Detective Fiction as Bakhtinian Dialogic Play

In considering the idea of 'play' further, the Bakhtinian lens of 'dialogue' draws attention to notions of literary interaction and 'the answering word' in Golden Age detective fiction. In this domain, ludic dimensions of the detective form are highlighted through the texts' exchange and contest of distinct voices. These voices are varied and multiple ranging, in *Dead in the Long Room*, from the authorial (Doyle, Hornung, Milne, Wodehouse, Chandler, Miller/Christie) to the intertextual (Doyle's Holmes canon and Wodehouse's *Not George Washington*), the epistolary (blackmail letters) and the mimetic (as the text seeks to echo the literary worlds of Doyle, Wodehouse, Milne, Christie and others in a sequence of acts of literary gameplay).

Such gameplay is a regular feature of Golden Age detective fiction. Embedded textual authorial dialogue, for instance, is a key feature of *Ask a Policeman* (1933, 2019). This novel is concerned from the outset with the interplay of contrasting voices, opening not by establishing a classic crime scene but instead with a correspondence between John Rhode and Milward Kennedy.²⁶ The playful epistolary interchange between Rhode and Kennedy is reflected in the game the writers play in the novel, swapping detectives for their respective contributions: so, Anthony Berkeley writes using Dorothy L. Sayers' Lord Peter Wimsey while Sayers uses Berkeley's Roger Sheringham, and Gladys Mitchell employs Helen Simpson's Sir John Saumarez while Simpson writes a section using Mrs Bradley. The subject of the opening letters is, suitably enough, detective fiction and the writers' processes of

²⁶ The use of The Scorebook provides a similarly oblique way into the detection narrative of *Dead in the Long Room*.

composition; a topic that also plays a significant part in *Dead in the Long Room*. Inspector Cough, Agatha Miller, Wodehouse, Hornung, Doyle and Milne all at various points engage in discussion of the art of writing crime.²⁷ The premise of the novel, therefore, is not solely detection but also literary impersonation and parody, as they are in *Ask a Policeman*. As we have seen, both A.A. Milne and P.G. Wodehouse published a number of Sherlock Holmes parodies early in their writing careers (Milne 1903; Wodehouse 1903a, 1903b, 1903c, 1903d), and the idea of literary impersonation lies at the heart of the plot of both Wodehouse's novel *Not George Washington* and *Dead in the Long Room*, in which both blackmail and murder plots hinge upon a supposed literary deception planned by Wodehouse and Conan Doyle.

The result of such playful narrative 'games' is a practical outworking of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. In the constant interplay between me (as author), the authors involved as characters in the *Dead in the Long Room* and the anticipated reader, the text is, at a number of levels, brought face-to-face with 'the profound influence of the answering word' (Bakhtin 1981: 280). Readers well-versed in the realms of detective fiction will be alive to such literary games, deploying a set of resources for creatively reading (Scholes 1985; Knights & Thurgar-Dawson 2008) other works of Golden Age detective fiction. They carry in their heads a personal 'library' of detective fiction and are in a position to use this as a resource; like the

²⁷ The presence of an array of authors of crime in *Dead in the Long Room*—all of whom seek in their own ways to understand and 'tell' the story—serves to destabilise the detective's own position in relation to the narrative of the crime he seeks to create. This is an extension of the trope, observed by Gulddal & Rolls (2016), that Christie employs in deploying the figure of Ariadne Oliver and that Dorothy Sayers employs in using Harriet Vane. Stewart (2017: 110) observes the importance of the author-figure in detective fiction, stating that: 'To include a character within a detective novel who is an author of detective fiction is a strategy ... to continue the debate about the nature of the form ... The reader is invited to measure the work s/he is reading against the paradigm presented within the work itself, and, simultaneously, the author displays self-consciousness about the task of writing'. Ontological and epistemological domains of the literary text are effectively collapsed.

detectives of the era themselves, readers can use one detective as a means of reading another through a game of fictional dialogic boundary-crossing²⁸.

It is also instructive to note the appositeness of Bakhtin's influential notion of carnival (1965) to *Dead in the Long Room*. The concept certainly resonates with the subversive premise of the novel, where for a brief season of misrule, the culturally high-stakes cast of authors, actors, composers and even the Secretary of the Marylebone Cricket Club himself are shepherded into the holding pen of suspicion, while Inspector Cough and Constable Oates are given *carte blanche* to investigate the case without fear or favour. This sorts well with Shaw's suggestion, in terms reminiscent of Bakhtin, of the importance of '[i]nversion, overturning, ribaldry and joyous play' (2014: 6) in the wider Golden Age genre, and implies that the scope for rule-breaking and inversion is not restricted but rather broadened by its ludic propensities in a context of dialogism, parody, and intertextual play.

