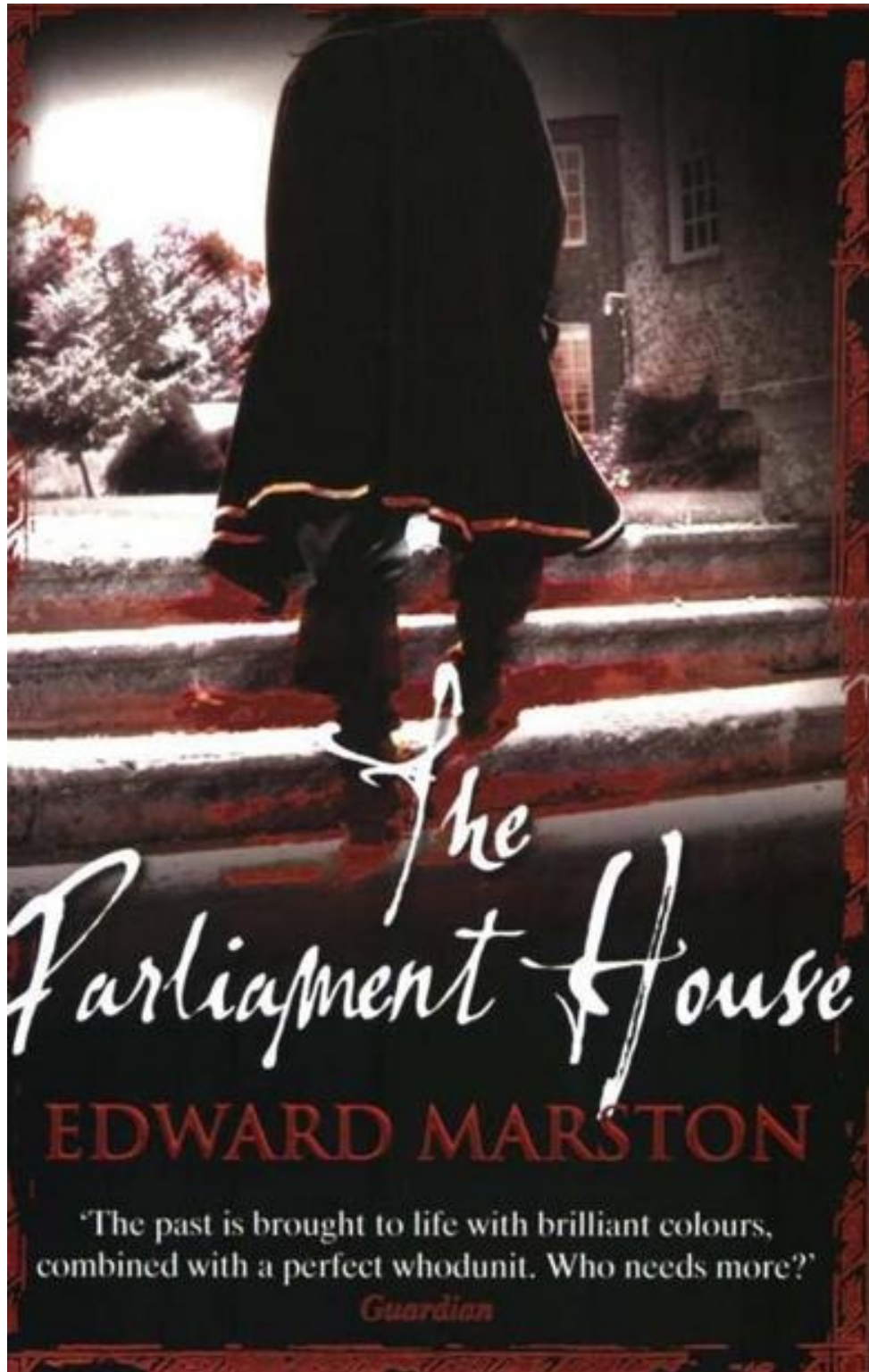


The
Parliament House

EDWARD MARSTON

'The past is brought to life with brilliant colours,
combined with a perfect whodunit. Who needs more?'

Guardian



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EDWARD MARSTON was born and brought up in South Wales. A full-time writer for over thirty years, he has worked in radio, film, television and the theatre, and is a former chairman of the Crime Writers' Association. Prolific and highly successful, he is equally at home writing children's books or literary criticism, plays or biographies, and the settings for his crime novels range from the world of professional golf to the compilation of the Domesday Survey. The Parliament House is the fifth book in the series featuring architect Christopher Redmayne and Puritan Constable Jonathan Bale, set in Restoration London after the Great Fire of 1666.

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Chapter One

The shot came out of nowhere. He had removed his helmet to wipe away the perspiration dribbling down his face when he heard the sound of gunfire. The musket ball missed his right eye and ploughed a searing furrow along his unprotected temple. He felt as if someone had just used a hot chisel to gouge out skin and bone from the side of his head. Agony blended with fear. Blood mingled with sweat. Dropping his helmet, he tried to maintain his balance but his legs began to buckle under him. His mind was racing, his vision blurred. Sliced wide open, his right ear seemed to have trebled in size and turned into solid lead, weighing him down so hard that he keeled over and hit the ground with a thud. It was only then that he was able to let out a long, loud cry of despair.

It had all happened many years before, but Bernard Everett had never forgotten that fateful moment in September 1651, when he thought, mistakenly, that the battle was all over. He still carried the livid scar along the side of his head. Other men would have grown their hair over it or worn a periwig to hide the wound completely, but Everett bore it as a mark of honour. The ugly slit and the shattered ear were testimony to his role in a great military triumph. At the battle of Worcester, the Royalist army had been emphatically routed.

'What a day that was!' recalled Sir Julius Cheever.

'One of the proudest of my life,' said Everett.

'Even though it was very nearly your last.'

'God was there to save me, Sir Julius.'

'Had you kept it on, your helmet would have done that. And it would have left you looking a trifle prettier.'

'Who cares what I look like? We won the battle.'

'Yes,' said Sir Julius. 'That's what really mattered.'

Bernard Everett was a stocky man of middle years and medium height. His short grey hair surmounted a bulbous forehead. A pleasant face had been given a sinister quality by the hideous battle scar. Everett had served under Sir Julius Cheever in the army, and he was glad to be reunited with his old colonel. He was even more delighted by his recent election as Member of Parliament for Cambridge, a city that Oliver Cromwell, a man he revered, had represented in parliament.

Military service was not the only link between the two men. Sir Julius, too, was a Member of Parliament, representing his native county of Northamptonshire, and bringing a bold and uncompromising voice to any debate. Big, bulky, opinionated and forthright, he was sixty years old but he had lost very little of his vigour and he remembered, in precise detail, the experiences that he and Bernard Everett had shared on various battlefields during the Civil War.

'They fought well at Worcester,' he conceded, 'but we had the beating of them from the start. We had thirty thousand soldiers in the field.'

