

Chapter 9

The police had asked all the conference delegates to either stay in residence or to notify them of their movements as they might need to ask them some questions. This request generally was not considered burdensome. Those whose minds were preoccupied with Cavendish's death wanted to remain at the conference in case any interesting details might emerge, and those who were apparently indifferent naturally still wished to imbibe all the intellectual fruits which had been scheduled to be on offer originally. Thus the annual conference of the Church Antiquarian Society carried on, with the only real changes being that Professor Osborne now introduced the plenary speakers, and that a great deal of the table and bar conversation was vivified with speculations regarding why Cavendish had deemed his life too painful to endure.

In the late afternoon Fowler was chairing one of the parallel sessions. This was the first time he had ever assumed this role. He was delighted to have been offered this honour—taking it as a tangible sign that his reputation was growing—and he earnestly hoped to acquit himself well. This was a very realizable hope, as it is really a very easy role, consisting of only a few simple duties. The chair must call the room to attention. This is hardly a difficult task as everyone has come there for the expressed purpose of giving their attention to the papers. The chair then introduces the first speaker. Another easy assignment. For the sake of time, this is meant to be done in merely a few sentences, and these remarks are invariably factual. Indeed, there is a standard formula which is perfectly acceptable: _____ is a _____ [research student / lecturer / professor, etc.] at _____ University. She is currently writing a book on _____ . The title of her paper today is _____ . The most crucial task comes next: the chair

must keep track of the time and, at all costs, prevent the speaker from overrunning by more than five minutes or so. What the chair says after the speaker has finished is the most formulaic bit of all. Inevitably, the chair says something like, 'I think you will agree with me that that was a very stimulating paper.' Anyway, however the phrase is constructed, the key adjective is always the same. If a chair knows beyond doubt that he has just heard a seminal paper which will set a historiographical trend which will last for decades, or that he has just heard a bunch of ill-considered, half-baked rubbish, he still does not award it more or less praise than 'stimulating'. Fowler had once heard a daring president who substituted the word 'elegant' for 'stimulating', but as she used it equally indiscriminately this variation conformed to the essential rule, whilst arguably being more vulnerable to the charge of being injudicious when applied to some of the more inferior specimens.

The only other substantial demand made upon the chair besides enforcing the timetable is that, should no discussion naturally arise after the paper, he or she is duty bound to generate it by asking the speaker one or more relevant questions. It is not always very easy to think of a question to ask. One naturally fears disgracing oneself by asking a foolish question. One might know very little about the (often painfully narrow) subject which the paper addressed. Moreover, a very good paper often ties up all the loose ends so effectively that there is nothing left to ask. A very bad paper is the worst, however. It is cruel to expose the speaker's ineptitude, but disingenuous to attempt to engage with the paper whilst ignoring its fundamental flaws. A cruel audience will usually leave the chair to wrestle with this social dilemma single-handedly. Thus it is crucial that the chair stays very alert and attentive during the whole paper. This is a true

discipline: many members of the audience will daydream for portions of the presentation. The chair, however, is engaged in two tasks simultaneously: firstly, watching the clock and, secondly, trying to think of an intelligent question to ask at the end, should the need arise. For the latter task, the chair jots down ideas periodically during the presentation. Fowler had brought with him his Mont Blanc fountain pen—a chubby writing instrument, with a marble pattern on it in shades of green—so that he could perform this task with dignity and ceremonial flair.

And he did acquit himself well. The first paper was by a professor. Fowler probably over-compensated slightly by asking a question himself which was unnecessarily pointed, but the great man did not take offence and produced a measured, reflective, and indeed illuminating, answer. The second paper was by a very competent research student, and a fair number of the more established scholars seemed to go out of their way in order to make sure that everything went well for both the novice speaker and the novice chair. The final paper was by a late middle aged man who was well known and loved by his fellow scholars, although his career had not been particularly successful. He offered a stunning, if disorganized, collection of anecdotes about Easter eggs, mostly played for laughs, ranging impressive, if eclectically, across several centuries and numerous nations. He had no intention of publishing it, and barely offered a fig leaf of a conclusion to it all, but the more successful scholars in the audience appreciated the familiarity with an extraordinary wide range of primary sources which it represented, and everyone enjoyed the speaker's urbanity and wit. Members of the audience bantered with him jovially, and Fowler was left without a care, save when to break in and suggest reluctantly that the session be brought to an end.

The next morning Fowler discovered another phone message from Kettle. This time there was no handwritten sentence in the ‘message’ blanks. Instead, the ‘Please phone back’ box had been ticked. Fowler hunted around for some change, found that he did not have enough, and bought a newspaper with a five pound note in order to generate some more. He choose the Guardian—his progressive credentials winning out in the newspaper world—although he did like to read the obituaries of eccentric minor members of the aristocracy so faithfully recorded in the Daily Telegraph. He went to one of the private call boxes which lined part of a wall near the porter’s lodge. The phone was answered just after the first ring.

‘Detective Superintendent Kettle here.’

‘Hello Mark, it’s Jo.’

‘Hello, Jo, can you hold on a minute?’

‘No problem.’

Jo listened to complete silence for about forty-five seconds. Kettle must be using a mute button he thought to himself idly.

‘OK, sorry about that. Well here’s the news: your suspects are dropping off fast now.’

‘What have you found out?’ Fowler prompted.

‘Reverend Alexis is out.’ Written on the piece of paper in front of him was the correct title along with the full name, ‘Father Alexis Zernov’, but Kettle could not bring himself to break Christ’s injunction in the Gospel According to St Matthew chapter twenty-three against bestowing upon any earthly figure the honorary title of ‘father’. Fowler understood this perfectly.

‘How’s that?’

‘He checks out. We’ve talked to police contacts and church contacts. There is an Alexis Zernov, he is a priest in Saratov, he is at a conference in Britain. In a word: he’s legit.’ Fowler’s mind irresistibly began to calculate the actual number of words—two short words contracted into one and one longer word cut in half—but quickly gave it up. What he said was, ‘OK, I hear you. Next.’

‘Chandler Johnson.’

‘Yes?’

‘He’s nowhere near your conference. He’s the history lecturer on a posh cruise. We’ve contacted the ship. He’s definitely been with them the whole time.’

‘Anything else? How about Louise Cavendish?’

Kettle snorted dismissively. ‘Come on, Jo. We know she’s legit, as far as her identity and past goes. What do you expect? That she has spent time in prison or has a firearms license or something?’

Fowler conceded that these were unlikely possibilities. Nevertheless, they were precisely the pieces of information—amongst others—which Kettle had demanded from one of his subordinates. Having exhausted his bits of news, Kettle quickly ended their conversation.

Fowler leaned against the side of the call box, feeling deflated. Rationally, of course, he knew that eliminating suspects was just as much progress as finding positive clues, but he could not help feeling that nothing was turning up. Moreover, it is part of a scholar’s training to be suspicious of another person’s research and to want to go over the same material again in case a misconception has arisen. He was particularly dissatisfied with Father Alexis being dismissed so easily. There was something fishy about him, he was

sure of it. After mulling it over for a few minutes more, he decided to make another call. He listened patiently as it rang eight times, then the line connected and he heard a familiar message, 'This is Matt Fowler. I'm not in the office right now . . .' After the beep, he left this message: 'Hello, Dad. Out at the horse races again?! I'm wondering if you will do me a favour. Do you remember that Russian bishop or whatever that you became friends with at that big charismatic conference in Brighton? Could you ring him and ask if he could find out whether there is a Father Alexis Zernov, Z-E-R-N-O-V, who is a priest in Saratov and, if so, if he is currently in Britain. It's rather important: I might be investigating a murder! You can leave a message for me by phoning the University of Bloomsbury and saying that I'm with the Church Antiquarian Society conference. Thanks a lot. Hope you, Mum and Paul are doing well.'

Now he needed time to think again. He thought about the quadrangle, the park, the Geographic Library, but he decided to treat himself and have a martini at the Gloucester Hotel. For some Britons, the martini suffers from its connection with James Bond, causing it to be viewed as vulgar in a nouveau riche sort of way, as what a person straining to be classy might order. James Bond, however, hardly registered on Fowler's cultural radar. The martini for him was the drink that enchanting characters in lush, inter-war novels always seemed to have to hand. He had discovered the hard way that if one ordered a martini in a Midlands pub, one was handed a fruit juice glass half full of vermouth. He was in London now, however, and he knew that he would be able to obtain a true martini.

At the lounge bar of the Gloucester Hotel they did serve a martini which fulfilled Fowler's expectations. True, it was priced £10.50, not far off the price of a whole bottle

of gin in an Oakham supermarket, but this did not trouble him. It is a popular misconception of educated Britons that because they disdain Pentecostal ministers, and because they know that they adopt a folksy style, and their congregations are generally not very sophisticated people, that therefore they must not make very much money. In fact, Pentecostals, or Tongues of Fire people anyway, believe that money is a blessing which one need not be squeamish about receiving, and that the servants of the Lord are worth all they can get and more. This allows some spiritual market forces to work in such a way that a great spiritual pioneer like Matthew Fowler could receive a salary which rivalled, if not surpassed, that of an industrious barrister or a high-flying hospital consultant. And, in true, Fowler's father did work as hard as any of them, work as many hours as any of them, and was just as much on call twenty-four hours a day as any medical doctor. Matthew Fowler had always wanted his son to have the very best. He had consistently bankrolled his son's dreams, and Josiah Fowler had become so used to this treatment that he had allowed it to continue unabated even though he was now a man of twenty-five years in full-time employment, living in his own rented accommodation. Thus his mind was not the kind which was apt to calculate whether or not a martini might be experienced at less expense.

Fowler decided that Chandler Johnson really was ruled out. He would have to wait and see what his father found out about Father Alexis. The Russian gangsters theory did have the attraction of providing a motive for killing both Professor Besselsleigh and Reg Cavendish. Louise Cavendish also had a motive for killing them both. Fowler admitted to himself that this crime of passion scenario did not seem too plausible. She might blame either Besselsleigh or her husband for the breakdown of her marriage, but could

she really blame them both equally? Killing her husband would mean that she had decided that he was culpable but, if so, why kill Besselsleigh? She might as well kill Amanda Brown instead—or every woman with whom he had had an affair with in-between. Kettle's prophecy that there were more deaths to come returned to his mind. Was it more than the air-conditioning and the icy chill of his drink which caused him to shiver involuntarily?

He had lost time because he had erroneously thought that Reg Cavendish had killed Besselsleigh. Why had he thought that? he asked himself afresh. Fowler reviewed the evidence in his mind. There was the motive, of course, but it had been more than that. As he was the president, he would have known about the water and would have been able to hover around the platform table without arousing suspicion. He himself had a peanut allergy, and they had been lovers, so he undoubtedly would have known that she did as well and, therefore, the idea for the method of murder would have occurred more naturally to him than to almost anyone else. It was at this point that Fowler had his second flash of illumination: Besselsleigh's death might have been an accident. Perhaps Cavendish was the only target all along. Perhaps the murderer had no idea that Besselsleigh had a peanut allergy as well and had assumed erroneously that if anyone else did drink the water it would have done them no harm at all. It was only when this original plan had failed in such an unexpected manner that the murderer had gone on to a new method, deciding to electrocute him.

So the real question might be simply: who wanted to kill Reg Cavendish? Once again, Louise Cavendish sprang to mind. As he thought more about it, however, a new suspect entered the frame for the first time: Amanda Brown. The more he thought about it, the

more this made sense. Louise Cavendish had spent most of her adult life resenting her ex-husband without resorting to killing him, but the young research student's wounds were fresh. Amanda Brown was now his prime suspect.

Chapter 10

He had no evidence of course. Indeed, the police thought that it was literally impossible that Reg Cavendish had been murdered. Kettle had twice warned him about stirring up trouble but—having drunk a dry martini on an empty stomach—Fowler had now come to the brave conclusion that frightening the killer into acting was the only way to move the investigation along. If he did it cleverly it need not be dangerous. Or so he reasoned.