By working in literary 'collaboration' with the authors who feature in *Dead in the Long Room* and more broadly with the whole corpus of Golden Age detective fiction writers, I have become increasingly aware of the range of compositional strategies available to writers of detective fiction. Such 'collaborative' activity opened up new possibilities as I worked with the characters and the ideas of the various authors within the fictional domain of *Dead in the Long Room*. The novel is at one level an individual endeavour, but is also a movement outwards from what might be considered the univocal 'certainties', purpose and logic of a sole-authored work. The

²⁸ As we have already seen Agatha Christie, in her novel *Partners in Crime*, uses Tommy and Tuppence Beresford's bookshelf as a literal 'library resource' in shaping her narrative.

process of writing *Dead in the Long Room* opened my eyes to the ways in which other authors and their work are an ever-present influence on the act of writing.

Such interactions are also, of course, available within the relationship between authors and readers. There is a good case to return to the idea of 'collaboration' in exploring and conceptualising the dialogic interaction and narrative experimentalism that takes place between writers and readers of detective fiction. We may note, for example, how these elements are encoded within recent radical re-readings of classic detective novels by *inter alia* Bayard (2001, 2008) and Gulddal (2016).

The 'space' of the text

One of the ways in which Golden Age writers frequently seek to establish the parameters of their fictional spaces is through the use of maps and plans. As Miskimmin (2019: 94) notes, this is to assist and shape the narrative in a number of distinct ways: 'navigation, location and demarcation'. Ržepka (2005: 157) argues that the presence of maps, plans and other similar textual devices, such as facsimiles of writing fragments are used to release 'metonymic possibilities for [readers'] ongoing invention' as they engage with the mystery they face. They are, in other words, part of the creative apparatus of the textual space. Famous examples can be found in novels such as Innes' *Death at the President's Lodgings* (Figure 1):

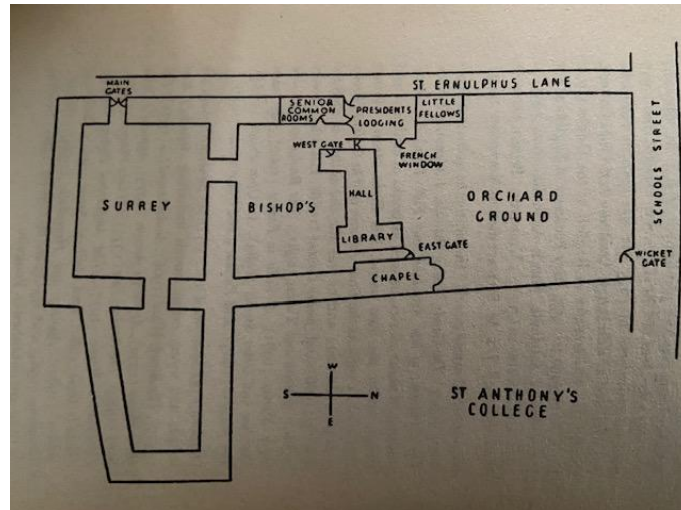


Figure 1: Innes, *Death at the President's Lodgings*

Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (Figure 2):

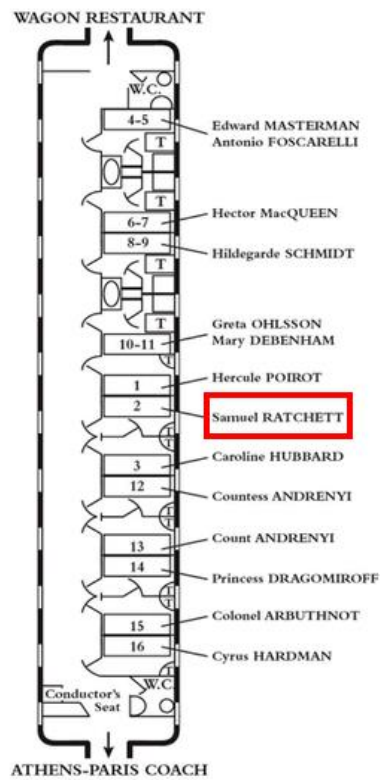


Figure 2: Christie, *Murder on the Orient Express*

Daniel's *The Cambridge Murders* (Figure 3):