'Our army and militia were out in force,' recalled Everett.

'The Royalists were hopelessly outnumbered.'

'How many prisoners did we take, Sir Julius?'

'The best part of ten thousand,' said the other, 'in addition to the three thousand that were killed in action. Of course, we did have casualties on our side.'

Everett chuckled. 'I know - I was one of them.'

'Are you two still talking about the war?' asked Hester Polegate, clicking her tongue in disapproval. 'That's all in the past. It's time to look to the future, Bernard. Now come and see the rest of the house.'

'Gladly, Hester.'

'You, too, Sir Julius.'

Everett gave her a conciliatory kiss on the cheek. Hester Polegate was his sister, a plump woman in her late forties with a round, rosy-cheeked face and a genial manner. She took her duties as hostess very seriously. Along with others, her brother had been invited to celebrate the opening of the new business in Knightrider Street. Hester's husband, Francis Polegate, a lean, angular man, was a successful wine merchant who had been looking for new premises. He had purchased a corner site that he searched for someone to design the building.

Sir Julius Cheever was a good friend of Polegate's and he had recommended a name to him. As a result, Christopher Redmayne, the young architect who had designed Sir Julius's own house in London, was given the commission. He, too, was present on the day that the merchant and his family took over their new quarters. It was a happy occasion. Christopher was not only pleased to receive endless praise from satisfied clients. He had an opportunity to spend time with the other guest, Susan Cheever, daughter of Sir Julius, the lovely young woman with whom the architect had a long-standing understanding that was slowly moving towards a formal betrothal. While everyone else was being shown around the building, he preferred to stay in the hall with Susan.

'It's a lovely house, Christopher,' she said. 'You worked hard on the plans. I'm so grateful that I'm able to see the final result. You have every right to be proud of your achievement.'

'Thank you.'

'Mr and Mrs Polegate are thrilled.'

'Yours is the only opinion I really value, Susan.'

'Then you have my unstinting approval.'

'But you haven't seen the house properly yet.'

'I don't need to,' she said. 'Everything that Christopher Redmayne designs has the hallmark of excellence.'

He laughed. Christopher was tall, lithe and handsome with long, curly hair that had a reddish tinge. Though conspicuously well-dressed, he wore none of the garish apparel that was so popular among younger men. There was an air of restraint about him that appealed to Susan. For his part, Christopher had been drawn to her from the moment they had first met. Slim and shapely, Susan had a bewitching face and the most beautiful skin he had ever seen. Sir Julius was a wealthy farmer and, for all his eminence, there was a distinctly rustic air about him. His daughter had not inherited it. She could have passed for a court beauty.

'This is the finest room in the house,' he explained, glancing around the hall. 'As you've seen, the living quarters are all on the first floor and I included a gallery that leads to further rooms over the back kitchen. The shop is at the front of the property, of course, with merchandise housed in the cellars and the warehouse. Mr Polegate imports wine from other countries so he needs plenty of space to store it. His counting house is over the main kitchen. The bedrooms are on the floor above us,' he went on, pointing upwards, 'with dormer windows in the roof - tiled, naturally. Since the Great Fire nobody uses thatch.'

'The whole building is so compact,' she observed.

'When you have a limited area, you have to create extra height.'

'There's even a yard with its own well.'

'That's a valuable feature of the house, Susan. If it were not raining so hard,' he added, looking through the windows at the storm raging outside, 'I'd show you the yard. It's beautifully cobbled.'

'Clearly, no expense has been spared.'

'More to the point, my clients have paid both architect and builder. That's not always the case. Believe me. With some projects, I've waited up to a year for my fee.'

'You should ask for more money in advance.'

'People are not always in a position to pay it.' He heard footsteps in the room above his head and

moved closer to her. 'Before the others come back, I wanted to ask you about your father. Why does he seem so uncommonly contented?'

'Contented?'

'Sir Julius is truculent as a rule.'

'That's just his way, Christopher. Father is always rather blunt.'

'He's positively joyful today.'

'I think he's pleased to meet Mr Everett again.'

'It goes deeper than that,' said Christopher. 'There was a moment earlier on when I caught him standing at the window, staring out with a broad smile on his face. He was completely lost in thought. Something has obviously brought happiness into his life.'

Susan was almost brusque. 'It's not happiness,' she said with a dismissive wave of her hand. 'Father hates idleness. Now that parliament has been recalled, he'll be employed again and that's what he enjoys most. He thrives on the rough and tumble of debate.'

Christopher had a feeling that the mellowing of Sir Julius Cheever had nothing to do with parliament, an institution whose activities, more often than not, tended to enrage him beyond measure. Nor could his reunion with Bernard Everett explain his uncharacteristic mildness. It had another source. In trying to find out what it was, Christopher had unwittingly thrown Susan on the defensive. He regretted that. Not wishing to upset her any further, he abandoned the subject altogether.

Having inspected the upper rooms, the others rejoined them in the hall. Food and wine had been set out on the long oak table and a servant handed the refreshments out to the guests. Everyone was very complimentary about the house and shop. Christopher basked in their approbation. Since it was purely functional property, it had not been the most exciting commission of his career but it had won him new admirers and would act as a clear advertisement for his talents. Sir Julius had passed on his name to Francis Polegate. Christopher hoped that Polegate would, in turn, speak up on his behalf to the others.

Calling for silence, the wine merchant raised his glass.

'I think that we should toast the architect,' he said.

'The architect,' responded the others in unison. 'Mr Redmayne!'

'Thank you,' said Christopher, modestly, 'but we must not forget the builder. Without him, an architect would be lost.'

'Without you,' Polegate noted, 'a builder would be unemployed.'

'Yes,' said Sir Julius. 'You are an artist whereas he is a mere labourer, skilled enough, in his own way, but lacking the ability to conceive the house in his mind's eye. We are fortunate to get this young man, Francis,' he continued, indicating Christopher. 'He is destined for great things. In a few years, he may be well beyond our price.'

'I doubt that, Sir Julius,' said Christopher.

'You have ambitions to prosper, surely?'

'Of course.'

'And a desire to work on a grander scale?'

'In time, perhaps.'

'Then you will soon be emulating Mr Wren.'

'Emulating and surpassing him,' said Susan, loyally. 'There will soon be only one Christopher the others speak of in London and it will not be Mr Wren. He will have been eclipsed.'

'You are too kind,' said Christopher, touched by her comments. 'I like to think that I have artistic gifts but they will never compare with those of a genius. Who, in years to come, will feast his eyes on Mr Polegate's house when St Paul's cathedral has been rebuilt?'

'Hester and I will do so,' attested Polegate.

'Yes,' said his wife. 'It will always come first in our affections. Let us ask an outsider for his opinion. What do you think, Bernard?'

Everett grinned. 'This house has something that a cathedral will never have,' he pointed out. 'A wonderful wine cellar. Mr Redmayne is to be congratulated on his design.'