As she was at the top of his list of suspects, he decided that he would try Amanda Brown first. This would be a little awkward, as he had not even been introduced to her yet. The only way to go about it was a direct approach. It was only about a half an hour till lunch time. He just might be able to find her in the publishers' display area, the bar, or one of the other public rooms. He paid his bill, left the Gloucester, and began his hunt. Fowler kept moving briskly, popping his head across thresholds and around corners. It did not take long for him to spot her. She was wearing a pure black jumper and the obligatory combat trousers. She was a petite, young woman, with short, brown hair and a round face. Fowler could not help but notice that she was attractive. She did not belong with a lecherous old man like Reg Cavendish, he thought to himself, but rather with someone closer to her own age; a man like himself, for example. He quietly calculated that she could not be more than four years his junior. He wondered about how her relationship with Cavendish had developed, about what they had done together. Christ's comments to the effect that if a man looked at a woman lustfully he was placing himself on the same level as an adulterer disconcertingly came to him. He upbraided himself with the judgement that youthful lusts were no less sinful than late middle aged lechery,

however more socially acceptable they might be. Having fumigated his mind with this little exercise in moral philosophy, Fowler then proceeded with his task.

‘Hello, I’m Jo Fowler. I believe you are Amanda Brown.’

Amanda Brown smiled. Fowler’s first thought was that her round face had such lovely colour and warmth when she smiled. His second was to wonder what had caused it. It was not a smile of greeting, he quickly discerned, but rather one of amusement.

‘Yes, I am,’ she replied.

‘I have something rather personal to tell you, do you think we could talk somewhere alone.’

‘Do you want to go to my room?’ she asked.

Fowler was thrown off his balance, particularly given his private meditations a few moments before. He instantly thought that ‘personal’ might be a word open to the wrong construction. He visibly blushed. Amanda Brown was delighted. Her mischievous smile had never left her and now it became even broader than before.

‘I don’t mean personal between you and me,’ he stammered idiotically.

‘Whatever,’ she commented dismissively.

Once again, Fowler thought, I have melted in someone else’s presence, when I ought to be a solid personality, in charge of the situation. Recovering, he added, ‘But your room would be an ideal location.’

The smile faded and he saw some other emotion momentarily flash across her face. What was it? Caution? Indecision? Fear? ‘Whatever,’ she said again, and began to lead the way.

He was about to ask her some polite questions regarding her research in order to pass the time as they walked, but she got in first with her own opener.

‘So Jo,’ she began, making the most of the rhyme, ‘are you married?’

‘No.’ He laughed jovially—if not nervously; he did this purely because he was embarrassed at the very notion that two people would begin an acquaintanceship at a professional conference by launching into a discussion of their private lives, but it appeared to have given her the mistaken impression that he found the idea inherently absurd—which was not his opinion at all.

‘Do you live with anyone?’ she pressed.

‘Well, there was this guy Tom who lived with me for a while, but he’s moved out now.’

‘Oh I’m sorry,’ she said gravely. ‘It’s always harder than people think,’ she added by way of consolation.

Fowler slowly grasped the misconception Amanda Brown was labouring under. He was not sure whether he would prefer to leave her with this false impression and endeavour to move on to less intimate lines of conversation or if he ought to dispel it at the price of being forced to talk frankly with a total stranger about personal matters after all. He halfheartedly chose the latter option, muttering, ‘Oh, we weren’t lovers or anything like that.’

‘Whatever,’ she replied in a bored tone.

Her room was in that part of the block which did not have windows. It was, of course, identical to Reg Cavendish’s room, which was, indeed, just down the hallway from hers. Moreover, with the exception of the window, it was identical to his own room—identical

to all the others. He walked in and stood in the middle of it, not knowing quite what to do.

‘Would you like to sit on the bed—or would you prefer that I did?’ she asked, smilingly mischievously once again.

‘Oh, you—I mean—me,’ Fowler blurted out incoherently, unable to work out in his mind which answer was the one that contained an innuendo. She laughed aloud and he gave it up and just sat down on the chair, his ideals of good manners entirely defeated by her ideals of frankness.

‘Well,’ she asked, ‘you have something personal to tell me?’

‘Yes, well, um, I do. I fear you will think it rather impertinent of me, but I thought you would really want to know. You see, well, I happened to be chatting with the porter,’ he lied, ‘—he is really quite a character, you know, a kind of institution about the place—and he was telling me about all the changes he has seen since he’s been here—about the university in the old days and all that, since we are historians and all he thought we might be interested—and how his duties have changed over the years. Well, anyway—I’ll try to speed this along—apparently a female student was attacked last year. The university tried to keep the bad publicity to a minimum, of course, but some student organizations made quite a noise about it—saying that something ought to be done, that their ought to be more security guards on campus, more safety measures in place, things like that.’

Amanda Brown was staring at him, trying, apparently unsuccessfully, to work out where he was going with all this, but as she did not say a word he just rambled on.

‘So all kinds of measures were put in place, some—according to the porter—purely cosmetic, and others, again in his view, a real nuisance for the staff.’ Fowler seemed to think of something, ‘One of them,’ he said eagerly, ‘was putting these bolts on all the doors.’ He jumped up eagerly as he said this, moved to the bathroom door in one step, and momentarily fiddled with the bolt, as if she would not have grasped what he was saying without this timely visual aid.

‘Another one, however,’ he proceeded, ‘is what I wanted to talk to you about.’ Amanda Brown looked more puzzled than ever.

‘Perhaps I ought to start this the other way around,’ he continued. ‘You see, I happened to hear that you and Dr Cavendish were intimate friends.’

At this, she visibly stiffened. Amanda Brown glared at him, daring him to say something soon which would justify this whole conversation.

‘It’s none of my business, I know,’ he said defensively, ‘but, naturally, you must be very upset by his death and all. Oh,’ he said, interrupting himself, ‘there is a third angle, and perhaps that was the one with which I should have begun. I just thought you had a right to know.’

‘What are you saying?’ Amanda Brown said this slowly, giving equal weight to each word, and with an edge to her tone.

‘I have a friend in the police,’ he blurted out. ‘He is the detective who was on the scene when the police came to look at Dr Cavendish’s body. I thought it might be some consolation—in a perverse sort of way—for you to know that he was murdered.’

At this, she involuntarily jerked her head, as if Fowler was a car which she had known was overtaking her all along, but she had only just realized was driving erratically.

‘I mean,’ he continued, ‘people often blame themselves when someone commits suicide. They wonder what they might have been done differently, wonder what signs they missed, wonder why they themselves were not a sufficient reason for the person to what to continue living, things like that. I just thought you had a right to know.’

‘Thank you, Jo.’ Amanda said this with the air of a boss who is dismissing a subordinate.

Fowler spoke up quickly. ‘Oh, that isn’t all.’

‘Yes?’ she said coolly.

‘They are about to catch the person who did it.’

‘And who is that, Jo?’ she said very evenly.

‘Oh, they don’t know yet. That’s what I was trying to tell you, about the safety measures and all. Another one was that they installed some hidden security cameras behind the air vents in the hallways. The porter was telling me about this, and I asked him whether they were still running over the summer, and he said that they are still recording, but they haven’t been bothering to label the tapes, they just dump the used ones in a big box. He showed it to me, it just sits in a corner in his office. Well, I asked him if a camera would have picked up if anyone had gone in or out of Dr Cavendish’s room, and he said he was sure one would have. So I said, he must give the tapes to the police, and he phoned them, and they said they would send someone around first thing tomorrow morning. Although he warned them that it would probably take them a couple days to sort through it all and find the right one. But, you see, at least it is some comfort to know that his murderer will soon be caught.’ Not finding her demonstrating obvious agreement, he bullied her a little bit more, ‘Don’t you agree?’

‘Oh, Jo,’ she sighed, ‘I’m just very numb from it all right now.’

‘Oh, yes, of course,’ he consoled eagerly.

‘I need a drink,’ she declared. ‘Would you like a cocktail?’

Now Fowler had come late to alcohol, as he had to nicotine, and, in truth, he was more of a poser than a serious consumer in this arena as well. He had already had a stiff drink and he had not eaten anything for about five hours now. Nevertheless, the word ‘cocktail’ had an enchanting ring to him. He had read with pleasure about grander times when people asked each other if they would like a cocktail, and now he had stumbled into a magical place where it still happened. He also rationalized that it was his duty to maximize this interview with her.

‘Why, yes, that would be lovely,’ he replied.

She rummaged through her case, which was on the floor next to the bed, pulled out some bottles and a plastic bag with some items in it—the nature of which he could not discern—and, moving toward the bathroom, said firmly, ‘I’ll be right back.’

At this point Fowler did become vaguely uneasy. Someone, after all, had murdered two people, and had been wary enough of him to search his room. And Amanda Brown was currently his foremost candidate for who that someone was. He wished that he could see what exactly she put in his cocktail, and whether she made her own drink in an identical manner, but his sense of decorum would not allow him to follow her into the bathroom as if he were some devoted puppy dog.

In the books which Fowler read for pleasure, a cocktail never meant tequila and warm 7-Up mixed into a foaming concoction and served in a plastic cup. He did not like the smell of his drink. Feigning a positive interest, he managed to examine the tequila bottle.

He had the courage to open it and inhale, even if this might look a little rude or odd. He deduced that it is tequila in general that reeks. This offered him some consolation, although he counter-reasoned that it was a smell which could mask almost any unwelcome additive. He wished again that he could have watched her make it. Nevertheless, his social sensibilities precluded any other possibility beside drinking it. Following her lead, he downed the liquid quickly, as if one were taking some medicine. Immediately after this little ritual, he said good-bye and left her.

Chapter 11

Fowler lay unconscious in his bed. Leaving Amanda Brown's room, he had suddenly felt irresistibly sleepy. He went straight to his room in the other half of the accommodation block and lay down, still fully clothed. As he lay there, asleep, he dreamed that he was being knighted. The Queen was a bejewelled figure, standing before an enormous throne. Around her shoulders and down her back hung a crimson velvet cloak with a wide, ermine collar. She summoned him by pronouncing the two words, 'Josiah Fowler', in a clear voice which carried well across the great hall. He walked towards her across a spacious tile floor, his feet making a clicking sound with every step. He knelt before her, but kept his head erect, looking her full in the face. She gazed back at him with resolute, loving eyes. As she lightly tapped his shoulders with a thin, ceremonial sword, she pronounced deliberately, speaking as much for the benefit of the assembled guests as to him personally, 'Well done, good and faithful servant, take your seat of honour in our United Kingdom.' He did not utter a sound, or even change his pattern of breathing, but several tears did quietly make their way down his cheeks. Then, leaning down close to his left ear, she whispered an informal remark, 'May we congratulate you for being one of the very few commoners who has a true conception of how to dress for a day at court.' Turning her attention back to the whole assembly once again, she took a long staff and decisively pounded it on the floor five or six times in a row. Fowler continued to stare at her, suspecting that he ought to do something else now—presumably discreetly retire to the far end of the hall—but he was desperately, tenaciously, hoping that the moment might be prolonged a bit longer. She pounded her staff a second time. Then, dipping her hands into an ornate silver bowl filled with coins,

she allowed the pieces of gold to slip out of her hands and fall with a jangling sound back into the bowl once again.

‘Who is it?’ Fowler called out, awaking with a start.

‘Harold Osborne,’ came the clear reply.

‘Oh, just a minute.’ Fowler fired these words out quickly, in a fluster. He sprang out of bed, looking himself over for any obvious signs of disorder—tucked here, adjusted there—and then opened the door.

‘Sorry to disturb you, my boy,’ the professor began, sensing that he had come at an inopportune time. ‘I thought you might wish to know that you had another message.’ Having said this, he thrust a little square of yellow paper into Fowler’s hand.

‘Thanks, thanks very much, it’s awfully kind of you,’ Fowler said. Fearing that he might sound grumpy, he rather overcompensated with intimations of gratitude.

‘Not at all, my boy,’ came the response and, with that, the interview was at an end.

Closing the door of his room, Fowler read the piece of paper. ‘Matt Fowler’ was written in the blank used for specifying who had phoned. The message read tersely, ‘No such person exists.’ ‘So,’ Fowler thought to himself, ‘Father Alexis is an imposter after all, that changes the picture considerably. I must keep rethinking this case from fresh angles.’