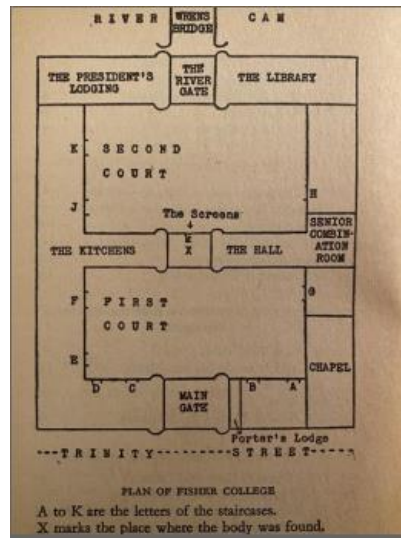


Figure 3: Daniel *The Cambridge Murders*

The Detection Club's *The Floating Admiral* (Figure 4):

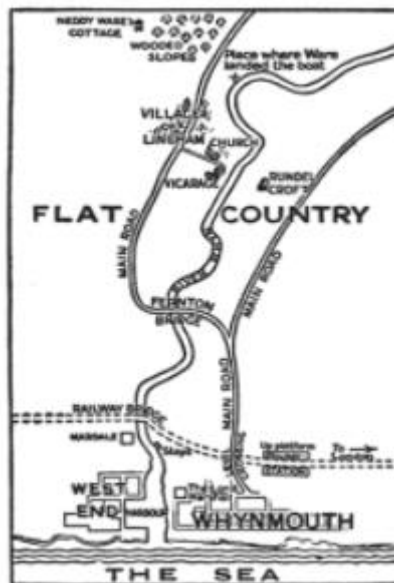


Figure 4: The Detection Club, *The Floating Admiral*

and The Detection Club's *Ask a Policeman* (Figure 5):

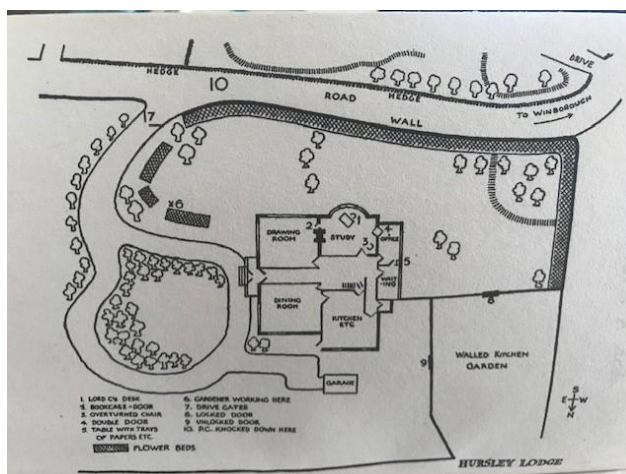


Figure 5: The Detection Club, *Ask a Policeman*

According to where maps and plans occur within the text, they may fulfil different functions (Table 1).

Where maps or plans are found	Their role in the narrative
at the outset	Maps and plans at the start of the text are significant shapers of the topos as learning space; they control readers' sense of the space of the novel, the confines within which the workings of the crime and its detection are (largely) to take place.

mid text	<p>Maps and plans emerging mid-text fulfil the functions of the previous category also, but in addition may represent evidence of the detective's developing sense of the learning space of the narrative; such maps and plans may be shaped by the investigation to date and provide a visual summary of the detective's sense of the space of the investigation at a given point in the novel. Maps and plans of this sort may also be part of the evidence emerging in the course of the investigation, and may be clues found by or sent to characters (including, but not limited to) the detective in the course of the investigation.</p>
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Table 1: Maps and plans in Golden Age detective fiction

In both cases, maps and plans are key dialogic elements of text, and are to be tested against or used in combination with the written text. Sometimes they are left to speak for themselves, but often they are explicitly discussed in the novel.

Maps and plans have an important part to play in *Dead in the Long Room*. An initial set of floor plans of the pavilion at Lord's is provided in order to establish for readers the location of the fiction. As such they are an important element of the 'information' readers need, given that many readers will not be familiar with the interior of Thomas Verity's iconic building. However, they are also crucial in demarcating the important 'spaces' within which the events of the Authors' versus Actors' match unfold. As a well-established genre trope in Golden Age detective

fiction, I felt it helpful to supply floor plans of relevant areas of the pavilion at Lord's up front in order to establish the 'space' of the following narrative. As Miskimmin observes, 'pre-empting ... the written narrative with the illustrated one emphasizes the significance of the map and the metaphorical processes of navigation and location.' (2019: 95). This also relates to Turchi's metaphor of 'the world of the story' (2004: 14); a world that maps and plans can help to establish. This was a particularly important idea for me in writing *Dead in the Long Room*, as the precincts of the pavilion at Lord's represent a notoriously exclusive and therefore 'unknown' space.