'Wait until you see our home,' said Sir Julius. 'It's an example of Christopher at his most inventive.'

'I thought you were taking me to the Parliament House first.'

'Ha!' Sir Julius was derisive. 'It's a den of iniquity.'

'Nevertheless, I have to take my seat there.'

'You shall take it beside me, Bernard. We could do with some more commonsense in there. Most of the members are charlatans, sycophants or ranting lunatics. The Parliament House is a species of Bedlam.'

'Yet it exercises so much power.'

'And does so very irresponsibly. My view is this, you see...'

'Why not discuss it later on?' suggested Susan, interrupting her father before he started on his diatribe. 'We are not here to talk politics.'

'No,' agreed Hester Polegate. 'We're here to celebrate.'

'Eat, drink and enjoy yourselves,' urged her husband, slipping an arm around her shoulders. 'The Polegates are at home to their friends. Have everything that you wish.'

Everett drained his glass. 'I'll have a spare key to the wine cellar.'

'Behave yourself,' chided his sister, good-naturedly.

'If I'm to lodge here when I'm in London, I can help Francis by acting as his taster. I have a most discerning palate.'

'You're not here to drink away our profits, Bernard.'

'You'll be amply repaid,' Everett joked. 'When I take my seat in parliament, I'll introduce a bill for the abolition of all import duties on wine. Sir Julius will support me - won't you?'

But the other man did not even hear him. He had drifted off into a reverie and there was a faraway smile on his lips. Christopher noticed it at once. His gaze shifted to Susan, plainly discomfited by her father's behaviour. The normally belligerent Sir Julius Cheever was acting very strangely. Christopher wondered why.

It was hours before the jollity came to an end. While the party was being held in the hall, Polegate's assistant was serving the first customers in the shop below. Both the house and business had been duly launched. Christopher Redmayne took the opportunity to conduct Susan around the property and she marvelled at some of its finer points. In designing the place for work and occupation, the architect had not wasted a single inch of space. Susan was impressed. When they returned to the hall, her father was getting ready to leave. Bernard Everett was going to share his coach so that they could call at the Parliament House together.

Christopher was sorry that the time had come to depart. He had been enjoying Susan's company so much. While she accompanied her father in the coach, the architect would have to ride home to his house in Fetter Lane. There was one consolation. The rain had eased off. Though it was still drizzling, the earlier downpour had spent its force. They would get wet but not thoroughly soaked. After a flurry of farewells, they descended to the ground floor in their coats and hats.

The coach was waiting in the street outside. Christopher escorted Susan to it and opened the door for her so that he could steal a kiss as she got in. Her smile was all the gratitude he required. Their eyes locked affectionately. Behind them, Sir Julius and Bernard Everett came into the street side by

side. A voice suddenly rang out.

'Up here!'

The two men instinctively looked upwards. There was a loud report and Bernard Everett was knocked backwards as a musket ball went under the brim of his hat and burrowed deep into his skull. He was out of luck this time. There was no hope of survival. With blood gushing down his face, he landed in a puddle and splashed water everywhere.

One thing was immediately apparent.

He would never sit in the Parliament House now.

Chapter Two

Everything was suddenly thrown into confusion. Startled by the sound of the gunfire, the two horses bucked madly between the shafts and the coachman had difficulty controlling them. Christopher Redmayne, meanwhile, fearing that a second shot might be fired, dived into the lurching coach to protect Susan Cheever. Shocked by what she had just seen, Hester Polegate put her hands to her mouth to stifle a scream. Her husband rushed forward to bend over his fallen brother-in-law and Sir Julius Cheever, lacking a weapon, waved an angry fist up at a window opposite. People emerged from houses to see what had caused the commotion. A small crowd soon gathered around the dead body.

Christopher was the first to recover. Realising that Susan was not in any danger, he released her from his arms and peered through the window. Then he leapt out of the coach and went over to Sir Julius.

'What happened?' he asked.

'Some villain shot Bernard,' replied the other, purple with rage.

'From where?'

'Up there.'

Sir Julius pointed to the upstairs window of the tavern on the opposite side of the street. It was wide open but there was no sign of the killer. Christopher needed only a glance to see that Bernard Everett was dead. Curiosity was bringing more people out of their dwellings. They began to converge on the shop.

'Take him inside,' advised Christopher. 'I'll fetch a constable.'

Before doing so, however, he hoped that he might be able to apprehend the murderer. Dashing across the road, Christopher pushed through the knot of customers around the door and entered the tavern. He went into the taproom and saw the staircase against the far wall. He darted past bemused drinkers before going up the stairs to the first floor, running along a narrow passageway until he came to the last door on the right. Christopher flung it open, only to find that the room was now completely empty. Drizzle was blowing in through the open window. He went quickly across to it and gazed down at the scene below. The corpse was now being carried into the shop, away from the prying eyes of the neighbours. Hester Polegate was patently in great distress at the death of her brother. Susan Cheever had an arm around her as she helped the grieving woman inside.

Christopher went back into the passageway and saw that there was another staircase nearby. It corkscrewed its way to the floor below. Pounding down it, he came into a kitchen where an old woman was stirring something in a pot over the fire. When he popped up in front of her without warning, she turned to him with open-mouthed wonder.

'Did anyone else come through here?' he demanded.

'Yes, sir,' she croaked. 'A gentleman rushed in.'

'When?'

'Not a minute ago.'

'Which way did he leave?'

She pointed a stubby finger. 'That way, sir.'

Christopher opened a door and found himself looking at a row of stables on the other side of the cobbled yard. Nobody was there. One of the stable doors had been left ajar. He ran through a stone archway and into the street beyond, arriving just in time to hear the distant clatter of hooves as a horse galloped down Bennet's Hill towards Thames Street. Christopher caught the merest glimpse of the rider before he turned a corner and vanished from sight. Pursuit was out of the question. The killer had been calculating. He had planned his escape in advance.

Jonathan Bale had just returned home after patrolling the streets of Baynard's Castle Ward and his wife helped him off with his sodden coat. When she hung it on the back of the door, it began to drip onto the kitchen flagstones. Sarah was sympathetic.

'You must be soaked to the skin,' she said.

'A spot of rain never hurt anybody.'

'It was more than a spot, Jonathan. The storm lasted for hours.'

'We hardly noticed it,' said Bale with a shrug. 'One good thing about weather like this - it keeps the villains off the streets.'

'It ought to keep *you* off the streets as well.'

'Don't fret, Sarah.'

He gave her an affectionate squeeze. Bale was a hefty man in his late thirties with a facial ugliness that his loving wife had somehow failed to notice. As one of the constables in the ward, he guarded his territory with paternal care as if its entire population belonged to his own family. His wife, Sarah, was shorter, stouter and had a bustling energy that never seemed to flag. She wished that her husband's devotion to duty were tempered with more caution. Sarah thought him too fearless for his own good. Bale lowered himself heavily on to a chair. Before he could give her an account of his day, however, there was a loud knock at the front door. He started to rise.