Examining his clothes once again, he decided that—at the very least—he needed to change his shirt, which was now distinctly crumpled in places. In the end, he found himself changing into an entirely new outfit—a white cotton pull-over shirt which he wore with the collar open, cream-coloured flannel trousers, and a blue, yellow, and cream

striped cotton jacket with wide lapels. He had the vague air of a man who might announce that he was going to spend the day ‘motoring’.

He had now missed lunch. Judging that he would need some kind of nutrition, and regretfully reasoning that he could not afford to leave the conference and go hunting about for a pleasant meal somewhere, he resigned himself to consuming something from the campus kiosk. In the end, he grudgingly ate a pre-wrapped ploughman’s sandwich. However, he did enjoy drinking a strong black coffee.

He dutifully attended a parallel session, but he sat there passively, still lulled by an instinct to sleep, not really concentrating on the papers. By the end of the session, however, he was ready for action. Drifting toward the coffee break tables along with everyone else, he was on the alert for the next suspect on his list.

Louise Cavendish stood in a corner, together with two other scholars, discussing the merits and demerits of a paper they all had just heard, but he had not. ‘I thought it was very stimulating’ had come the opening gambit from one lady, to which, the chorus had inevitably answered ‘very stimulating indeed’, as a ritualistic preliminary before more specific opinions were ventured. Fowler waited a while—hoping that their conversation would come to a natural end and the little group would break up—but, as more and more of the break time was exhausted without any sign of this, he came to the awkward conclusion that he would have to be fairly assertive if he wanted to have a tete-a-tete with Louise Cavendish before it was time for the next session to begin.

‘I’m very sorry to interrupt your conversation,’ he began, ‘but I need to pass on a confidential message to Dr Cavendish.’ Fowler instantly thought this sounded too

dramatic, but he counter-reasoned that a less portentous utterance might not secure her co-operation.

‘Right,’ Louise Cavendish pronounced in a business-like manner, and moved to follow him without another word, either to him or her erstwhile companions.

Fowler led her out a side door to a nearby rose garden. The space had been arranged in a hexagonal pattern, with benches in the middle of each of the six sides on the parameter of the garden. Every rose bush was of the same variety, and every rose was yellow. Fowler inwardly applauded the unknown gardener who had had the resolve to spurn an unreflective expectation of variety. The effect was marvellous. He was even more delighted to learn that an older rose stock must have been used. These plants might not have been scientifically bred to create perfectly formed, long-lasting flowers, but one looked at the splash of yellow across the beds, not individuals blooms, and the fragrant aroma which these roses generously exported was a far more valuable prize.

‘Well, what is the message?’ Louise Cavendish asked in a very controlled manner, once they had been seated upon the closest bench.

Fowler launched into a somewhat more coherent version of the spiel he had given to Amanda Brown a few hours before, only being careful to delete all the comments indicating that she might be grieving over Reg Cavendish’s death, sticking monotonously instead to the formulation: ‘I thought you had a right to know.’ When he came to the point where he announced that the police thought it was murder, he received an abrupt and unexpected question.

‘What makes them think that?’ she snapped.

He did not know what to say. In truth, the police did not think it, they thought the exact opposite, that it could not possibly be murder. He had his reasons, but even these would not really stand up to a sceptical grilling. Louise Cavendish did not even suspect that Professor Besselsleigh had been murdered. Fowler had suspected that she had been because he knew that she had not eaten anything, and his suspicions had been confirmed by finding the water bottle, and then by someone having searched his room. There was no question in his mind that there was a murderer about, and he did not believe for one moment that a bully like Reg Cavendish had instantly jacked in his presidential conference and given up the fight, whatever his troubles, seemingly before it had hardly begun. 'I am not really at liberty to say,' he eventually pronounced, striving to sound as if he was maintaining an important confidence.

'It's nonsense,' she shot back defiantly. 'The room was bolted on the inside. I saw that myself. Besides, he told me he was weary of living.'

'It might be some kind of forensic evidence they found in the room,' Fowler ventured vaguely. As someone whose life of the mind was entirely ensconced in the humanities, a reference to a scientific answer conjured up, for Fowler, an air of unquestionable authority combined with a complete expulsion of any curiosity which might lead one toward actually understanding it. Whether or not Louise Cavendish held the same attitude, she did not press the point any further.

Fowler finished his briefing, taking care to mention the box of unlabelled videos which were sitting in the porter's office, waiting to be collected in the morning, and that it would probably take the police a day or more to sort through them. He then ended with his mantra, 'I don't presume to know how you feel about Dr Cavendish's death, but I

thought you had a right to know that he was murdered, and that his murderer will be caught soon.’ Louise Cavendish’s eyes rested on the trees beyond. Still looking abstracted, she mumbled a brief word of thanks as she stood up and began walking away.

There was a mild breeze. Fowler stepped across the path and examined some rose bushes. Selecting a small, compact bloom, he carefully plucked it, placing it in his buttonhole. The yellow rose matched his jacket perfectly. It gave him almost a sensation of divine providence—a doctrine which, in other contexts, he found particularly hard to accept—to realise that the proclivities of the gardener who had designed this hexagonal space so long ago and his own wardrobe choices of that afternoon had converged so advantageously.

Such sacred musings notwithstanding, Fowler took advantage of his idle moment outdoors in order to enjoy a cigarette. What was it he had resolved earlier? Oh yes, he must not become fixated with one theory. He must continue to allow new perspectives to alter his view of the case. What did he need to think over? Father Alexis was the obvious loose end. He definitely must take a place amongst his short-list of suspects once again. There did not appear much to think through there, however: some kind of action would have to be taken in regards to him as well.

There was something else knocking on the back door of his mind. This very metaphor, as it came to him, made him think of his dream. Both his Tongues of Fire roots and the Freudian psychology he had later dabbled in were in agreement that dreams mattered, and he had always been open to gaining insights from his unconscious musings. So he began to review this one in his mind. Did the Queen represent God, he wondered, in which case it might be a comforting dream, a statement of divine approval; or did it

mean that he had substituted or was in danger of substituting a desire for worldly success—for the approval of earthy powers—for more eternal values and rewards, in which case it was a warning? Perhaps it was not a reassuring vision, even if it was a picture of God. Could the compliment about his apparel have come from an ironic Almighty mocking the shallow and transient nature of his personal priorities? The pounding of her staff, however, was not really part of the dream's message—if it had a message—it was simply an incorporation of Professor Osborne's knocking on his door into the dreamscape which it ultimately dispelled. And what did the bowl of gold coins mean? It was certainly true that he enjoyed beautiful things which, alas, were often also expensive. It might also be true that he coveted honour. If he knew himself at all, however, the love of money was not one of his besetting sins, not the foothold the devil would find when he came after him. The more he thought about it the more he became convinced that the jangling sound, like the pounding one, was an intrusion from the outer world rather than an organic component of his imaginative one. He tried to reconstruct what had happened. Professor Osborne had knocked, he had waited, he had knocked again, and then he had produced a jangling sound. He must have retrieved a ring of keys from his pocket and began to fumble through them, Fowler theorized. This led on to a new thought: whoever had searched his room must have acquired a key to it somehow, a key which that person presumably would still have. Fowler wondered what would have happened if he had not called out, 'Who is it?', but rather remained silent on his bed a while longer. Would the door to his room have opened?

Chapter 12

Father Alexis was the one remaining suspect where some kind of action was still needed, according to Fowler's reasoning. The first thing that Fowler did was to phone Kettle.

'Detective Superintendent Kettle here.'

'Hello Mark, it's Jo.'

'What's up, Jo?'

'You were wrong about Father Alexis,' he began, oblivious to the fact that this mode of expression might go some way toward alienating his audience. 'I had Dad check into it with his Russian church contacts, and they say he doesn't exist.'

'Is that so,' Kettle replied noncommittally, torn between his conviction that the information-gathering powers of the CID were more to be trusted than the serendipity of amateurs, and his instinctive deference for the pronouncements of Matt Fowler.

Fowler, sensing the note of scepticism, replied, 'Well, if you think he does exist, how do you explain some bishop saying that he doesn't?'

'In the same way that you explain some bishop and some police commissioner telling my people that he does.'

'But that's just it,' Fowler replied triumphantly, 'you went through official channels to the obvious people. They knew you would do that and so they bribed or threatened them or something.'

'Who's they, Jo?' Kettle asked coolly.

'The Russian Mafia, of course.'

Now it was Kettle's turn to indulge in a feeling a triumph. 'He's not with the Russians, that's for sure. That one's a non-segue. I had one of my constables take a photo of him on the sly. We've shown it to people who would know. He's not with the Russian Mafia. You can take it to some friends of yours somewhere who run a money-laundry business or something and show it to them if you like, and see if they will swear that he is well known as the Saratov Knife or something if you want, but I'm telling you that that theory is no good.'

'OK Mark, I hear you.' Fowler ended the conversation shortly thereafter, hoping to avoid a lecture about staying away from danger or, worse still, any direct questions regarding what he had been up to since they had last spoken.

Fowler sat down in one of the comfortable chairs in the striving-to-be-splendid main lobby of the University of Bloomsbury once again. What was he to think about Father Alexis, if Kettle was right? One sentence the detective superintendent had said kept rattling around in his brain, 'He's not with the Russians.' As he meditated upon it, he achieved another significant mental breakthrough, one that even Kettle would come to admire, once it was all over, as 'good police work'. A new working theory in place, Fowler rushed off to interview the final suspect on his current list.

As the late afternoon plenary session would not finish for another half an hour, he need not have hurried. He sat down to wait in a chair strategically located so that he would be sure to see each of the delegates as they came out. He vaguely wondered if any distinguished scholars in his field might notice with disapproval that he must have skipped the session. What was he to say to Father Alexis? One thing was certain, he could not repeat the ruse he had used on Amanda Brown and Louise Cavendish. It would

hardly be credible to suggest that a foreign delegate who, for all Fowler knew, had never even been introduced to Reg Cavendish, somehow had ‘a right to know’. Even the direct approach would not work because there was no message to deliver, nothing to be direct about. He would have to be chatty.

‘Hello, my name is Jo Fowler,’ he said as he planted himself in front of Father Alexis, pumping as much friendly excitement into his voice as he could.

‘Hello, my name is Father Alexis Zernov. I am from Saratov, in Russia.’

‘Yes, I thought so!’ Fowler enthused, as if he had just discovered that they had played recorders next to each other in primary school, ‘I’m very interested in the history of Russian Orthodoxy. I’m hoping you will tell me all about it.’

Father Alexis looked at him warily, then he shook his head. ‘My English is not so good.’

‘O really,’ Fowler replied, ‘that must make attending a conference where all the papers are in English somewhat pointless.’

‘I can hear the English, but I do not speak it.’

‘Oh, that’s alright then. I’ll just babble on and then every now and then I’ll put a question to you, ensuring that I couch it in a such a way that you can give a monosyllabic reply.’

‘I just know about our monastery. I do not know about the history of the Russian Church generally.’

‘I don’t imagine that there will be a paper at this conference on the history of your monastery.’

‘I have come to learn, not to teach,’ Father Alexis replied cautiously.

‘I see. You know a fantastic amount about one little bit of local religious history, but are enormously ignorant about the broad sweep of the Russian ecclesiastical tradition. Late in your career you have begun to feel ashamed of this, so you have decided to make a brave effort to eradicate your ignorance. Therefore, you decided to fly to Britain in order to hear a week’s worth of papers in English, most of which address English themes.’

‘What is it you want?’ Father Alexis asked sharply.

‘Oh, it is not at all difficult. I’m just trying to remember a few basic facts. St Gregory the Illuminator founded your national church, is that right?’

‘Of course,’ Father Alexis replied, apparently relieved to be asked such a simple question.

‘But that means that you are an Armenian, not a Russian, doesn’t it?’

Father Alexis ended this exchange abruptly by the expediency of simply walking away, but not before he had made one final comment, ‘It is not always wise to be too clever, Dr Fowler.’

As Fowler went his own way, he happened to notice Professor Osborne having what appeared to be a heated conversation on a public telephone. He manoeuvred himself into a position in which he could hear Osborne’s voice without being noticed by him, but all he was saying were very curt responses such as ‘No’, ‘We’ll see’, and ‘absolutely not’. At the end, however, just before he put the receiver down, he had said, ‘Chandler, don’t call me again until the conference is over!’