Furthermore, Snell identifies the importance of the map in works of fiction, foregrounding the 'house-by-house cartography' that forms 'a grid for the plot' (2010: 26). Maps and diagrams provide essential information for readers and must be 'read' as part of the textual evidence made available to them. For this reason, I felt it was important to engage readers with the spatiality of the pavilion at the outset by means of a set of floor plans (Figures 6-9), so that they would be able to locate their reading and understanding of the ensuing written text, which relies on their understanding of the layout of the building. In this way, as Monmonnier has written (1993: 3), readers are enabled to 'visualize regions and comprehend relative distances and other geographic relationships' and in so doing the maps and plans amplify the written text and its significance.

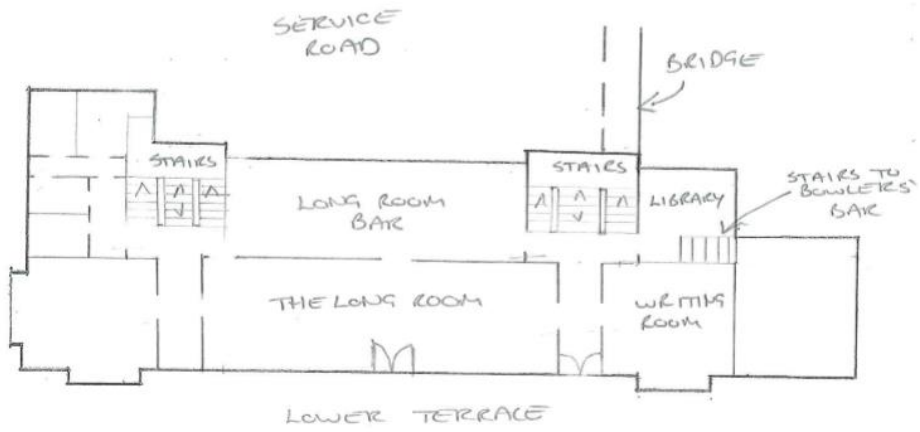


Figure 6: Ground Floor of the Lord's Pavilion

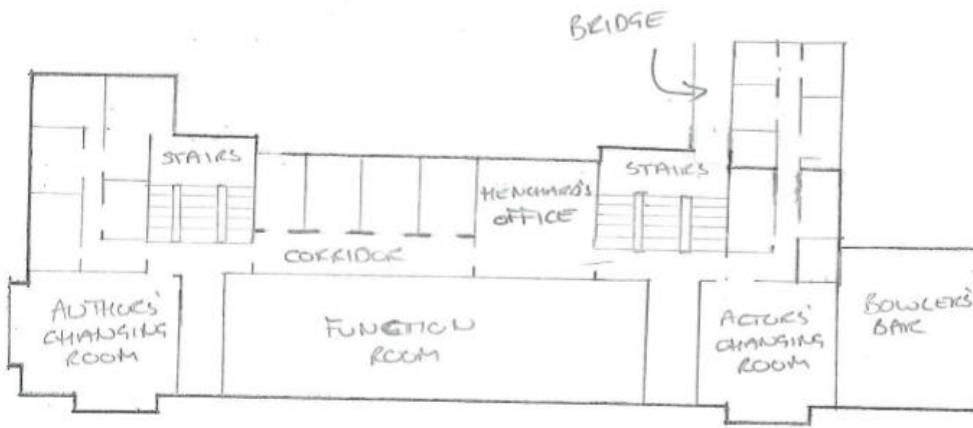


Figure 7: First Floor of the Lord's Pavilion