'Stay there,' she said, touching his shoulder. 'I'll see who it is.' When she opened the door, Sarah was pleasantly surprised. 'Why, Mr Redmayne!' she cried. 'Whatever are you doing here?'

'I'm hoping to find your husband at home,' said Christopher.

'Yes, I'm here,' called Bale, getting to his feet and coming to the door. 'What can I do for you, Mr Redmayne?'

'At least step in out of the rain,' urged Sarah.

'This is not a social visit, I fear,' explained Christopher. 'I've come to report a serious crime.' He turned to Bale. 'A murder has just been committed in Knightrider Street. You must come at once, Jonathan. I'll give you the details on the way.'

Bale did not hesitate. Going back into the kitchen, he grabbed his coat and put it on again. He thrust his hat on his head then promptly left the house. As he and Christopher walked briskly up Addle Hill, his companion told him what had happened. Bale was alarmed by the news. He and Christopher were old friends. Thrown together in an earlier murder investigation, they had solved more than one crime together and had the highest respect for each other. They were unlikely soul mates. While the architect was a man of Cavalier inclinations, the constable was a dour and implacable Puritan, who firmly believed that the restoration of the monarchy was a grotesque mistake. In the normal course of events, their paths would never even have crossed. Yet whenever they worked together, their essential differences somehow vanished.

Bale listened with interest to all that he was told.

'And you went into the tavern?' he asked.

'Yes, Jonathan. I thought that the man might still be there. But the bird had flown. He obviously had a horse, saddled and waiting.'

'Did you speak to Mrs McCoy?'

'Who?'

'Bridget McCoy. She owns the Saracen's Head.'

'I didn't have time for conversation,' said Christopher. 'As soon as I saw that the killer had fled, I came running to you.'

'I'm glad that I lived so close.'

'So am I. It meant that I knew where to find you.'

~~They turned into Knightrider Street and saw that a crowd was lingering outside the shop. Bale recognised a number of them. Calling him by name, he sent a boy to summon another constable. He and Christopher then went into the shop. Bernard Everett had been carried into the warehouse at the rear of the building and was laid out on a table. The women had gone upstairs but Sir Julius Cheever and Francis Polegate were standing beside the corpse, still shaken by the incident. An hour before Everett had been a welcome guest in the house, a happy man on the brink of entering parliament. He was now a murder victim.~~

There was no need to introduce Bale to Sir Julius. They had met before in similar circumstances when the constable had been involved in the search for another killer, the man responsible for the death of Gabriel Cheever, the estranged son of Sir Julius. They had soon discovered a bond between them. Like Sir Julius - or, for that matter, the deceased - Jonathan Bale had borne arms at the battle of Worcester. Unlike the unfortunate Bernard Everett, he had come through it all unscathed.

'Good to see you again, Bale,' said Sir Julius, gruffly. 'We need your help. This is Mr Polegate,' he added, indicating the vintner. 'The victim is his brother-in-law.'

'So I hear,' said Bale.

'This is an appalling crime,' said Polegate, wringing his hands. 'My wife is distraught. Bernard was her only brother.' He shook his head.

'Perhaps you could describe exactly what occurred, sir.'

'I'm the best witness,' insisted Sir Julius. 'I was standing beside him when he was shot down. I actually saw the rogue at the window.'

'What else did you see?'

Sir Julius went on to give a highly emotional account of the crime and it was supplemented by a few comments from Polegate. Bale weighed all the facts at his disposal before speaking.

'You say that the weapon was a musket, Sir Julius?'

'True,' confirmed the other.

'Did you actually see it?'

'No - it all happened so quickly.'

'Then how can you be certain it was a musket?'

'By the sound, of course,' said Sir Julius, testily. 'I know the difference between a pistol shot and musket fire. I hear the latter far too often on my estate,' he grumbled. 'I'm plagued by poachers.'

'The shot seems to have been very accurate,' noted Bale, glancing down at the wound in Everett's forehead. 'To hit his target from that distance, he must have been something of a marksman.'

'A trained soldier, perhaps?' Christopher wondered.

'A hired killer with a black heart,' said Sir Julius.

'But why should he have shot Mr Everett?' asked Bale, raising an inquisitive eyebrow. 'Anything else puzzles me. How could he be certain that the gentleman would be here?'

'I can answer that,' said Polegate. 'It was no secret that the shop was to open for business today. There's been a sign in the window for weeks. We had a party to celebrate.'

'But how did the killer know that Mr Everett would be present?'

'He's my brother-in-law. Bernard was going to stay with us.'

'That information was private,' argued Christopher. 'Nobody outside the family could possibly have been aware of it.'

'Someone was.'

'Yes,' agreed Sir Julius, 'and he lay in wait at that window until Bernard finally made his appearance. Speak to the landlord, Bale. He'll be able to tell you who rented that room.'

'The Saracen's Head is run by a woman,' said Bale, 'and I'll talk to Mrs McCoy in due course. B'

'I'd like to establish a motive first. Can you think of anyone with a grudge against Mr Everett?'

'No,' replied Polegate. 'Bernard had no enemies that I know of.'

'What about you, Mr Polegate?'

'Me?'

'Do you have any serious rivals?'

'Naturally. I face the heaviest competition in my trade.'

'Would any of your competitors stoop to this kind of thing?' asked Bale. 'It does seem an odd coincidence that it happened on the day that you opened your new premises. What better way to hamper your business than to leave a dead body on your doorstep? It's a bad omen.'

'I never thought of it that way,' confessed Polegate.

'The notion is certainly worth considering,' said Christopher.

Sir Julius was impatient. 'It's a mere distraction,' he asserted. 'I know why Bernard Everett was shot, and it has nothing whatsoever to do with the opening of the shop. Bernard was a man of strong convictions and he was about to bring them to bear on the Parliament House. The moment one enters politics - as I learned myself - one makes a host of vicious, merciless, unseen enemies. That's why a decent man was murdered in the street today. He was a victim of political intrigue.'

There was a tap on the door and Tom Warburton, the constable who had been sent for, entered with his dog trotting at his heels. Tall, stringy and weasel-faced, he was much older than Bale but had nothing of his authority. Whisking off his hat, he nodded to everyone present then stared wide-eyed at the corpse.

'Who's that, Jonathan?' he said.

'Mr Everett,' returned the other. 'We need to take him to the coroner, then we must seek a grant of hue and cry. A heinous crime has been committed under our noses, Tom, and we must solve it quickly.'

'There'll be a reward if you do that,' volunteered Polegate.

'I'll double it,' promised Sir Julius. 'As for the body, it can be conveyed in my coach. But, first, disperse that collection of ghouls outside. Respect for the dead is the least that we can ask.'