That night, Fowler prepared himself for the great stake-out. He decided that he would continue to wear the outfit which had served him well that afternoon, yellow rose in the

buttonhole and all. He would read the copy of Evelyn Waugh's *Vile Bodies* which he had brought with him to the conference. One entered the porter's office through a door on the west side of the main lobby. The lobby was open throughout the entire night in the sense that it was accessible to the delegates, but there was no porter on duty beyond eleven PM. Delegates were given, as well as a key to their room, a key to the main door which opened into the lobby from the street, and therefore they were free to stay off campus past eleven and let themselves in. Fowler reasoned that it was the murderer—or an accomplice of his or hers—who had searched his room. That person had a key, and presumably it was a master key. It might be that such a key would open the porter's office as well. Even if it could not, the person who was clever enough to procure a master key and knowledgeable enough to tape up the earth cable on the lamp probably had sufficient ingenuity or skill to open this door as well, one way or another.

The lobby was a spacious affair, more like the entrance to a hotel than a university, with its predictable glass chandeliers and potted trees. Fowler nestled himself into a high-backed chair which formed part of a little cluster of plants and furniture about half-way across the lobby on a diagonal path from the door to the porter's office. His chair sat with its right side facing the office. He did not have a very good view, but he reasoned it was good enough to keep tabs on what was going on, and he would be certain that he could conceal his own presence from a wary visitor scanning the room from the vantage point of the porter's lodge.

Fowler sat there for an hour and a half. The evening grew darker, as did the tone of his novel. A few times a single delegate or a couple or cluster of them had entered the lobby from the street on their way back to their rooms after an evening out, but none of

his suspects had ever done so, no one had ever loitered by the office door, and no one had ever entered the lobby from the quadrangle.

At around a quarter passed midnight, the door on the accommodation block side of the lobby did open. Fowler could not see it from his position, but he clearly heard it. In his excitement, he instinctively pressed his head and body back into his chair in order to ensure that he was not visible. He could hear the footsteps. They were surely moving directly to the porter's office. Fowler did not dare steal a glance. The footsteps stopped. He heard a subdued rapping sound. Someone was gingerly knocking on the office door. Silence. Even from where he sat, Fowler distinctively heard the gentle clicking noises that were produced as someone turned the handle on the door a few times before being satisfied that it was locked. Still Fowler did not look. He reasoned that there was nothing overtly suspicious about searching for the porter. If his presence was noticed now, then his plan would not have produced any objective evidence at all. There would be time enough to look once the person had illegally gained access to the office.

Fowler waited for the sound of keys or the sound of tools, but it did not come. Instead, the figure was walking again, not back toward the quadrangle, but deeper into the lobby. The figure was not heading to the door which led out to the street by the most direct route. Instead, he or she was moving along the perimeter of the room as if they were systematically searching it. Fowler started to feel really uneasy. His presence would undoubtedly look just as suspicious as theirs. Since his room had already been searched, it was clear that he had already been identified as a potential threat. It suddenly came home to him that the person he was hunting was a double murderer. He then thought of Kettle's pseudo-scientific numerology to the effect that there was no such

psychological category as a double murderer, there were only one-off murderers and people who kill whenever it suits them. Would his current invidious position be considered sufficient incitement to murder?

Pull yourself together, he told himself, not for the first time that day. He was going out of his way to look suspicious. He needed to adopt a more natural body posture. He needed to resume reading his novel once again. What would appear more natural, for him to look up to see who was passing by in front of him or for him to continue reading, ignoring the intruder? He could not decide. The footsteps were getting closer and closer. They stopped momentarily. Had he been spotted? They resumed again. The figure was now deviating from his or her march around the perimeter. He could hear the steps as the person moved more into the interior of the room, heading directly toward him. He had been spotted, that much was clear now. It would surely be unnatural to ignore the fact that someone was walking toward you. He steeled himself to adopt a vacant expression, and raised his eyes out from behind his book.

‘*Hello*, and what’s keeping you up at the *witching* hour,’ Christopher Walduck said with a smile.

‘Oh, hello, Chris. How wonderful to see you!’ Fowler enthused. Despite his personal admonishment of seconds before, he could not strike a bored pose. He had expected to meet one of his suspects—a prospect which truly excited him, its dangers notwithstanding—but when those dangers had unexpectedly and instantly been removed, the release of tension involuntarily expressed itself in a wave of congenial warmth toward his harmless companion. At the ‘Chris’ Walduck had winced slightly. Apparently he trained his friends to call him ‘Christopher’, Fowler reasoned, making a mental note of

this. Then, noticing that his interlocutor was still waiting for an answer to his question, he said apathetically, 'I'm just reading a novel,' raising the cover up so Walduck could discover which one it was. 'And what are you doing, Christopher?' he retorted, not wasting any time before endeavouring to rectify his social misdemeanor.

'Oh, *me*, I'm just so *bored*,' he said, plopping down in a nearby chair, 'I thought I would see if there was *anything* going on *anywhere*. The bar emptied *promptly* at eleven. Middle-class *morality* or what?'

Fowler laughed politely.

As he did not speak, Walduck inquired, 'So what do you think of "*Fasting and Feasting*"?'

This was the kind of expansive question which was meant to launch two people into an extended period of idle chatting. This theory was confirmed as Walduck's body begin to settle into the chair as if he was a man in an airport who had recently learned that there was a four-hour delay on his flight. This would not do. He had to continue his stake-out, and he had to continue it alone. If anyone was tempted to fall into the trap he had laid, they would certainly avoid it if he was chattering away with someone else in the middle of the lobby. What was he to do? He wished he had not sounded so pleased when he first greeted Walduck, and that he had not compounded this error by sounding so blasé about his ostensible task in hand.

'Well,' Fowler said, 'I have found it most interesting, and not just the official bits of the programme either.' He added this last part in a confiding tone. 'I would like to tell you all about it, but, to tell you the truth Christopher, I really need to get my sleep. I tried to go a bit earlier, but my mind was so buzzing with thoughts, that I could not settle

down. I thought if I read for a while it would settle me down. It's been working, actually, but if I started telling you all about it I'm sure it would wind me all up again. I'll tell you what, let me buy you a drink tomorrow?' Even as he said this, Fowler could not help but think that he sounded like one of those contrived solutions to social problems which the *Spectator* provided for its readers in its back page advice column.

'I *never* say no to a drink, Jo, unless it is something *horrible*, like that tinned *lager* my brother drinks.'

'Great, I'll catch up with you tomorrow then,' Fowler replied, contriving simultaneously to add an air of finality to their current discussion and to leave their plans for the morrow partially unformulated. Walduck took the hint and departed promptly.

Having shooed off an inconvenient companion, Fowler returned in earnest to his reading. Another forty minutes passed. He stopped now to stretch and to think. He had not really thought about this as an all-night stake-out. As he reflected on it now, anyone wishing to break into the office could choose any time between when it closed at night, say eleven-thirty to be on the safe side, till it opened in the morning, say any time before six o'clock, to be absolutely safe. For some reason, he had just assumed that, if anything happened, it would happen in the first couple hours after the office closed for the night. It was, of course, possible that nothing would happen. That was certainly the case if Father Alexis was the murderer, and it might be the case even if Amanda Brown or Louise Cavendish was. However, he now realized, it was just possible that a raid on the office had been planned for three or four in the morning. It would be ridiculous to go to all that trouble to set a trap and then to be too lazy to find out if one had caught anything

in it. He became resigned to the prospect of spending the whole night in the lobby. He read for another twenty minutes, and then fell asleep, his book resting open on his chest.

He did not hear the front door of the lobby open. He did not hear the footsteps of the figure who entered. He was aroused, however, when the lights went out. It took him a second to realize what had happened. Then he heard the steady, rhythmic pattern of shoes walking across the tile floor. A figure was walking down the darkened aisle, heading straight toward the porter's office. As he could not see the intruder from his current vantage point, Fowler adjusted his position in order to have a better sight line. The good news was that Fowler could still not be seen; the bad news was that he still could not see: it was too dark. He heard the jangling of keys and, with surprising rapidity, he heard the door of the office open. Having entered, the figure immediately closed the door again. A light was turned on inside, but Fowler could not see anything beside the radiant lines on each side of the shut blinds in the office windows.

This was not according to plan. His idea had been that he would be a clear witness to a break in. As it was now, he had not seen who had done the breaking and entering, and it was possible that the person would also leave through the darkness with Fowler still being unable to make a trustworthy identification. Whoever it was would be visible as soon as he or she left the lobby, but Fowler would only see the intruder then if he positioned himself outside the door. There were two doors, however, and they were at opposite ends of the room. If he guessed wrongly, he would have lost his chance altogether. He could stay where he was and then give chase, but to what might that lead? If he overtook the person at the doorway, he would just need to make a lame excuse and get away. If he overtook him or her before they reached the door, however, he might end

up in a scuffle in the dark with a murderer. If the figure reached the door before him, he or she might be able to slip away before he could catch sight of them.

Although Fowler could be disconcerted socially, his true friends knew that he had an impressive reservoir of both physical and moral courage upon which he could and, if the situation warranted it, did draw. And there was nothing for it, but for him to confront the person whilst they were still in the office. He walked over carefully, ensuring that his steps could not be easily heard. Putting his hand upon the door handle, he lingered there for a moment or two, seeking to control his breathing. Then he flung the door open.

Behind a desk toward the left side of the room sat Mike the maintenance man. He held in his right hand a large, horseshoe-shaped magnet. His left hand was close to the surface of the desk, and blocked from view by a tattered cardboard box which sat in front of it. Fowler, to say the least, was once again disconcerted. Nevertheless, he did not allow himself to be intimidated.

‘What are you doing here?’ Fowler demanded.

‘I work here. What are you doing here?’ Mike replied aggressively.

‘You’re not on duty at two in the morning,’ Fowler said accusingly.

‘That’s no business of yours,’ came the curt reply.

‘Why did you turn the lights out?’ Fowler demanded.

‘Saving electricity.’

‘But I was reading,’ he protested lamely.

‘Why didn’t you call out then, as soon as I turned them off?’

Fowler had no answer for this. ‘I just thought something was up, that’s all,’ he mumbled as an explanation. ‘Sorry about the intrusion.’

He longed to give up now. He was tired, sick of sitting in that chair, sick of wearing those clothes, not desiring to risk a further confrontation by maintaining an obvious vigil whilst the maintenance man was in the office. Nevertheless, he stubbornly stuck to his self-imposed task, duly noting the maintenance man's eventual departure, and haunting the lobby area until the dawn had come and cleaners and other support staff were roaming about the premises. Although he did drift into sleep periodically, he also had patches when his mind was surprisingly active. He would manipulate the evidence of the case like a computer addict trying to crack a new game, pushing his control buttons throughout the night watches. Could the maintenance man be an accomplice? That would explain the master key. Still, it did not make any sense. If he was, he would know that there were no hidden cameras, no incriminating videotapes, so the whole late night trip to the office would be pointless. Unless, he had come knowing that Fowler would be there in order to intimidate him. But, if that was the case, it was pretty timid intimidation, and at the price of revealing his identity as an accomplice, a piece of information which surely it was in his and the murderer's interest to keep concealed. He certainly could not be anything more than an accomplice, Fowler reasoned. He could not imagine any motive he could possibly have for murdering Reg Cavendish.

He found himself thinking of Christopher Walduck. Cavendish, at least, was his supervisor. It was possible that this personal contact had generated a great deal of malice. It was just possible that Walduck might have joined forces with either Louise Cavendish or Amanda Brown. If so, that person could have told him the story about the videotapes. Perhaps one of them might even have told him innocently, without being an accomplice. Walduck had been such an unexpected figure, that Fowler had not thought

of suspecting him at the time, but now one fact came back to him forcibly: Walduck had tried the handle on the office door.

Chapter 13

Fowler slept. Breakfast came and went. The schedule rolled on without him. Even as he was drifting in and out of sleep, he battled with pangs of guilt about this dereliction of his conference duties, especially as it was being added to all the others he had already committed. He could not be making a good impression—assuming he was making any impression at all—upon the great and the good of the academic world who congregated at the Church Antiquarian Society. He scolded himself with the thought that he was not demonstrating to the society's officers that he was worthy of the considerable honour which they had bestowed upon him by appointing him as the chair of one of the parallel sessions. Still, he continued to lie in his bed, battling in his more conscious moments with these pangs of guilt, but lacking the willpower to curtail them by rising.