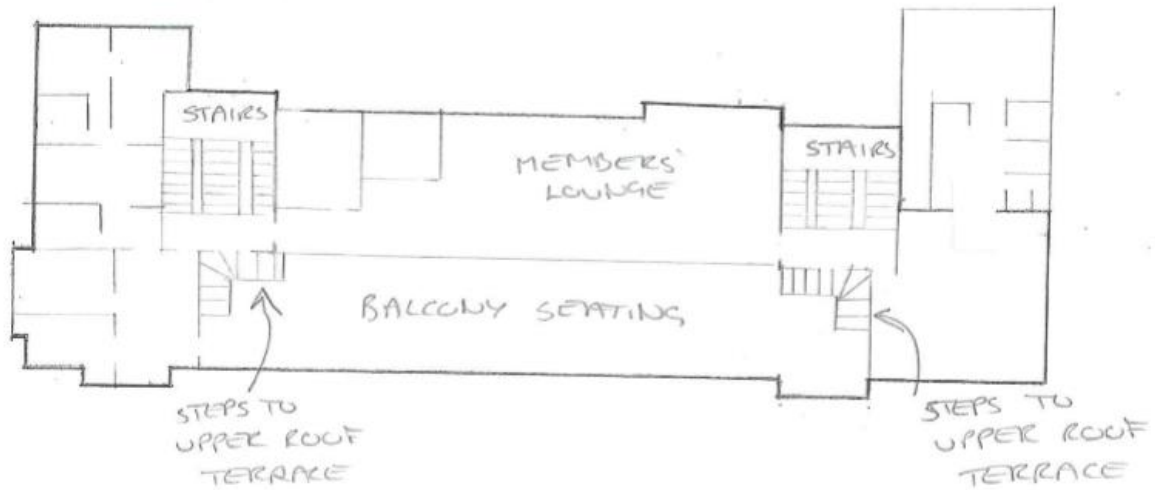


Figure 8: Second Floor of the Lord's Pavilion

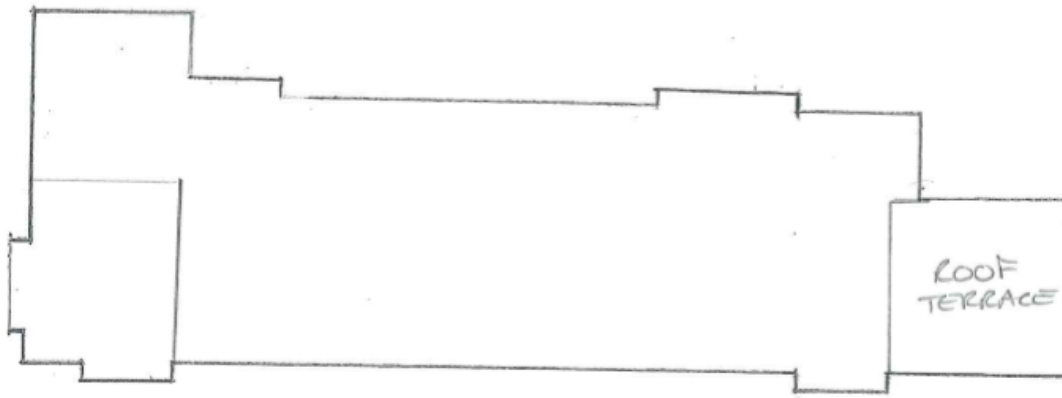


Figure 9: Roof Terrace of the Lord's Pavilion

Elsewhere in *Dead in the Long Room*, however, the maps do not serve simply as a 'locating' function but become, as identified in Table 1, a part of the dynamic of the text and the investigation itself. So, Inspector Cough produces his own hand-drawn

plan to assist him in composing his developing thoughts about the topos of the crime at Lord's (Figure 10). The drawing of the plan of the Long Room, like the other jottings in Cough's notebook and the list of issues he identifies to follow up in the course of his investigation, becomes another of the textual methods by which he seeks to shape and control the narrative of the crime he is trying to compose. Maps, as Campbell (1991) identifies, are also exercises in 'plotting' (a richly double meaning here), and are essential in helping both detectives, characters and readers to locate themselves in relation to the developing narrative.