Christopher watched while the constables did as they were told. He then helped to carry the body out and lay it gently on the floor of the coach. Before clambering into the vehicle himself, Sir Julius ordered his coachman to drive very slowly to their destination. Bale and Warburton plodded side by side in its wake but the dog scampered irreverently between the wheels, blithely unconcerned with the solemnity of the procession. The rain had finally stopped. It was scant consolation.

Anxious to see Susan again, Christopher reasoned that she would be preoccupied with comforting Hester Polegate over the loss of her brother. It would be wrong to intrude. In any case, Christopher wanted to assist the murder inquiry and he could think of one obvious way that he might do that. Retrieving his horse, he hauled himself up into the saddle and trotted away. The crime had cast a dark shadow over the house he had designed. Until it was solved, he would never be able to look at the building with real satisfaction again.

Henry Redmayne was in a bad mood. His superior at the Navy Office had chastised him at length that morning. His physician had told him to drink far less and exercise far more. His tailor had failed to deliver his new suit on time. And - compounding his misery - the young lady whom Henry had been courting so sedulously for weeks had succumbed to an attack of marital fidelity, spurning his advances in the most hurtful way before returning to the arms of her undeserving husband. Henry was thoroughly piqued. The servants at his house in Bedford Street had the sense to keep well out of his way.

He was still nursing his wounds when his brother arrived. Draped across a couch, Henry did not even get up when Christopher was shown into the room. A sigh of discontent was all that he could risk to by way of a welcome. Christopher identified the telltale signs at once.

'Who is the lady *this* time, Henry?' he asked, wearily.

'I would not soil my tongue by naming her.'

'Yet you pursued her with your usual tenacity, I daresay.'

'Sheer folly on my part,' said Henry. 'I should have known better than to choose such an unworthy creature. She was utterly beneath me. And since she refuses to *be* beneath me in a bedchamber, I am liberated from an attachment that could only have tarnished my reputation.'

'It's tarnished enough already by now.'

Henry sat up. 'I expect sympathy from my brother, not mockery.'

'Then leave off this show of self-pity,' said Christopher.

'Is that all you have to say to me?'

'No, I've come in search of a favour.'

'Then search elsewhere!'

Arms folded, the elder brother turned petulantly away. Only a few years separated them but Henry looked much older. Dissipation had added untold years to his age, hollowing his cheeks and leaving dark pouches beneath his eyes. His face had a deathly pallor and, since he had cast his periwig aside, his balding pate completed the destruction of what had once been handsome features. Ostentatious by nature, Henry could still cut a dash when dressed in his finery and puffed up with an aristocratic arrogance. Now, however, he looked like a rag doll cast aside by an indifferent child. Christopher sat beside him and gave him a compassionate pat on the knee. All that he got in return was a glare of hostility.

'Come now, Henry,' he encouraged. 'Whatever your tribulations, you must rise above them. Display the true Redmayne spirit.'

'I've forgotten what that is, Christopher.'

'Perseverance is our watchword.'

'Bah!'

'Imagine what our father would do in the same circumstances.'

Henry let out a wild laugh. 'Our father?' he exclaimed. 'I don't think that the old gentleman could ever have been in such a position as I find myself. The Church of England would be rocked to its foundations if it learned that one of its holiest prelates had been pursuing a married woman with the ardour that I've shown this past month. The kind of impassioned language that I've been using to her would not be found in the Book of Common Prayer, I assure you. Father is a saint. He would never dare to stray from the strait and narrow. I - thank heaven - have never been in the slightest danger of finding it.'

'Perhaps the time has come for you to mend your ways.'

'Unthinkable!'

Henry was defiant. Blessed with a sinecure at the Navy Office, he also enjoyed a handsome allowance from their father. The pious dean of Gloucester cathedral, a man of private wealth and high moral principle, did not realise that he was supporting an existence that was freely dedicated to every vice in the city. Christopher Redmayne was a conscientious architect, striving to make his marriage work. Henry, by contrast, was a confirmed rake. Yet he could sometimes be useful to his younger brother. Moving in court circles, and befriended by those sharing his decadent tastes, Henry knew almost everyone of consequence in London.

'What's this about help, Christopher?' he asked. 'If you've come in search of money, I've none to lend you. As a matter of fact, I'd like to borrow some from you - just enough to keep penury at bay.'

'You've not repaid the last loan I gave you.'

~~'Brothers are brothers. Let's have no talk of "loans". We share and share alike. My purse is even open to you.'~~

'Only so that I can fill it yet again,' said Christopher, wryly. 'But enough of that - I'm here on more serious business. A foul murder occurred earlier on. I was there at the time.'

As he listened to the description of events in Knightrider Street, Henry was torn between interest and derision. When the name of Sir Julius Cheever was mentioned, he curled his lip.

'Sir Julius!' he said with a sneer. 'The fellow is nothing but an ignorant farmer who got his knighthood from that vile monster, Oliver Cromwell. If it were left to me, such freaks would be stripped of their titles forthwith. They were illegally bestowed.'

Christopher did not rise to the argument. There was no point in antagonising Henry by challenging his opinions. To get any assistance from him, his brother had to be wooed, and that meant showing tolerance in the face of his many prejudices. Christopher was patient.

'How is Sir Julius viewed in the Parliament House?' he asked.

'With appropriate disgust.'

'I'm told that he is a forceful speaker.'

'Empty vessels make the most noise.'

'What of Bernard Everett?'

'The name is new to me,' said Henry, disdainfully, 'but, if he is another renegade from Cambridgeshire, I'll not shed a tear for him. We've had trouble enough from that part of England.'

'Others in the Parliament House might think the same.'

'They'd not have welcomed a friend of Sir Julius Cheever.'

'Why not?'

'Because he'd have shared the same damnable republican views. Parliament is a jungle,' said Henry, warming to his theme. 'It's full of conniving groups, factions, clubs and temporary alliances. There's a party that supports the King, another that favours his brother, the Duke of York, and a third from the country that opposes both with equal vehemence.'

'Sir Julius will belong to the country party, then.'

'It is not as simple as that, Christopher. Within each party are many smaller groups whose loyalties are constantly shifting. Look what happened to our once-revered Chancellor,' he went on. 'The Earl of Clarendon wielded enormous power until the Members of Parliament joined together in a ravenous wolf pack and tore him to shreds. By God - he's the Duke of York's father-in-law but even that did not save him.'

'I know,' said Christopher. 'Clarendon was not only impeached, he was exiled from the kingdom. His fall from grace was absolute.'

'Sir Julius Cheever was one of the wolves who brought it about.'

'He could never admire such a staunch Royalist.'

'There are still plenty of those to be found,' affirmed Henry, moved by patriotic impulse, 'and I am one of them. So, I trust, are you.'

'Of course,' said Christopher, readily. 'At the Restoration, I threw my hat as high in the air as anyone. I owe full obedience to the Crown.'

'Then why do you consort with those who would overthrow it?'

'Oh, I think that Sir Julius is reconciled to the idea of monarchy.'

'That's not what I hear.'

'Indeed?'

'He and his confederates are plotting rebellion.'