Actually, by the society's lights, it was the ideal time to skip part of the programme and not, in a letter-of-the-law sense, a social crime at all. This morning was the one which had been allotted, as was the custom every year, for an outing to a local site of ecclesiastical interest. The field trip was officially considered an optional component of the programme. As the conference was being held in London this year, this was doubly so, eradicating any unofficial feelings that true members of the society really ought to be participating fully. When the venue was in some of the more remote and depopulated areas of Britain, the field trips were usually well attended through the sheer deprivation of alternative attractions. In such a situation, to retreat to one's little campus bedroom—going stubbornly into self-imposed exile when everyone else was sharing in an communal experience—might be deemed by a few CAS stalwarts as a little anti-social. As it was, however, no one would consider it inappropriate if a foreign delegate choose to

use this officially free time in order to visit the British Museum, the Houses of Parliament, the Tower of London, the Tate Gallery, or some such place; and even British delegates would not need to feel apologetic about taking the opportunity to have a meeting with their publisher or to track down a few sources in the British Library. Only American post-graduates who appear to disdain all the unique opportunities London affords, and perversely insist upon going somewhere like Planet Hollywood or the Hard Rock Café would merit mild disapprobation.

Nevertheless, despite this spirit of voluntarism, the society loves its outings. After one has been sitting in the same rooms listening carefully to papers for most of a week, it is exhilarating to be released out into the locality to move about, touching and gazing at unusual artifacts from centuries past. Although they would never say that they have felt imprisoned, they nevertheless react as if they are on parole: taking deep breaths of air, delighting to notice that bakeries still exist, deriving pleasure from any little row of buildings which looks faintly picturesque. It is as if they had heard the sirens, climbed down into a sound-proof bomb shelter and, only now re-emerging, are amazed to discover that it was a false alarm after all. Moreover, the Church Antiquarian Society's annual outing during its annual summer conference provides much more scope for socializing and networking than any other part of the programme. The delegates are free to chat for almost the whole morning. Moreover, whilst at the meals their interlocutors are limited throughout to the handful of people seated within close proximity, during the field trip they can drift on from companion to companion indefinitely. Another welcome feature is that it provides a fresh stimulus for conversation, particularly as reactions to papers can be fairly stereotyped and repetitive.

On this occasion, the society's members were to be given the opportunity to marvel at the delights of St Crispian's Church, Bloomsbury. St Crispian's is a large Georgian structure which, according to one's tastes, was either a tour de force or a reminder of why the term 'baroque' originally had pejorative overtones. There is a large, elaborate tower, at the top of which is a tripod structure which serves as the stand for a statue. The figure mounted so imposingly at the pinnacle of this house of worship is not, as one might suspect, St Crispian, but rather the secular saint King Henry V, lest there be any danger at all that the Shakespearean tribute and nationalistic impulses which had inspired the church's name might elude some dim-witted creature. Thus Henry V stands, his drawn sword defiantly stretched in the direction of France, forever reminding the pious souls of London that they should not allow Christian sentimentalism to foster any misguided notions regarding the international brotherhood of man or the alleged nobility of pacifism.

Climbing the tower was not permitted on a standard tour of St Crispian's. In the first place (it was laboriously explained to the CAS delegates) there was no fixed lighting; secondly, it would add significantly to the church's insurance payments; and, finally, your ordinary run-of-the-mill tourist could not be completely trusted to act prudently nor, for that matter, were such people likely to have the kind of intellectual training that would make such an experience truly profitable. Nevertheless, the point was repeatedly underlined, the eminence and prestige of the Church Antiquarian Society had secured a (virtually) unprecedented waiving of this restriction. Once the general, collective guided tour had ended, a generous amount of time would be allotted for the delegates to choose to examine whatever had aroused their interest. During this period, those who wished

could climb the tower. A box of torches would be left at a nearby table in order to facilitate this. It was duly held up for cursory inspection lest any of the delegates might be momentarily thwarted by having visualized incorrectly what was meant by the phrase ‘a box’.

Although the delegates were immensely gratified that this privilege had been secured on their behalf, and they probably would have been indignant had it not been, the vast majority of them were not apt actually to take advantage of it. As it was a very high tower indeed, climbing it meant a formidable trudge up a monotonous series of narrow, winding stone stairs. Well over half of the trippers had already arrived in life at an age at which their bodies would punish them on the morrow for having pursuing such an undertaking on the day before. Those in the age bracket below them, even by several decades, already knew perfectly well that this particular excursion was almost completely pointless from a didactic point of view, and therefore their time would be much more profitably spent examining the ornate furnishings in the interior of the church. It was only a portion of the youngest of the society’s members, and a few of their kindred spirits of middle age—those of either age who prized athleticism and adventure as much as art and education—who were tempted to ascend the normally forbidden tower.

The other eye-catching architectural feature besides the tower with its statue of Henry V was a gigantic portico, modeled on the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus. This was an impressive sight but, unless one was inspired to attempt to make a pencil sketch of it, one that could be appreciated without expending very much time. The interior of the church, however, was a treasure trove of exquisite furnishings: altar pieces, sculptures, paintings, and numerous other features, each with a story from the history of Western civilization to

tell which would delight the ears of scholars of that period. In typical British conquest-and-collection fashion, the works of Venetian, Florentine, Flemish and other arts had been acquired; and, in general, the cultural heritage of a range of nations and ages had been cheerfully raided, in order to inspire the worshipping citizens of Bloomsbury. Thus numerous scholars whose period was not the eighteenth century, could find something to contemplate which added to their knowledge of their own area of specialization, either in the furnishings which pre-dated the building of St Crispian's or (in the case of the modernists) in telling modifications which had been made in order to suit the needs, tastes or sensibilities of subsequent generations of parishioners. The official tour over, the delegates did mill about contentedly, contemplating the features which informed their studies or struck their fancies.

Not everyone heard the scream; a scream which gathered pace like the whistle of an on-coming train. Not everyone heard the thud that silenced it; a thud like a huge bag of cement being thrown by some burly construction worker onto the back of a lorry. Those standing in the portico certainly heard it. They instinctively worked their way around the outside of the building in order to see what had happened. They did not have far to walk. There on the paving stones of Church Lane lay the body of a young woman. She was wearing a black pull-over shirt and black jeans. The pool of blood which was partially underneath her and partially beside her made a vivid contrast to the darkness of her apparel and the drabness of the expanse of grey stones which framed them, like one of those greeting card photographs which are all in black-and-white save for the bunch of red roses.

Confusion followed, as one would expect. People inside the building were informed. The scene acted like a magnet, steadily drawing more and more of the delegates, each of them facing toward the street and away from the doors of St Crispian's. No one, of course, thought to find out if anyone else was still in the tower, if anyone was just coming out of it, if anyone was joining the others rather later than everyone else. Everyone naturally assumed it was an accident. Amanda Brown had fallen off the tower. It was not too improbable a misfortune. There was only a short ledge—not even quite waist high—to act as a guard. A brave person might lean over to look at the scene below; a squeamish person might suddenly become dizzy or faint.

The police, of course, would go through the painstaking process of getting everyone to recount their movements. Did they see Amanda Brown enter the tower? Did they see anyone else enter the tower? Who was with them for the whole time? Who was near them when they heard the scream? They did not hear the scream? Well, then, who was with them when they heard the report that there had been an accident? The time period was too long, the church too vast, the delegates too absorbed in their private studies, for a completely accurate account of everyone's movements to emerge in this way. They could hardly accuse a man on a scheduled outing with scores of other people of not having an alibi, even if he did claim to have been reading an obscure wall plaque or visiting the gent's during the crucial time period. Nevertheless, one interesting fact did emerge from all these laborious efforts. It was established that eight people had definitely gone up the tower, and one of these was Christopher Walduck.

Chapter 14

‘I’m one hundred and ten percent behind you now,’ Kettle said excitedly when he found Fowler, still in his room, undressed. ‘You’ve got your murder investigation now, big-time.’ The detective superintendent went on to inform him of the morning’s developments. Kettle spent too many of his days filling in forms and going to apparently pointless meetings for his own liking, and he came alive when a real bit of action came his way. His face was glowing with energy, and he was pacing back and forth in the little cage of a room. As he relayed the days events, the relish in his voice was all too clear. He finished triumphantly with the words, ‘We’ve got a proper case on our hands now.’

‘And I suppose if you had not got your third murder, just as you predicted, you would have been very disappointed,’ Fowler said bitterly. Then he added under his breath, ‘Poor Amanda!’

This stung Kettle. Callousness to the plight of the victims he encountered during his working hours probably was his besetting sin, the devil’s foothold in his life, he thought to himself—not for the first time. His attitude was not the one Christ would have taken. He thought of the parable of the Good Samaritan, accusing himself with the judgement that he would have passed the wounded man by; that he would have been one of the religious persons whose heart was no longer moved by the pain of others. ‘I’m sorry, Jo,’ he said, ‘There’s no excuse for my behaviour,’ and his face was so earnest and guileless that it seemed to Fowler to incarnate all that was most admirable about Tongues of Fire people. Once they had navigated this interpersonal moment, the conversation slowly, by increments, drifted back toward exploring the contours of the case.

‘You’ve been right all along, Jo,’ Kettle remarked, and—now back to full flow—launched into a long monologue reviewing the twists and turns of events thus far. But Fowler was not listening anymore. He just sat on his bed, looking out of the window, trying to assimilate the news that the detective superintendent had brought him. He could see a man mowing a lawn in the distance, for a moment he idly wondered if it was Mike the maintenance man. No, surely there would be a separate grounds crew. He watched mindlessly now, letting the monotonous to-ing and fro-ing of the man and mower as they moved back and forth in orderly lines act as a kind of hypnotic vision to call him inwards to his own thoughts. The wheels in his brain turned back and forth as well, like careful fingers manipulating the dial on a combination lock, until, in a moment, he heard the final click.

‘I’ve got it!’ he shouted, more to himself than Kettle, the volume of his outburst notwithstanding. ‘Oh! I’ve been such a fool! If I would have just thought the thing through properly I might have saved poor Amanda.’ Then, turning to address Kettle, ‘Quick! Let’s not waste any more time. I can explain everything to you now. I’ll get dressed. You find a room somewhere where we can have a meeting. I want Father Alexis there. And Louise Cavendish. And Christopher Walduck. And Professor Osborne.’ Then, as an afterthought he added, ‘And bring a few constables to discourage any funny business.’

Kettle stared at him bewildered, but Fowler just said energetically, ‘Go! Go! I thought you were one hundred and ten percent behind me now,’ and pushed him out the door.

The use had duly been secured of a small lecture room, away from the main traffic of the conference. As the set format did not seem appropriate, someone had wisely disrupted the front rows in order to create a circle of chairs to be used for their meeting. The room had only one door. A constable took an honour guard stance beside it throughout the interview, apparently deriving a tremendous sense of personal satisfaction from his purely superfluous inclination and ability to stand at attention indefinitely. This was the only obvious display of latent force, but Fowler judged that the constable who was taking notes had also been briefed regarding other possible duties, and that Kettle counted himself amongst the muscle on reserve. Moreover, the observant could notice that at least one constable was keeping an eye on the scene through the windows from outside the building.

‘As you all know, several unfortunate incidents have occurred at this conference’, Kettle began lamely. ‘We believe that they are police matters, and we have asked you to come here to help us with our enquiries.’ So far so good, but now comes the difficult part. It was most irregular for him to hand over the control of the meeting to a twenty-five year old amateur, but that is—it had occurred to him belatedly—exactly what he had agreed to do apparently.

‘Dr Fowler,’ he ventured tentatively, ‘will now explain some matters which have come to his attention.’ Kettle felt a bit guilty about this half-hearted introduction. He had covered his own back in case something went wrong at the price of withholding any endorsement—let alone quasi-authority—from his young friend. The decent thing would have been for him to say something like, ‘Early on, I asked Dr Fowler if he would assist me with this case and his co-operation has proven invaluable . . .’ Kettle shuddered,

however, when he thought how that would sound to his superiors if it came before them in the context of an enquiry into an incompetent investigation. No, he dare not do more, but still, his conscience was uneasy. Fowler, after all, might be about to hand him on a plate the credit for solving a triple homicide.