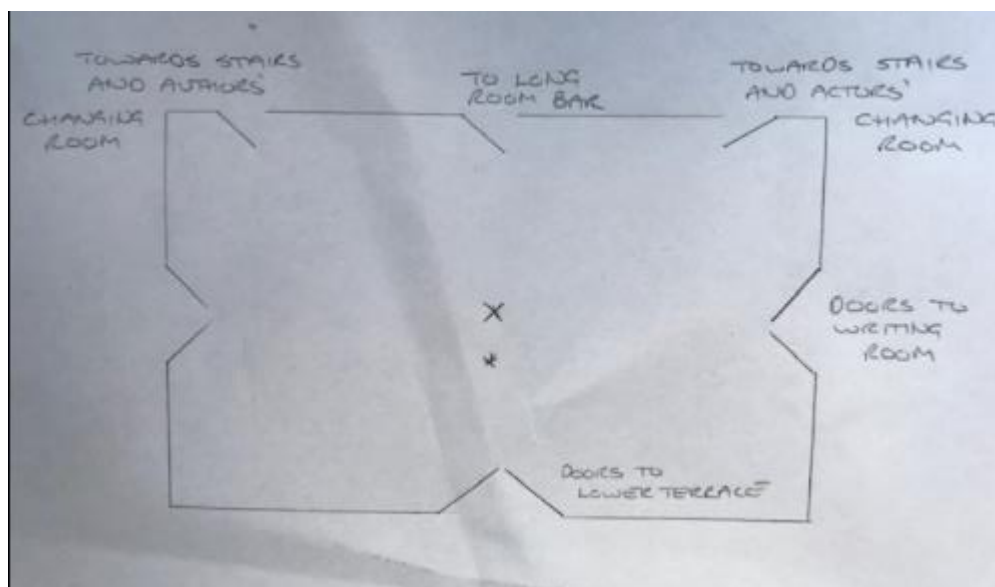


Figure 10: Cough's diagram of The Long Room

Later on in the novel, I use maps and plans differently again. In Chapter 12, A.A. Milne receives a note with a diagram of the Long Room threatening falsely to place him there at the time of the murder of Harold Wilde. In this case, the plan is not an attempt to shape the 'space' of the novel, which has already been defined, but rather (like the blackmail letters sent to Doyle and Wodehouse) it is a textual intervention

intended to coerce a reaction from one of the characters; the plan becomes itself an actor within the dynamic of the text, prompting Milne's next steps. Although we do not see the diagram in the text, its presence is nevertheless significant:

Tilting his head this way and that, Milne scrutinised the page. The diagram was of what seemed to be a long room. At the centre of the room was a cross and next to it the letters H.W. Beneath the diagram was a single sentence—a stark and disturbing question—written in neat capital letters and in the same ink as the drawing:

WHAT IF INSPECTOR COUGH BELIEVED YOU WERE HERE?

Maps, plans and references to them serve to remind readers of the significance of the physical space of the novel and its importance in Inspector Cough's investigation. But more than this they serve, as Miskimmin identifies, both to reinforce the role of this kind of documentary evidence in helping shape the solution of the case and in 'add[ing] verisimilitude to the narrative' (2019: 96).

In this way, the maps and plans of Golden Age detective fiction, and of *Dead in the Long Room*, serve to offer readers the opportunity to enter into and participate in the world of detection process, placing them as potential detectives in their own right. Maps encourage them, alongside the content of the written text, to test for themselves the possibility of the detective's evolving investigation and proposed solutions. This is all, of course, consistent with the Golden Age emphasis upon 'fair play', whereby the reader is presented with all the information required to reach the

solution of the mystery for themselves. Maps are an important element of the metafictional 'game' that is detective fiction.

Real locations and *Dead in the Long Room*

Real historical locations are also an important element of *Dead in the Long Room*. In developing scenes employing these places, it was particularly helpful to have recourse to photographs and other images; these helped me to locate the novel in both space and time. I was also fortunate enough to be given two personal tours of the pavilion at Lord's as part of my research.

A good example comes early in the novel, when we see the arrival of Agatha Miller and her brother Monty on the day of the Authors' Match at St John's Wood Road station (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Picture of St John's Wood Road Station

<https://www.stjohnswoodmemories.org.uk/content/new-contributions/history-st-johns-wood-marlborough-road-stations> [last accessed 21/10/2021]

The station itself no longer exists, Lord's now being served by St John's Wood Station. However, the former station is important in establishing both the area of London within which the novel is set and the atmosphere on the day of the match between the Authors' and Actors' XIs. The following passage from Chapter 1 demonstrates this:

It was the 15th of August 1907—a Thursday—as the young woman made her way up through the cramped foyer of the old station building from the Metropolitan and St John's Wood Railway train that had deposited her and the young man accompanying her, the day's edition of *The Times* rolled neatly under one arm, on the platform below. As they emerged from the station at St John's Wood Road preparatory to making their way towards the hallowed turf, they paused to take in the splendour of the day. From beneath came the rumble of their train departing on its way northward.