'Surely not.'

'Sir Julius has gathered other firebrands around him.'

~~'Bernard Everett was no firebrand - I met him, Henry. I took him to be a most amenable gentleman.'~~

'What you met was his public face, the one he wore to beguile and deceive. In private, I venture suggest,' said Henry, raising a finger, 'he was a fellow of a very different stripe. Everett was another skulking Roundhead and it cost him his life. Look no further for an explanation of his murder than Christopher. I can tell you exactly why he was killed.'

'Can you?'

'He had been recruited by Sir Julius Cheever to depose the King.'

Jonathan Bale was familiar with all the taverns and ordinaries in his ward. Much of the petty crime with which he had to deal came from such places. Peaceful citizens turned into roaring demons when too much drink was taken. Law-abiding men could be seized with the desire to wreak havoc. Bale had lost count of the number of tavern brawls he had broken up over the years, or the number of violent drunkards, male and female, he had arrested. The Saracen's Head in Knightrider Street caused less trouble than most. It permitted none of the games of chance that bedevilled other establishments and prostitutes were not allowed to ply their trade there.

Bridget McCoy kept a very watchful eye on her premises.

'When did he arrive here, Mrs McCoy?'

'This morning.'

'What did he say?' asked Bale.

'He wanted a room for one night that overlooked the street.'

'Knightrider Street, you mean?'

'Yes, Mr Bale, even though our best room is on Bennet's Hill.'

'Did you tell him that?'

'Of course.'

'But he still chose the other room. Did he say why?'

'I didn't ask,' said Bridget. 'When someone wishes to lodge here, I try to give them what they want. It's a small room but I keep it very clean. He said that it would be ideal for him and he paid me the money and then.' She bit her lip. 'I hate to think that I was helping him to commit a murder. He seemed such a quiet man.'

Bridget McCoy had been outraged that her tavern had been used as a vantage point by a ruthless killer. There were occasional scuffles among her customers and pickpockets had been known to drift in from time to time, but the Saracen's Head had never been tainted by a serious crime before. It upset her. She was a short, compact Irishwoman with a surging bosom that made her seem much bigger than she really was, and a tongue sharp enough to cut through timber. Talking to the constable, she had a soft, melodious, Irish lilt. Raised in anger, however, the voice of Bridget McCoy, hardened by years in the trade and seasoned with the ripest language, could quell any affray.

'Did he tell you his name, Mrs McCoy?'

'Field. His name was Mr Field.'

'No Christian name?'

'He gave none.'

'How would you describe him?'

'He was a big man, Mr Bale, with something of your build. Older than you, I'd say, and with a broken nose. But it was a pleasant face,' she added, 'or so I thought. And I spend every day looking into the faces of strangers. Mr Field had a kind smile.'

'He showed his victim no kindness,' remarked Bale, sharply.

'How much did you see of him?'

'Very little. Once I showed him to his room, he stayed there.'

'Biding his time.'

'How was I to know that?' she said, defensively. 'If I'd understood what business he was about God help me - I'd never have let him set foot over the threshold. The Saracen's Head has high standards.'

'You were not to blame, Mrs McCoy.'

'I feel that I was.'

'How?'

'By letting that devil take a room here.'

'That's your livelihood. Customers rent accommodation. Once they hire a room, you are not responsible for what they do in it.'

'I am, if they break the law,' she said with a grimace. 'I should have sensed that something was amiss, Mr Bale. I should have sounded him out a little more. My dear husband would have smelled a rat.'

'Patrick, alas, is no longer with us.'

'Mores the pity. He'd have been first to join the hue and cry.'

'You are still a valuable witness,' Bale told her. 'You met the man face to face. You weighed him up.'

'Not well enough, it seems.'

'Did anyone else here set eyes on him?'

'Only Nan, my cook. He ran past her in the kitchen when he made his escape. It gave her quite a start.'

'I'm not surprised,' said Bale. 'We may need to call on both of you at a later stage to help identify him. Do you think that you'd be able to recognise Mr Field again?'

'I'd pick that face out of a thousand.'

'Good.'

'Recognise him?' she howled, quivering with fury. 'Recognise that broken-nosed rogue? I'll never forget the slimy, stinking, turd-faced, double-dealing son of a diseased whore. May the rotten bastard roast in Hell for all eternity!'

'He will, Mrs McCoy,' said Bale, calmly. 'He will.'

Chapter Three

Christopher Redmayne waited until the next day before calling on them. In the interim, he had spoken with a couple of people to whom his brother, Henry, had introduced him, veteran politician who had sat in the House of Commons long enough to become familiar with its deadly currents and treacherous eddies. Neither of them had spoken kindly of Sir Julius Cheever and Christopher had, out of necessity, to conceal the fact that they were talking about the man whom he hoped would one day be his father-in-law. His brief researches into the murky world of politics had been chastening. When he rode towards Westminster in bright sunshine that morning, Christopher was unusually subdued.

His spirits revived as soon as the house came into view. It had been built for Sir Julius so that he could have a base in the city during periods when parliament was sitting, or when he wished to spend time with his other daughter, Brilliana, who lived in Richmond. The property was neither large nor particularly striking but it had a double significance for the architect. It had been the first substantial commission he had gained without the aid of his brother and, as such, marked the beginning of his independence. Previous work had always come his way because Henry had used his influence with various friends. By no stretch of the imagination could Sir Julius be looked upon as a friend - or even a nodding acquaintance - of Henry Redmayne.

But the house had a much more powerful claim to a place in Christopher's heart. It was the catalyst for the meeting between him and Susan Cheever, a relationship that had begun with casual interest before developing into a firm friendship, then gradually evolving into something far deeper. The promise of seeing her again made him sit up in the saddle and straighten his shoulders. He just wished that he could be bringing happier tidings on his visit.

Arriving at the house, he met with disappointment. Sir Julius was not there. It gave him a welcome opportunity to speak alone with Susan but it was her father whom he had really come to see.

'What time will Sir Julius return?' he asked.

'Not until late this afternoon.'

'In that case, I may have to call back.'

'Why?' said Susan. 'Do you have a message for him?'

'Yes, I do.'

'Can you not trust me to pass it on?'

'I'd prefer to speak to him myself,' said Christopher, not wishing to alarm her by confiding what he had discovered. 'Meanwhile, I can have the pleasure of spending a little time with you.'

She gave a wan smile. 'It's hardly an occasion for pleasure.'

'Quite so. What happened yesterday was appalling.'

'I still cannot believe it, Christopher.'

'No more can I. It had been such a joyous occasion for all of us. Then, in a flash, it turned into tragedy. How is Mrs Polegate bearing up?'

'Indifferently well. Mr Everett was very dear to her.'

'It was kind of you to offer some comfort, Susan.'

'I stayed there for hours but I could not ease the pain of her bereavement. Mrs Polegate was inconsolable. The only thing that might take the edge off her grief is the arrest of the man who killed her brother.'