‘There have been three deaths,’ Fowler began, as if he was teaching a survey course to undergraduates, ‘Firstly, that of Professor Besselsleigh, and, most recently, that of Amanda Brown. But the central one—both literally and metaphorically—is that of the society’s president for this year, Dr Reginald Cavendish. Dr Cavendish was murdered ...’ At this announcement, Christopher Walduck and Professor Osborne exclaimed, apparently in surprise, but Fowler refused to be deflected by these reactions. ‘The central question therefore is, Who would have wanted to murder him?’

‘When put that vaguely, there are perhaps several answers to this question. But if one asks more precisely, who came to this conference with the intention of murdering Dr Cavendish, then I believe there is only one correct answer: the man who calls himself Father Alexis.’

‘I did not kill him!’ Father Alexis blurted out defiantly. Then he added sulkily, ‘This is your famous British justice.’

‘Wait, wait,’ Fowler said in a soothing, perhaps patronizing, tone, and then went on, addressing him directly, ‘Your name is not Alexis Zernov. You are not a priest. You are not from Saratov. And you are not a Russian. You are an Armenian. You are either a relation or a friend of a man Dr Cavendish once killed—murdered, we can say from a moral perspective, even if such a legal judgement was denied by the *Armenian* system of

justice,’ (Fowler could not resist this retort as a kind of offensive defence of the virtues of the British system), ‘—or a paid agent in the employ of such a person.’

‘I am not a mercenary,’ Father Alexis replied with dignity, continuing faintly, ‘he was my brother.’ Then, shrugging off a certain wistfulness, ‘But I did not murder Dr Cavendish!’

‘It is psychologically interesting that you should say, “I did not murder Dr Cavendish,” rather than, “I am not a murderer,”’ Fowler remarked with cruel playfulness, ‘but I know your assertion is true. You came here to murder him, but you did not murder him. Nevertheless, your planning was chillingly thorough. Not only did you acquire a very good, made-to-order, false passport, but you even went so far as to bribe officials in Saratov to back your story. Whether or not you would have murdered him—had not someone else beaten you to it—is something only you and God know.’

‘My son once fell in love with a German girl who came to our region as a tourist,’ the man who had called himself Father Alexis began. ‘They had eleven magical days together—they were inseparable. He took her everywhere—to all the sites. They drank together, laughed together. Whenever you saw them they were always doing foolish, teasing, playful things—like lovers do. Then she had to go back to her home. It was two years before he could see her again. He was devoted to her throughout the whole of those two years. He loved her more when she was away than he had ever loved her during those days they had had together. Then, finally, he met her again. But it was not according to his dreams. He found that he did not love the Helena that actually existed, but the one he had replaced her with in his endless hours of daydreaming and longing. They had a few awkward days together and then, poof, it was all over. The way my son

was with love, I have been with hate. In the inner world of my thoughts, I have hated for so long a person of my own creation, whom I have labelled, “Dr Reginald Cavendish.” Now I come here and find that—in reality—a very different kind of person goes by that name, a much more ordinary and banal person. I have had my awkward few days, and now I must go home without my hate, like my son went home without his love.’

‘Well, I think that unravels one strand of this mystery,’ Fowler pronounced breezily, apparently unmoved by the little speech which ‘Father Alexis’ had just delivered. ‘Who then murdered Dr Cavendish? Only one other person had a long-standing grudge to rival that of our Armenian guest, and she had enough on-going contact with him to ensure that she was not wasting her anger on a fantasy. I am referring, of course, to Dr Louise Cavendish.’

Louise Cavendish gave him a mock smile, but did not say a word.

‘Just because a person has a motive, however, does not, of course, mean that they are a murderer,’ Fowler continued in his didactic style, ‘but there is one crucial piece of evidence which moved the case against Dr Louise Cavendish beyond one of mere motive: she has lied to the police.’

‘Nonsense!’ Louise Cavendish pronounced indignantly.

‘O really,’ Fowler muttered smugly, ‘You told the police, you told me for that matter, that your ex-husband had intimated to you on the day before his body was found that he was feeling suicidal. He told you no such thing.’

Louise Cavendish looked down at her hands. She seemed to have lost the will to fight. Fowler, perhaps a little disappointed with this anticlimactic response, pushed a bit further, ‘On that lie potentially hung the difference between suicide and murder and the

difference between suicide and murder is the difference between whether or not the police bring charges.’ But this baiting was to no avail. Louise Cavendish was obviously no longer interested in attempting any immediate defence.

‘Before we can untangle this any further,’ Fowler soldiered on, abandoning that particular duel for the moment, ‘We need to bring into view the story of the one other person with a visible motive for killing Reginald Cavendish: Amanda Brown herself.’ At this point, Fowler turned his attention to Christopher Walduck.

Chapter 15

‘Christopher Walduck was, shall we say, an acquaintance of Amanda Brown’s,’ Fowler began. ‘He is in the unique position of being able to report, from conversations with Amanda herself, on events in both her personal and academic life. I’m not sure that very many other people could offer more than hearsay evidence of her private life. Anyway, it would take some time to find them. As to her academic situation, with the natural secrecy of Cambridge, and with most people away for the summer, I imagine it would not be easy to confirm anything from that end immediately. Therefore, I thought it would be easiest if we just allowed Christopher’s testimony to establish certain germane facts.’ Christopher Walduck began to breathe more fully, and relaxed his stiffened arms, at this innocent explanation of his presence in the room. The treatment that ‘Father Alexis’ and Dr Louise Cavendish had received had apparently led him to fear something worse.

‘Would you kindly tell Detective Superintendent Kettle about Amanda Brown’s relationship with Dr Reginald Cavendish?’ Fowler asked.

‘*Well*, not to be too *salacious*, let’s just say that they were *lovers*. Not perhaps in the *true* sense of the word, but, shall we say, the more *physical* connotation of the term.’

‘So are you saying that they were not “in love”?’ Fowler asked, picking up on the one part of Walduck’s statement which was ambiguous.

‘Oh, I have no doubt that Amanda was *head over heels*, but I don’t think the same could be said for Dr Cavendish.’ In the light of the quasi-judicial tone which Fowler had struck for this meeting, Walduck felt a compulsion to concede, ‘Not that I was his

confidant, or anything.’ Then, having added this phrase to balance his former one, he now added a little chuckle to deflate the latter one.

The post-graduate student was next induced to outline all the details regarding Amanda failing her M.Phil. programme due to her lover’s unnaturally strict marking. Having established these points, Fowler then probed, ‘How did Amanda’s attitude toward Dr Cavendish change in the light of these events?’

Walduck laughed. ‘She was *livid*. *Hell* hath no *fury*, and all that.’

‘Would you say that she wanted to kill him?’

The jovial look drained from Walduck’s face. ‘Of course,’ he began cautiously, ‘one would say that, as an *expression*, but I would not have *thought* it. I wouldn’t have been surprised if she would have *smashed* every *precious* thing in his house or something, but she did not seem *literally bent* on *murder*.’

‘Exactly,’ Fowler said triumphantly. ‘She would have liked to have hurt him. She probably fantasized about murdering him, but she was not really so bitter or rash as to actually murder him. “Smash every precious thing in his house” is exactly right, Christopher, and it is this mental state which explains Professor Besselsleigh’s death.’ Walduck blushed with gratification at the compliment.

Fowler continued, ‘Amanda Brown was Reg Cavendish’s lover. She was “in love” with him. She watched him as he talked, as he read, as he buttered his toast. She noticed every little pattern of behaviour, every like or dislike, every little vanity, quirk, or discomfort. She knew more than anyone that he was enormously pleased to have been honoured with the presidency of the Church Antiquarian Society. He looked upon presiding at this conference as the crowning triumph of his career. She knew that ruining

this moment for him would be truly to smash one of his most precious possessions. She also knew that he was allergic to peanuts. Finally, she knew that he had an entrenched habit of treating a glass of water as a kind of comfort object when speaking in public. He would mechanically take little sips of water throughout his lectures. Amanda Brown tampered with a water bottle, making it appear to be a new one which had never been opened, when in actuality she had secreted some powdered peanuts or perhaps peanut extract in it.’

‘Now, I think she imagined a range of possible outcomes. At the end of this range marking the smallest result, she envisioned Reginald Cavendish smelling or tasting the peanuts at his very first sip. She would then be greatly amused for the rest of the lecture as he would continually grab for the glass, lift it toward his mouth, remember it was tainted, and return it to its place without drinking from it, only to repeat the whole comic ritual over again a few moments later. Perhaps the mental energy this sideshow could demand might even cause his delivery to become stilted or cause him to lose his place on the page or stumble over his words. On the other side of the scale, she might have calculated that it just might kill him. Perhaps she was willing to dismiss this—one would have assumed—fairly improbable possibility cavalierly, and somewhat unreflectively, with an it-would-serve-him-right attitude. I think she probably dwelt in her musings upon a middle outcome. She saw him in her mind’s eye being forced to abandon his lecture—the most important lecture of his career—in order to receive medical treatment.’ Fowler paused and changed his stance, as he often did in his lectures as a kind of non-verbal clue that he was moving into a new section of material.

‘One thing is certain, however: never, in all the scenarios she played over and over in her mind, did she ever imagine that this prank could hurt someone else. As the detective superintendent so cogently put it to me, “peanuts aren’t poison.” Normally, only the principal speaker drinks the water, but even if someone else should drink it, it ought to have done them no harm at all. The great, uncalculated—incalculable—coincidence of this case is that Professor Besselsleigh was also allergic to peanuts. Indeed, her allergy was more severe than Dr Cavendish’s, she was older and more frail, and she had not eaten anything for some time. I saw the ghastly look on Amanda Brown’s face as she watched what was happening. The realization was dawning that she had accidentally killed Professor Besselsleigh.’

Fowler had his audience fully in hand now. The members of the Church Antiquarian Society who were present were not so jaded by a week’s worth of lectures as to be unable to give their full attention to such a talk as this. Kettle was beginning to relax more as well, judging that the slack he had given Fowler was not going to come back to him twisted around his neck.

‘We now have two strands clearly identified,’ Fowler went on, defaulting from being a storyteller back to being a lecturer, ‘the extraneous one involving our friend from Armenia, and the important, the very relevant, one concerning the death of Professor Besselsleigh. We still have, however, two more corpses to account for.’ Fowler felt the callousness of these last words as he said them but, uncertain how to correct the gaffe now, he just kept moving. ‘Who then did kill Dr Cavendish? That is the question. And it brings us back to Louise Cavendish.’ It had been so long now since Fowler had accused

anyone in the room that everyone had become less wary. Now the tension returned in an instant.

‘Dr Cavendish,’ Fowler said coaxingly as he looked her, ‘it’s all over now, isn’t? I will reconstruct the events myself if I must, but it really would be for the best if you would just tell us what really happened right now. Reg Cavendish was not suicidal, and he did not commit suicide—he was murdered. Therefore, he told you no such thing.’

‘Although he would not admit it to himself, let alone anyone else, he did not really want an equal partner,’ she began listlessly. ‘It was inevitable, I suppose. We were the first generation to demand it of them, to beat them at their own game, climbing side by side with them on the same professional ladder.’

Then, with a change to a new forcefulness in her tone, she said, ‘But the new generation is full of cant. They’re always talking about equality in relationships. But that is not what they really want; that is not what Amanda Brown wanted. If you really want equality, then you choose someone who is your equal, don’t you? She ought to have gone for someone her own age, at her own position in life. Someone like you.’ She waved a hand at Fowler who, in turn, tucked his chin toward his chest, in an instinctive, futile effort to hide his embarrassment.

‘But what does she do?’ Louise Fowler continued, speaking with even more animation. ‘She goes for a man from her father’s generation; her supervisor of all things! You can’t get more hierarchical than that! Then, to top it all off, she gets all shocked and disillusioned when he has to fulfil his duty in that hierarchy, as if it is his fault rather than her own for having put him in such a ludicrous situation to begin with. Not that he doesn’t deserve blame as well. God knows he does! He was such a selfish man.’ As she

said this, she gave a little shiver as if the very thought of it was a kind of contamination which needed to be shaken off. This seemed to rouse her into recollecting the point at hand.