Another central location on *Dead in the Long Room* is, probably not surprisingly, the Long Room in the Lord's pavilion itself. Again photographs, alongside several in-person visits to the location itself, were important in helping me to create the 'space' of the events of my novel. Figure 12 shows the Long Room circa 1914, seven years after the setting of my novel. It provides a sense of the size and grandeur of the room and the incongruity of finding a dead body there. It also shows the door connecting the Long Room itself with the Long Room Bar, caught in which Cough finds a tell-tale red thread that will prove a significant clue in solving the murder of Harold Wilde.



Figure12: The Long Room circa 1914 (Hart-Davies 2004)

Figure 13 was also an important image in helping me to recreate the setting of scenes that take place in the Long Room. It captures the space from the opposite direction, showing the open door that allows access to the staircase leading to the Actors' changing room and the Old Library. The double doors at the far end of the image lead to a corridor and the Writing Room. Interestingly, in this photograph the door connecting the Long Room and the Long Room Bar has been converted into a display cabinet and the fireplace visible to the right of the photograph in Figure 12 has been removed. Such specific period details were important in ensuring the accuracy of my portrayal of the space as it would have been in 1907, when the Authors' versus Actors' match took place.



Figure 13: The Long Room (Hart-Davies 2004)

Another significant location in the novel is the Old Library, pictured in Figure 14. This is the venue selected by Inspector Cough for the conduct of his interviews on the day of the Authors' versus Actors' match. It is also the location of the final 'reveal' scene of *Dead in the Long Room*. The staircase, just visible at the left of the photograph, connects the Old Library to the Bowlers' Bar. These are the stairs up which Henchard runs prior to committing suicide at the end of the novel.



Figure 14: The Old Library at Lord's (Hart-Davies 2004)

A final photograph to which I referred in the writing of the novel is an 1898 picture of the front of the pavilion (Figure 15). The frontage has not changed since the building was first constructed, so this is precisely as it would have appeared in 1907 when the match occurred. The roof terrace where A.A. Milne goes during the match is at the top right of the picture and the window of the Bowlers' Bar, from which Henchard jumps to commit suicide is the first floor window of the low extension to the far right of the image. The Long Room occupies the Ground Floor behind the terraced seating in the long central section of the building.



Figure 15: Picture of the front of the pavilion at Lord's in 1898 (Hart-Davies 2004)

Before leaving images that were significant in the writing of *Dead in the Long Room*, however, it is important to refer to the plan at Figure 16. This shows the ground and the stands at the time of the match in 1907.

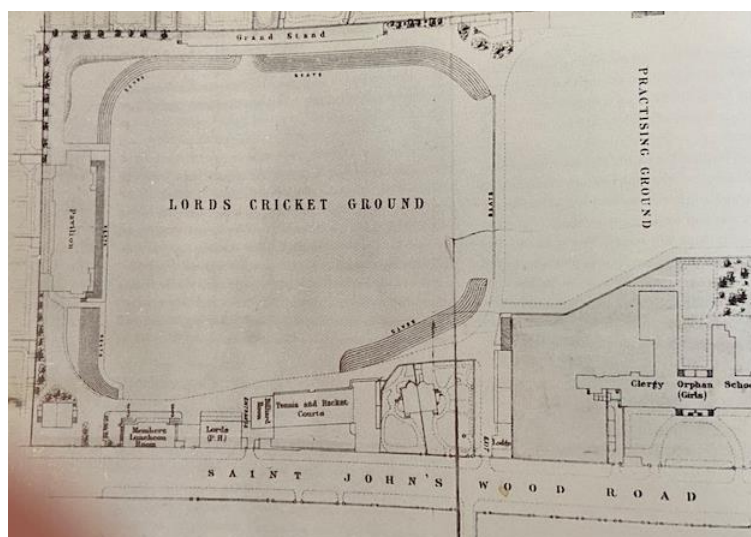


Figure 16: Plan of Lord's Cricket Ground circa 1907 (Hart-Davies 2004)

This plan was invaluable in shaping my sense of the ground as it would have been in 1907 and in helping me to develop the narrative. A good case in point is the section in Chapter 33, in which Jerome Kern presents his evidence to Inspector Cough. The Mound Stand, from which Kern observes A.A. Milne on the roof terrace of the pavilion is at the bottom right hand corner of the ground in the image (the stand to the left of the Clergy Orphan School). This plan was supplemented by a YouTube video developed by the Lord's Cricket Library archival team demonstrating in 3D the historical development of the ground over time. Figure 17 is a screen capture from this video. It shows the layout of the ground and the stands in 1906, just one year prior to the events of *Dead in the Long Room*. This shows the ground, therefore, substantially as it would have been at the time of the match between the Authors' and Actors XIs in 1907.