'Jonathan Bale and I will do all we can to find him.'

They were in the parlour of the house, a room that reflected the taste of the client rather than that of the architect. Sir Julius had been the most decisive employer that Christopher had ever had, knowing exactly what he wanted from the start. That brought advantages and disadvantages. The main benefit was that valuable time had been saved because there had been none of the endless

prevarication that made other clients so frustrating. On the debit side, however, was the fact that Christopher had to agree to an interior design that was serviceable while also being totally out of fashion. Even when seated beside the woman he loved, he was aware of how much more intrinsically appealing the room could have been had he been given his head.

Gazing fondly into her eyes, he forgot all other problems.

'These past couple of months have been wonderful,' he said.

'Have they?'

'Of course, Susan. I've been able to see so much of you.'

'That's been the saving grace of our visits,' she confessed.

'Don't you *enjoy* coming to London?'

'Only if I can see you, Christopher. As you know, I'm a country girl at heart. We may have St James's Park on our doorstep, but it's not the same as being surrounded by thousands of acres of land.'

'There are plenty of fine estates on the outskirts of the city.'

'But none that I'd exchange for the one we already own.'

'What about your father?' asked Christopher. 'He used to describe the capital as a veritable cesspool. His exact words, if I recall them aright, were that London is a swamp of crime and corruption.'

'He still holds to that view.'

'Then why has he spent so much time here recently?'

'Commitments of a political nature.'

'But the House of Commons has not been sitting.'

'Father doesn't confine his activities to the Parliament House,' she said. 'He claims that the most fruitful debates take place outside it. He's gathered a small group of like-minded men around him.'

'Men like Bernard Everett, for example?'

'Yes, Christopher. As soon as he was elected, he paid us a visit in Northamptonshire. He and father discussed political affairs all night.'

'That must have been very tiresome for you, Susan.'

'It's worse when we come here.' 'Is it?'

'Far worse,' she complained. 'There are evenings when the whole house seems to echo with political gossip. They talk about who's rising in power, who's likely to fall, how this objective can be best achieved and that one cunningly blocked, how the King exercises too much sway over the House of Commons and how his brother is an even more dangerous threat to civil liberty.'

Christopher laughed. 'Someone has been eavesdropping, I see.'

'What else can I do when the place has been invaded like that?' 'How many people attend the meetings?'

'Five or six, as a rule.'

'And your father is the acknowledged leader?'

'The habit of command is a difficult thing to break. Father, likes to be in charge. Oh, I'm sure that they have worthy aims and pursue them with due sincerity,' she conceded, 'but it makes for some dull evenings from my point of view. I foolishly assumed that you had designed a London home for us.'

'That's precisely what I did do.'

'No, Christopher. This is merely another Parliament House.'

'Then we'll have to devise more ways to get you out of it.'

'I'd be so grateful.'

'I hadn't realised that it was matters of government that had drawn your father back here so much. It crossed my mind that the city held some other attraction for him.'

Susan bridled slightly. 'What can you mean?'

'Nothing, nothing,' he said, seeing her reaction and regretting his comment. 'I was obviously mistaken.'

'You were, I assure you. Father is eager for political advancement. He will not get that by languishing on his estate in Northamptonshire. Friends have to be seen, ideas discussed, plans agreed. There's never a day when he's not engaged in some aspect of parliamentary work.'

'Is that where he is now, Susan?'

'Of course,' she said with an unaccustomed edge to her voice. 'Father is dining with a close political ally.'

'I thank the Lord that you have no interest whatsoever in affairs of state,' said Sir Julius Cheever, beaming at her. 'That would have been disastrous.'

'Why?'

'Because, dear lady, we would never have agreed.'

'I cannot imagine our disagreeing about anything, Sir Julius,' she said, sweetly, 'for you are the most agreeable man I've ever met.'

He chortled. 'Nobody has ever described me as agreeable before.'

'Nobody else has ever divined your true nature.'

Dorothy Kitson was a handsome woman in her early forties with the kind of sculptured features that only improved with age. Twice widowed, she had inherited considerable wealth on each occasion but it had made her neither extravagant nor overbearing. She had remained the quiet, intelligent, unassuming woman she had always been and, while she had had many suitors, none had been treated as serious contenders for her hand. That, at least, was the situation until Sir Julius had come into her life. He was so unlike anybody she had ever met before that she found him intriguing.

They were dining together at his favourite establishment in Covent Garden, a place that combined excellent food with a degree of privacy not usually found elsewhere. Clearly enchanted with her, Sir Julius wanted Dorothy Kitson entirely to himself. Having started with oysters, they had a hash of rabbits and lamb before moving on to a chine of beef, all of it accompanied by a plentiful supply of wine. Since his guest ate and drank in moderation, Sir Julius reined in his own appetite as well.

'I bless the man who organised the races at Newmarket that day,' he said, raising his glass. 'He made it possible for me to meet you.'

'It was only by accident that I was present, Sir Julius. I had planned to spend the day in the city but my brother insisted that I go with him to Newmarket as he had a horse running there.'

'Then my blessing on your brother as well.'

'As it happened, his filly won the race.'

'It was not the only winner that day,' he said, gallantly.

'Thank you.'

'Once I'd seen you, Dorothy, I lost all interest in horses.'

She smiled. 'I'm not sure that I appreciate the way that you put that,' she said, touching his hand, 'but the thought is a kind one.'

'I meant no offence,' he insisted.

'None was taken.'

'Then you'll agree to come to Newmarket with me again one day?'

'Only if you consent to watch the horses this time.'

They shared a laugh then sipped their wine. The change that had come over Sir Julius was remarkable. In place of his blunt demeanour and combative manner was a tenderness that seemed wholly out of character. He never once raised his voice, never once lost his temper. In the company of

Dorothy Kitson, he was restrained and gentlemanly. His battered face was permanently wreathed in smiles. She, too, was plainly relishing every moment of their time together but not without a trace of guilt. Dorothy waited until the plates had been cleared away before leaning in closer to him.

'You've been very considerate, Sir Julius,' she said, quietly, 'but you do not have to hold back on my account.'

'I've not held back, dear lady. I've eaten my fill.'

'I was not talking about the meal. You came here today with a heavy heart, and I know the cause. My brother is a magistrate, remember. Whenever a serious crime is committed, news of it soon reaches Orlando's ears.'

His face clouded. 'He's told you about it, then?'

'Yes. I'm so terribly sorry.'

'Thank you.'

'An innocent man, shot down in broad daylight - it's frightening. It must have been a dreadful shock for you to lose a friend in such hideous circumstances. The wonder is that you did not postpone a meeting with me so that you could mourn him properly.'

'I'd never dream of doing that, Dorothy.'

'I could have waited for a more appropriate time.'

'Every second spent with you is appropriate,' he said with clumsy affection. 'In dining with you, I show no disrespect to Bernard. He will ever be in my thoughts.'

'Did he have a family?'