‘Yes, Dr Fowler, I lied,’ she said in a business-like manner, staring straight into his eyes. ‘That little tart came to me, all confiding and sisterly, and told me that he had said he was suicidal. She pleaded with me to keep an eye out for him and to do what I could to help him. She even had the cheek to say the words, “No one can reach a man like his first love.” What sentimental American rubbish!’ After a brief pause, she went on, ‘Well, any fool could see that something must have been really wrong when he did not show up to preside over his own conference. I needed to say what I did to get them to look in his room.’

‘Afterwards you could have told the police the truth, that it was Amanda Brown who actually claimed to have heard him say this,’ Fowler prodded. To this, however, Louise Cavendish replied with only a contemptuous snort.

‘In short,’ Fowler said, resuming his lecturing pose, ‘Louise Cavendish’s lie was based upon a lie told to her by Amanda Brown. Amanda Brown, ladies and gentlemen, murdered Reg Cavendish. She came to this conference with a grudge against him, and a plan to punish him, but she did not come here with the intention of murdering him. Professor Besselsleigh’s death changed all that. She admired Besselsleigh, viewing her, rightly, as a great scholar and as an inspirational role model. Killing her accidentally was a severe shock. One might even say it unhinged her. If not mentally, then certainly from the restraints of what Christopher refers to as “middle-class morality”.’ Walduck smiled

a slightly confused smile, uncertain as to whether or not he should take this allusion to himself as a compliment.

‘She had crossed the line into being a killer, and she was ready to go all the way with it now. I think she probably, in a confused sort of way, blamed Reg Cavendish himself for Professor Besselsleigh’s death and thought that he deserved to be executed for it. Anyway, she did murder him.’ He paused and changed his stance once again.

‘I will now reconstruct for you how it was done. Somehow, Amanda Brown obtained a master key. I will leave it to the police to investigate how, if they deem it necessary. Perhaps a spare one is kept in the porter’s lodge and she nipped in and stole it before most of the delegates even arrived. This is just conjecture. It might even be that there was no master key and she was just very good at picking locks. Certainly, she had a great deal of practical knowledge. Perhaps this is because, as Christopher has also informed me, her father was an automobile mechanic. Anyway, as I have said, she knew Cavendish’s patterns of behaviour very well. She was able to predict when he would take a bath. She also knew that he liked to listen to the radio when he was in the bath. Amanda Brown quietly unlocked the door of his room and entered it while he was in the bath. She took the bulb out of the socket of the desk lamp, unscrewed the plug, taped up the ground wire, and screwed the plug back together again, being careful to leave the roll of tape and the screwdriver among his things. It is possible, of course, that she fixed the plug on her own lamp and brought it with her, replacing it with the lamp in his room after she had killed him, but my guess is that she would have found carrying a lamp around more risky than quietly doing a few jobs while he was in the bath. Anyway, throwing the lamp into the bath and thereby killing him was relatively simple if, of course, not a fool-

proof method. God knows, what she would have done if it did not work, but it did. Reg Cavendish was dead.’

‘Now here is the real piece of wit: the locked bolts. How does one lock a bolt from the outside? As the detective superintendent so correctly intimated to me this is insoluble. In short, one doesn’t because one can’t. It was extraordinarily ingenious in that it absolutely guaranteed that it would look like an obvious case of suicide; but, in a way, it was too clever by half for, should murder be suspected, it narrowed the field of suspects dramatically. Ladies and gentlemen,’ Fowler was so enjoying himself that he had been tempted once again to use this absurd mode of address, ‘the bolts were not locked from the outside. After murdering Reg Cavendish, Amanda Brown coolly left the room and returned to her own. She even made an appearance at breakfast the following morning. But, after that, she returned to Reg Cavendish’s room, let herself in once again, bolted the doors, and waited for events to take their course. She hoped—planned—that Louise Cavendish would take charge and ensure that matters moved along speedily, and this bit of her scheme came off smoothly as well. When the door was broken open, she was hiding under the bed. This can be deduced with certainty as there was literally no where else to hide. It also—by the way—eliminated at a stroke the other primary suspects on the police’s list.’ With this final bit of phraseology, Fowler shamelessly endeavoured to erase from the record the fact that he might have ever suspected anyone else, and redirected any sense of grievance held by the falsely suspected back to Kettle, returning his cowardly introduction in kind. ‘Our friend from Armenia,’ he continued, ‘is of such a hearty girth as to have made such a feat of concealment impossible. And Louise Cavendish, of course, was on the outside trying to get in.’

‘Once again, it was not a sure-fire scheme. It was very risky indeed. But, once again, her calculations proved correct. Anyone could tell at a glance that he was dead: his head was lying motionless beneath the water. Moreover, one would not be apt to dive into a pool of water which was, for all one knew, still filled with electric currents, in order to make absolutely sure. Therefore, the only sensible course would be to leave well alone and call the police. But the student rooms do not have phones. It is necessary to walk down the hall and around a corner to reach a public phone box. It is not far, but it is out of sight. A mobile phone might have destroyed the plan, but academics are not apt to carry them, and neither are the maintenance workers at the University of Bloomsbury. It was also possible that someone might have stayed behind but, once again, the normal, prudent course is to leave the scene exactly as it has been found. She might have lain there, under the bed, terribly frightened that she might get caught on the scene. Ironically, if so, and her fears had come true, it might have been the safest thing that could have happened to her, but that is getting ahead of the story.’

‘To continue with the reconstruction, as soon as Louise Cavendish and the maintenance man had gone to telephone, Amanda Brown came out of her hiding place, left the room, re-locked the door behind her, and slipped back into her own room which was just six or seven doors further along the hallway. And that is how it happened. There was no reason, of course, for the police to do all kinds of extraneous collecting and testing in the room, as it seemed like such an obvious case of suicide. Moreover, if a hair or something of Amanda’s had been found in the room she could have easily explained this away by noting that—until quite recently—they had been lovers, so it was not surprising that a hair of hers might have fallen off of some of his clothing. Nevertheless,

should they wish, I imagine the police could still find forensic evidence to corroborate my explanation of events.’

Fowler paused dramatically. Then, panning his eyes around the circle, staring at each of them in turn as if they were his bridge partner and he was hoping they just might send him some discreet signal, he said, ‘That is my explanation of the first two deaths, but now we must come to a very different scenario: the killing of the killer.’

Chapter 16

It was Amanda Brown herself of course. Or so Fowler thought, anyway. Most of the people in the room—scholars who were accustomed to listening to lectures, who knew their structure and therefore could divine where the argument was leading, a few teasers in order to heighten the drama notwithstanding—surely had already guessed this. Detective Superintendent Mark Kettle, however, was not such a person.

‘No, Jo,’ he exclaimed unselfconsciously when Fowler had declared that she had taken her own life. Then, discovering that everyone was now staring at him in silence, he felt obliged to add something further to his statement. ‘It’s all wrong. Women don’t commit suicide that way. It would be pills or something.’

‘O really. But you are happy to concede that she could do a little electrical D.I.Y. and fry someone in his own bathtub?’ As an afterthought, Fowler added dryly, ‘Perhaps American women are just less squeamish about violence.’

Kettle was not to be put off with a quip. ‘Go on then,’ he said belligerently, ‘prove how it was done.’

Now this comment did make Fowler uneasy. He thought it rather moved the goalposts as he had not really been ‘proving’ anything all along, but only explaining events in an intellectually satisfying, and therefore convincing, way. He was, after all, a scholar, and in the humanities at that. He would leave it to scientific minds, members of the forensic teams of the CID no doubt, to do something as vulgar as bothering unduly about proof. Proving these kind of things was the kind of work which took a certain obstinate small-mindedness, rather than the focus upon the grand, sweeping vision, the coherent whole, which was his training and delight. Even more to the point, he did not have a clever little

reconstruction which might dazzle his audience with its brilliantly imagined details. In his mind, she just climbed up the tower and threw herself off of it. What was there to say? Nevertheless, a true lecturer can always spin his words and, in truth, he was really convinced of his theory, so he took a deep breath and plunged in.

‘Well, it is a bit much to imagine that the membership of the Church Antiquarian Society contains two murderers,’ he began. Although an objective observer might agree that the force of common sense was behind this sentiment, it was rightly felt by his hearers at the time to be a rather lame start. Surely, he had a more compelling line to take than that, more than one person in the room could probably not help but think. Soon, however, Fowler began to recover his position.

‘Why would Amanda Brown have killed herself? Let’s begin with that question. Yesterday, that is to say, the very day before her death, I had a conversation with her.’ Fowler added, somewhat uneasily, ‘I had a similar conversation with you, Dr Cavendish,’ and gave a deferential nod to Louise Cavendish.

‘I’m afraid I deliberately told some untruths on both of those occasions.’ Fowler’s fresh sense of unease was now generated by the presence of Kettle, but it was quite unnecessary. The detective superintendent was in many ways an uncompromising moralist, but he had no qualms whatever in regards to the practice of lying in the course of an effort to prosecute criminals. If the arguments which had convinced Fowler that a Christian could engage in all kinds of activities generally considered sinful in Tongues of Fire circles from drinking and smoking to reading Darwin and admiring the paintings of Gauguin would have sounded laughably Jesuitical to Kettle, had he ever been privileged to hear them rehearsed; the detective superintendent nevertheless, in his own gruff way,

had followed a not dissimilar line of thought when it came to engaging in a morally flexible way with his own vocation and cultural milieu.

Fowler continued, ‘The gist of it was that the police were going to take possession today of video evidence which would show comprehensively who came in and out of Reg Cavendish’s room during the whole period in question. In short, I, as I say, falsely, informed her that his murderer would be revealed imminently. Perhaps as early as today.’

Kettle breathed out rebelliously. This inarticulate interjection was sufficient for him to gain the floor once again. With all eyes on him, he said, ‘It won’t do, Jo. When we discussed the theory that Reg Cavendish might have committed suicide because he had murdered Besselsleigh and thought he was about to be arrested for it,’ (with this circumlocution the detective superintendent deftly avoided revealing that he himself had been the champion of this erroneous theory whilst Fowler had always discounted it), ‘you yourself noted that no one would commit suicide to avoid being arrested. There would always be time to commit suicide later, once it was clear that the prosecution case was water tight.’

‘Precisely,’ Fowler chimed in, with false bravado. ‘Video evidence would have been pretty water tight but, nevertheless, Detective Superintendent Kettle is quite correct. It is unlikely this psychological pressure, by itself, would cause someone to lose the will to live. But it was not by itself.’

Fowler was now coming into his stride, the lecture was unfolding once again. ‘What were the psychological pressures on Amanda Brown? We know very little about her really. What kind of support did she have back in America? Did she have a loving

family, strong friendships? Or was there a lot of unhappiness in her past? But leaving all that aside, let us list the factors that we are aware of, in chronological order.'

'Firstly, she failed her M.Phil. programme. This could well have signalled the end of her chosen career. All of her dreams in this regard, her very sense of identity, seemingly down the drain. More than one person has committed suicide just because their career had been thwarted. Secondly, she was, in her mind, cruelly and callously betrayed by her lover. Well,' Fowler said in a knowing way, 'the pages of literature across the globe and down through the centuries and the pages of our newspapers to this very day are littered with the suicides of those wounded in love. But there is more. Thirdly, she had accidentally killed a woman whom she greatly admired. Now, ladies and gentlemen, we have moved out of the banality of everyday events—thwarted ambitions in life and love—to something really extraordinary. I think we can all imagine that the reality of such a great crime would weigh heavily on a reflective soul.'

'Now, I submit to you, might her murdering Reg Cavendish—a crime which is punished so severely—have been the act of a person who thought they had nothing left to lose in life—a person that was already somewhat apathetic about their future, their fate? Perhaps, perhaps not. None of us can fully imagine the mental turmoil of another. Perhaps she felt remorse in regards to Cavendish's murder as well. After all, her hatred of him was just the dark side of her passionate devotion to him. Maybe the love came back relentlessly, overwhelmingly, once his naked body was lying listlessly in that bath water. I once heard someone say that we know what we truly think of someone by what emotions are aroused when we see them sleeping. The sleeping bodies of our enemies we find contemptuous, repulsive, while those of our loved ones we find touching,

endearing. Death is a kind of sleep. I suspect that she had not seen him sleeping once since their angry falling out. Perhaps it all came back to her as she saw his unguarded features floating in the water.’