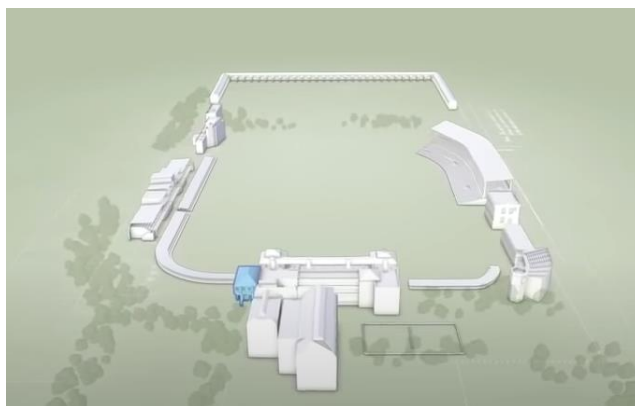


Figure 17: Screenshot from YouTube video available at

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqTuKsWBI-g> [last accessed 23/09/2021]

Conclusion

This essay began with reference to Lasky's view of poetics and creative writing research. She makes a plea for a closer integration of creative works and the critical and theoretical concepts that lie around them, envisioning a triptych, its panels connected by hinges that allow for movement between them. She is arguing for practices and modes of thought that will encourage the establishment of 'a flexible, active, connection' (2013: 22) between domains that are often (falsely) seen as distinct. The concept of 'poetics' as she describes it 'is instigated during the compositional process as an integral part of that process' (25) and becomes a powerful feature of the writer's creative armoury. Where this occurs, she argues, this 'poetics' becomes a means by which writers can explore their own work critically from within. So, for instance, they might consider how, in their work, 'genre conventions ... are being tested and subverted' (25), or how 'aspects of the piece ... may not have worked as intended' (25).

As has been argued in this essay, Golden Age crime writing is a determined exercise in the 'what if?', and as such relates very well to such contingent notions of what it means to write, to read and to engage in criticism and theorisation. The kinds of transformation and thought that Lasky highlights are, in many ways, staple features of works of detective fiction, providing both the form of and the subject of the genre, including my own *Dead in the Long Room*. In the light of theoretical perspectives drawing primarily on Barthes, Bruner and Bakhtin, I have sought in this essay to illustrate both the creative and the critical 'what if?' with which these texts engage. Golden Age writers are constantly and self-reflexively aware of their own artifice and playfully write this self-awareness (and their readers' awareness of the games they are playing) into the fabric of their work. In so displaying its

consciousness of its own construction, detective fiction (including *Dead in the Long Room*) simultaneously holds off and embraces its own status as fiction. It at one and the same time embodies its creativity and its criticality. This is the creative-critical reality of a writership and a readership together ‘talking around’ the nature of the form.

It is my hope that taken together *Dead in the Long Room* and this critical essay have engaged with the kinds of creative-critical illumination (or ‘poetics’) at which I believe Lasky is aiming; that they represent together an exercise in ‘enacted criticism’ (Green 2021).

Postscript: Plans for further writing

As a postscript, it seems appropriate to indicate that my hopes and plans for the writing of detective fiction (and the ‘enacted criticism’ it represents) do not end with *Dead in the Long Room*. I have plans for the future detective lives of both Inspector Cough and Agatha Miller/Christie both on their own and in collaboration once again. I anticipate *Dead in the Long Room* being the first in a series of books featuring Inspector Cough. I envision the series as being high concept Golden Age-influenced crime fiction set against the backdrop of true historical events. The second novel in the series, entitled *The Fifth Congress*, is already started. It is set during the Fifth Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, which took place over a period of three weeks at the Brotherhood Church in Hackney in May 1907, shortly before the cricket match that forms the basis of *Dead in the Long Room*. The cast of the novel includes such congress delegates as a young Lenin, a young Stalin, a

young Trotsky and the novelist Maxim Gorky. It is a tale of murder and international espionage in which Cough works alongside police and spies from across Europe.

I also have in mind another sequence of novels involving Agatha Miller/Christie to be set against certain key events in her life, such as *On the Feast of Stephen*, a novel structurally based (in true Christie style) upon the perennial Christmas favourite 'Good King Wenceslas', to be set against the yuletide backdrop of her famed disappearance in December 1926. Other novels may well be written in relation to her work as a nurse and pharmacist during World War 1, and her return to London to work during World War 2.

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