'A wife and three children.'

'This will be a fearful blow to them.'

'I advised Francis Polegate not to send word by letter. Such bad tidings ought to be delivered to a person so that he can soften their impact and offer condolences. He rode off to Cambridge this morning.' 'Where will the funeral be held?' she asked.

'At Bernard's parish church,' he replied. 'I've taken it upon myself to arrange the transfer of the body when the coroner releases it.'

'That's very considerate of you.'

'He was a good friend, Dorothy. He'd have done the same for me.'

'Heaven forbid!'

The arrival of the next course prompted them to change the subject. They talked about their first meeting at Newmarket races and noted how many happy times they had spent together since. Sir Julius was eager to see even more of her but Dorothy was cautious. Feeling that their friendship was moving at a comfortable pace, she was content to leave things as they were. At the same time, however, she did believe that one important step could now be taken.

'When will I be able to meet your family, Sir Julius?' she said.

'As soon as you wish,' he told her, delighted at what he perceived as a real advance. 'My young daughter, Susan, lives with me and is in our London abode even as we speak.'

'She has not yet married, then?'

'No, Dorothy.'

'Does she have prospects?'

'Yes, she is being courted by the young man who designed our house here. The problem is that Susan will not commit herself wholly to him while she has to look after her aged and infirm father.'

'You're neither aged nor infirm, Sir Julius.'

'My daughter treats me as if I were.'

'How will she respond when she is introduced to me?'

'Susan will be unfailingly polite,' he said, 'but you will still need to win her over. She's rather

possessive, you see. Though I may be her father, she sometimes treats me like an errant child. I mean that as no criticism,' he added, quickly. 'Susan is very dutiful. When my dear wife died, it was she who took on the task of caring for me.'

'What about your other daughter?' 'Brilliana?'

'Was it not her place to look after you?'

'It never even crossed her mind.'

'Why not?'

'Because she had other imperatives in her life,' he explained. 'My daughters are like chalk and cheese, so unlike every particular. Susan is selfless and tender-hearted - Brilliana has inherited my defects.'

'I refuse to believe that you have any.'

'Oh, I do, alas. I can be headstrong and stubborn at times. Outspoken, too. Above all else, I like to have my own way. In those regards, Brilliana takes after her father.'

'How will she look upon me?'

'With utter amazement.'

She stifled a laugh. 'Am I such a freak, then?'

'No, Dorothy,' he said, taking her hand, 'you are the most remarkable woman in London and therefore, Brilliana will refuse to accept that her gnarled old oak tree of a father could hold the slightest attraction for you.'

'Then I will have to convince her otherwise,' she resolved. 'I look forward to meeting your daughters, Sir Julius. The younger one sounds like a paragon of virtue, and, in spite of what you say, I'm sure that the elder has many fine qualities. I like them both already.'

'And they are certain to like *you* - in time.'

Brilliana Serle looked at herself in the mirror as she tied her hat in place, tilting it at a slight angle to give her a more roguish look. Now in her early thirties, she was a woman of startling beauty enhanced by clothing of the very highest price and quality. Her husband, Lancelot, came into the hall and stood behind her.

'Do we really need to go to London today?' he asked.

'We do.'

'But I have business in hand here, Brilliana.'

'Then it can wait,' she said with a peremptory wave of her hand. 'You read that letter from my sister. She and Father had a distressing experience yesterday. They saw a friend murdered before their eyes in the street. They require solace. I'd be failing in my duty if I did not instantly repair to the city to provide it.'

'Can you not go without me?'

'No, Lancelot.'

There was a note of finality in her voice that he did not dare to challenge. Lancelot Serle was a tall, spare, nervous individual with features that could have been accounted handsome but for the blemish on his cheek. The little birthmark was all the more visible against the whiteness of his skin, and looked, at first glance, like a blob of raspberry preserve that he had forgotten to wipe away. There was, however, no blemish on his financial situation. He was a man of substance with a palatial house set in the middle of a vast estate. His combination of wealth, social position and readiness to oblige Brilliana's every whim had made him an irresistible choice as a husband.

'We do not want to be in the way, my love,' he said.

'What a nonsensical idea!' she exclaimed, rounding on him. 'We are family, Lancelot. We could

never be in the way.'

'I do not recall that Susan actually solicited your help.'

'Then why else did she write to me?'

'Merely to keep you informed.'

'I know when I am being summoned, so let's have no more evasion. The chest is packed, the coach is ready and we are going to drive to London. After all,' she said, leading the way to the front door, 'it will not only be a case of offering our commiserations.' 'Oh?'

'We can satisfy our curiosity at the same time.'

'About what?'

She stamped a foot. 'Really! Do you listen to nothing I say?'

'I do little else, Brilliana.'

'Then you must surely recall that father has befriended a lady, a certain Mrs Dorothy Kitson.'

'I recall mention of her,' he said, following her out of the house, 'but I assumed that that relationship would have expired by now. With respect to my father-in-law, he's a most unlikely suitor.'

The roughness of his tongue would put any woman to flight within a week.'

'He seems to have curbed that roughness. I want to know why.'

The footman was waiting by the door of the coach and she took his hand so that he could help her into the vehicle. While she settled down and adjusted the folds of her dress, her husband took the seat opposite her so that he would travel backwards. Serle wore exquisite apparel but he could not compete with her finery or with the array of jewellery that set it off. A whip cracked above them and the horse pulled the carriage in a semicircle. They were soon rolling steadily up a long drive through an arched grove of poplars.

'How much do we know about Mrs Kitson?' he asked.

'Precious little.'

'Has your sister actually met the lady?'

'Not yet - but Susan has grave reservations about her.'

'Why?'

'Because she has led Father to tell so many lies.'

'Lies!' He was astonished. 'That's quite unlike him. Sir Julius is the most honest man alive. Far too honest, in my opinion, for he blurts out things that should best be left unsaid in civilised company.' Serle was rueful. 'I've suffered a great deal at the hands of your father's famous honesty.'

'Then you should not annoy him so much.'

'My very existence is a source of annoyance to him.'

'You were my choice as a husband,' she said, briskly, 'and not his. You have merits that are not visible to the naked eye and I cherish each one of them.'

He was pleased. 'Do you, Brilliana?'

'You're a man of hidden qualities, Lancelot.'

'Thank you,' he said, basking in a rare compliment from her.

She did not allow him to savour the moment for long.

'By the same token,' she resumed, 'you have shortcomings that are imperceptible at first sight but that slowly emerge on closer acquaintance. I see it as my task in life to remedy those shortcomings.'

'I study to improve myself, Brilliana.'

'Then assert yourself more. Do not be so easily cowed into silence. Whenever you meet your father-in-law, you hardly ever say a word.'

'He gives me no opportunity to do so.'

'Make an opportunity, Lancelot,' she urged. 'You bear the name of a noble knight. Display some knightly heroism. When we are in Father's company, seize the conversation with both hands.'

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