‘I do not know. Alternatively, perhaps she did not regret it at all, did not indulge once again in her past feelings of love but, nevertheless, Reg Cavendish’s death brought with it an overwhelming sense of ending. Her career was over. Her love affair was over. Her revenge was over. All of her motivating goals had been attained or rendered unattainable. Perhaps, in a rush of hollow consciousness, it seemed as if her very life was over. Then, we can now add on top of this, the possibility of a trial. She might have thought that, at best, her future was prison. She might have found unbearable the notion that the intimate details of her pathetic love affair would be meticulously aired in a public court room. As I say, it is impossible to recapture her exact mental state. I will say this, however, I have listed a handful of facts—facts, not speculations—regarding misfortunes she had experienced, any one of which has served as a sufficient inducement to suicide in numerous cases in the past.’

‘Before I conclude this point, allow me to say a few words regarding the alternative theory that Amanda Brown was murdered. I find it hard to imagine a murderer choosing such a moment for such a crime. It would have been impossible to guarantee that someone would not be climbing up the stairs—possibly even emerging on the roof—at the very moment when the unpleasant deed was done. In short, whether or not there might be a witness to, in all probability, the identity of the only possible person who could have committed the murder, would have been left as an entirely random possibility. I will not go into the question of who might have had a motive for murdering her,’ at this

point Fowler accidentally caught Louise Cavendish's eye and jerked his gaze away rather too quickly, 'but I cannot imagine any such motive which would require such haste that the murderer would not choose to wait for a more suitable, a more discreet, opportunity. Naturally, the police are free to pursue the theory that she was murdered for as long as they like, unearthing whatever evidence there is to unearth.' Upon saying this, he smiled patronizingly at Kettle. 'But, to conclude ladies and gentlemen, here is my solution to these tragic events. Amanda Brown killed Professor Besselsleigh by accident when a ploy to revenge herself on Reg Cavendish went wrong. She then murdered Cavendish, cleverly making it appear to be a suicide. Finally, she committed suicide.'

In a shamelessly ingratiating tone, Fowler added, 'Professor Osborne, Harold, please forgive me for taking up so much of your valuable time. All of us in the society are so grateful for the remarkable way you have stood in the gap after Dr Cavendish's tragic death. I insisted that Detective Superintendent Kettle invite you here for this little, unscheduled meeting because I thought that, as a venerable member of the committee of long standing, as the society's acting president, and as next year's president, you had a right to know the truth about all these events which have so disturbed our little family of scholars. I thought it would be wise if every effort was made to give you the fullest possible discretion in regards to what is said or not said regarding the deaths of three of the society's members, whether or not any memorials are conducted and, in general, that you have all the information you could possibly have in order to handle this whole unfortunate matter as you see fit in the light of your considerable tact, wisdom, and experience.'

Fowler then panned the whole assembly with his gaze as he thanked them collectively for their time and attention, and then sat down again. Kettle gave a few practical instructions, requested that various people, notably 'Father Alexis', provide various facts about themselves for the constable to write down, and, with that, the meeting was over.

Chapter 17

The next day was Sunday, the last day of the conference. As has been noted, every conference, by the very nature of the fact that it is so rigorously scheduled with new experiences, creates the sensation of a great deal of time passing by, but a conference which begins on the Monday with the public death of the retiring president, peaks with the discovering of the violent death of the president himself on the Thursday morning, and rounds off with the violent death of a member of the society on the Saturday outing is one which feels particularly eventful. After breakfast, there was another optional item on the schedule: the celebration of the Eucharist according to the Anglican rite, the society's treasurer, the Revd Anne Roebeck-Glanville, having kindly agreed to officiate. Unlike the outing, even the most stalwart CAS members attached no stigma to any of their number refraining from attending an act of worship. Nevertheless, there was a very high turn-out. Perhaps it was merely that most people wanted to have breakfast and were then at a loss as to what to do next if they did not join the trail of those heading for the chapel, but Fowler wondered if it was more than this.

Why was he there? He was not an Anglican, after all. But what was he, then? He had not yet worked that one out. He had a nominal affiliation with the Tongues of Fire congregation in Oakham whose Sunday morning service he attended irregularly, but he had not yet discerned—to his satisfaction—whether this connection was just about to end or just about to be renewed. Was his sneaking suspicion that the Pentecostal denomination of his childhood was truly his spiritual home after all a mere bout of sentimentality? Or of cowardice, a fear to move on to uncharted places? On the other hand, was the unease he so often felt there merely a manifestation of an unholy cultural

snobbishness he had acquired as a kind of intellectual's occupational hazard, or was it a genuine indication that he was growing spiritually in a legitimate way, but in a way in which the old wineskin could no longer contain? If so, what was the new wineskin? He attended a Baptist congregation sporadically, in order to hear a gifted preacher, but he always felt like a spiritual voyeur when he did so. He had attended Anglican services less often but, when he had, the sensation was the same. In many ways he was more spiritually engaged than his fellow worshippers who were in their long-occupied spiritual home; because the words of the liturgy were unfamiliar to him, they buzzed around in his heart and mind with remarkable spiritual potency. Nevertheless, it was the same as when he lustily drank or smoked with people who had lived their whole lives without any thought of religion: the zeal was the zeal of a tourist.

The congregation began to say the words of the general confession of sin. Fowler's Tongues of Fire sensibilities were intact enough to cause him always to revolt at this. It would do his father's denomination good, he well knew, to recite a few well written declarations of the Almighty's worthiness. It would certainly be a refreshing change from the repetitive banality of the ostensibly spontaneous utterances made during a typical Tongues of Fire service. Still, scripted confession was definitely a step too far for him. Only police states prepare confessions in advance to which people are expected to give their assent. A true confession, by definition, must be personal, tailor-made. Fowler simply stopped reciting when they came to it. Still, as he looked around he found, for the first time, something powerful and true in this public act. Dotted throughout the congregation were people whose lives he knew only briefly, but rather too well. He thought that, after all, there was something noble and dignified about the discreet nature

of a general confession. Tongues of Fire people, at their worst, had a tendency in the course of extemporaneous public prayers or testimonies to catalogue their past sins in such explicit detail as to leave them open to the charge of exhibitionism. Here, on the other hand, was an act which perhaps, at its best, allowed for a public acknowledgement of sin without degenerating into prurience. It put the spotlight, not on the contours of the sin, but on the penitence of the sinner.

He instinctively used the opportunity of this momentary disengagement to scan the faces of his fellow-worshippers. He saw 'Father Alexis' there, now wearing a simple, drab brown suit. His face was terribly earnest. Fowler watched him intone the words, 'We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness, Which we from time to time most grievously have committed, By thought word, and deed'. His gaze moved on until it lit upon Christopher Walduck, who was saying, 'The remembrance of them is grievous unto us; The burden of them intolerable.' Lousie Cavendish, her skin looking more icy white than ever against the blackness of her fitted dress and costume jewellery, pleaded, 'Have mercy upon us, most merciful Father; For thy Son our Lord Jesus Christ's sake, Forgive us all that is past . . .' Then the end of the prayer came and Fowler found himself vocalizing in unison with the rest of this random selection of sinners the simple, ancient word 'Amen'.

Toward the end of the lunch break, Kettle arrived, fresh from his own corporate act of worship. 'Look at you all,' he began as he met Fowler, 'This is supposed to be a Christian organization, isn't it?, yet no one thinks that Sunday ought to be a day for worship.'

'We did have a worship service this morning,' Fowler replied.

‘God got his forty-five minutes, did he?’ Kettle remarked contemptuously. A Tongues of Fire service lasted from two to three hours, depending on how spontaneous everyone was feeling, and Kettle naturally assumed that this was exactly what the Almighty expected from his children, and that he judged those who gave less as slack in their devotion. He added wistfully, almost sheepishly, ‘I had hoped we would see you with us this morning, Jo.’

‘All things are possible for those who believe,’ was Fowler’s scriptural, if enigmatic, reply. ‘What brings you here now?’

‘I just wanted to catch you before you head back. You were right, you know.’

‘About what?’

‘Amanda Brown. You did that clever amateur dick stuff about imaginary security cameras but, would you believe it?, that old tomb of a church building really did have them. Who would have thought the Anglicans would have the wit for it? Sure enough, there was a camera which captured the entrance to the tower. We could count ‘em up and count ‘em down. She was alone up there alright.’

‘She was alone,’ Fowler repeated wearily. After a moment of silence, he seemed to rouse himself from some private reflections. ‘Listen Mark, I’ve got to go get ready to give my paper now, but thanks for telling me, and thanks a lot for all your help.’

‘It’s my jolly job. Thanks for your help. And, hey, Jo, it’s been really good to spend some time with you again. Now that we’re back in touch, let’s try to stay incommunicado, OK?’

‘Sure, Mark, you bet,’ Fowler said, smiling an affectionate smile.

Fowler moved at a brisk pace toward his room. He knew his paper well; the reserved preparation time was dedicated to his apparel. In his mind, there was something vaguely disrespectful about going to church in too stylish an outfit, but that bit of the day was now over and his big moment was fast approaching. He selected the items from his wardrobe with care: white shirt, with slightly rounded corners to the collar; grey single-breasted tailcoat; matching waistcoat; narrow grey trousers with black pinstripes; silk necktie coloured a rich purple. To most observers the tailcoat was the most surprising feature of this visual anomaly but, for Fowler, who had become accustomed to it, the really delightful touch was his buttonhole. The plentitude of the metropolis had allowed him to go one step further in his sporadic, fanciful re-creations of the past: he had been able to procure a gardenia.

Fowler sat alertly through the first paper of parallel session D that Sunday afternoon, knowing that his turn was coming next. He moved up to the table at the front and placed his papers on them. The chair announced the title of Fowler's paper: 'A Moveable Feast: the Diet of Zechariah Hebblethwaites, Wesleyan minister, in Six Different Circuits, c. 1830-50'. And it went very well. He remembered to pause before adding the line 'except for half a bottle of claret for medicinal purposes', and was rewarded with the laughter he had hoped to induce by it. Having himself taken the option of a very narrow case study, there were, of course, no sharp comments in the question time insinuating that he had misunderstood his subject. A few helpful pointers were made regarding how one might broaden it out a little, making connections with other aspects of nineteenth-century religion and culture, and then his moment in the spotlight was over.

Fowler had been particularly gratified to note that Professor Osborne had chosen to come to this session. After it had broken up, the professor came over to him.

‘Fine paper, my boy.’

‘Thank you, sir.’ Fowler immediately regretted the ‘sir’, but it had just slipped out. Osborne had not seemed to notice.

‘In my work on Country Parsons,’ he was saying, ‘I did a little section on the clergy and wine. It might give you a bit of background, should you decide to fill that piece out a bit.’

The final session of the annual conference of the Church Antiquarian Society was about to commence. The two of them began to stroll together toward the main lecture hall. ‘Do you know much about nature, my boy?’ Professor Osborne asked abruptly.

‘Well, now that you mention it,’ Fowler began, trying to suppress any noticeable eagerness, ‘I’ve been thinking a great deal lately about the relationship between clerics who were amateur naturalists and the vicissitudes of natural theology in the Victorian age.’

‘That sounds very interesting. You know that I’ve chosen “The Church and Nature” for next year’s theme?’

‘I did hear it mentioned.’

‘Do you think you could whip up something along the lines you’ve just outlined for a plenary session?’

‘Oh, I’m sure I could! What a great honour that would be!’ Fowler gushed.

‘Well that’s settled then, my boy.’

As Professor Osborne was heading for the platform, and the two men had continued their conversation until he had almost arrived there, Fowler ended up sitting in the front row. Professor Osborne began to address the members of the Church Antiquarian Society, who were now assembled for the last time for that year. 'I think we would all agree that it has been a most stimulating conference,' he was saying. Fowler smiled to himself, echoing in his mind the refrain that came with this particular liturgy, another general confession which seemed to acquire fresh force, 'Very stimulating indeed.'