

## Chapter Nineteen

### *The Welcomed Renewal of an Acquaintance*

Ruth spent the day following her meeting with Victoria still preoccupied with her thoughts of what had been said, but she was no nearer a solution. She took her courage in her hands and tentatively asked Mr Spruce if, in his experience, he had come across a man called Angelo Calaceli. It was risking everything, but she was careful to make it appear that her question actually arose from the article that she was engaged upon and not a personal matter.

“Who?” said the City Editor, sharply. She repeated the name. “I have heard that name somewhere,” he said thoughtfully.

“In what connection?” she asked.

“I cannot remember, but let me consult my records. Organisation is everything in this business, Miss Mottram. Knowing what is to be found and where to find it!” He went to a small cabinet in a corner of the office and started to look through a large volume of papers. “These *should* be in order,” he said. “I keep a note on everyone who might be of interest or about whom we might need to have quick access to some background details. If he is one of those he should be here, and here he is. Why!” he said after studying the sheet he had found, “Now that is interesting! Exactly why do you ask about him, Miss Mottram?”

Her heart fell. She was sure that she was blushing and bitterly regretted asking the question as it was clear she was in danger of falling into a trap. What if he, the City Editor, was one of this man’s agents, assuming that what Victoria had said was true? “I came across his name yesterday,” she said, nervously. “It was in connection with a legal action over shipping losses by a South American line and I think, all though I cannot be certain, that his was the name of a man who visited my uncle, Earl Mottram, last year when I was staying with him. I just wondered what his background was. It is not at all important.”

“I see,” he said, his eyes fixed on her. “Well, that might explain it, I suppose. My notes, and I must thank you for bringing this to my attention, say that he is associated with your brother-in-law’s venture otherwise known as the Eldorado. It is likely that he is the person I mentioned and who is due back in the country any day now with all the substantiation of their claims.”

“You mean he is abroad?”

“Since the start of the year, if it is one and the same man. I would not have thought your brother-in-law would have engaged two prominent South American lawyers, would you?”

“I would not know,” she said softly, “but thank you.”

“Don’t mention it,” he said, still frowning.

Ruth took her fears and concerns to Church that Sunday. She knelt alongside Mrs Tucker and her two other ladies and prayed for her sister and asked for guidance. She did not require protection for herself, only guidance on how she should take this critical problem forward.

Outside the Church it seemed that her prayers had been answered as she had gone but a few paces when a man’s voice addressed her from behind. “Ruth! I do not believe it! It is Ruth! Ruth Mottram! I cannot believe that I should encounter you here of all places!” It was Matthew Fayrbrother, standing on the pavement a few feet away from her. Her deliverance was at hand!

“Matthew!” she exclaimed.

“You walked right by me,” he said smiling. “At first I could not believe it was you, but then I thought it must be.”

"I am sorry. I was preoccupied. Oh," she said, turning to her companions who were watching her with growing interest. "This is Matthew Fayrbrother, a very old acquaintance one might say."

"Not so very old, *I* would say," he did say, as he greeted them each in turn.

"We grew up in the same village," Ruth added, feeling flustered. She could see her companions exchanging glances and knew her face was flushed. "If you would like to walk on a little, I will catch up with you."

"Of course," said Mrs Tucker, smiling.

"This is really extraordinary!" exclaimed Matthew. "I am at a loss for words."

"So am I," she said, her heart fluttering. "I cannot say that I ever expected to meet you here, or anywhere other than at Sutton Minety."

"Well, it just goes to show what they say about small worlds, but I do not understand why *you* are here of all places!"

"Why, I might well ask the same question as you!" she said, looking anxiously towards her companions as if she might see her mother amongst them. "I live and work here."

"Work? I had not heard that you were working, but then I have not been home since your sister was married, and we have not seen each other to talk to since that afternoon we met, just like this really, at the boating lake on your uncle's Estate. And your sister, is she well?"

"Yes," said Ruth, hesitantly.

"And your work that you say you have?"

"I am a journalist and writer. I write for the Daily Pitch."

"I have heard of it," he said, "but I must confess I find no time to read it, not with the demands of the practice. It seems that now I must find the time to read it, or at least parts of it."

"Practice?"

"Well, you see, that is what makes this such a remarkable coincidence. I have a practice here, just across the river. Of course, you would not know that. But, for us both to end up working and living within a veritable stone's throw and with only the river to separate us. You will remember we once met on a bridge and then we met by the lake. That was not that many months ago. And now it is by the river and we have water again! It really is remarkable!"

"It is more like destiny," she said softly, almost to herself. "And it seems such a long time ago."

"Well," he said cheerfully, "I must ask you to release me now as I have a patient who awaits me, but I think we have much that we should talk about if you are happy to meet me again. Could I call on you, or is there somewhere we could meet, possibly sit and talk, or walk together. I must say that I have found this to be a quite lonely place for a man of my profession. Shall we meet?"

Ruth felt that her heart was beating so strongly that he, as a doctor, would hear it. If he felt the race of her pulse, he would be quite alarmed! But how should she answer him? Her heart was positive as to the answer, and the only doubt in her head was that planted there by her mother, an idea she should have weeded out long ago.

"Perhaps I could accompany you to see some of the sights if you have not yet seen them? Have you visited St Pauls, or any of the Museums? Or would you like to attend an orchestral concert?" Ruth confessed that she had visited none of these places on account of the demands of her employment. "Or, as the Spring is coming, we could even take a day at the seaside if you were prepared to accompany me."

"I would like to see the sea," she said, thoughtfully, "but I would have to think about such a trip."

"Of course," he said, "but a day away from our work for each of us might be the very thing the doctor would prescribe!"

"I must think about it," she said. "And I must join my friends as I fear that I am in danger of delaying Sunday lunch and you may be losing a patient although I trust his condition is not that critical."

“But, shall we meet again?”

“I would like to. Could you meet me here, next Sunday? There are some gardens through there, by the river, where we could walk or sit for perhaps a half hour.”

“I would be delighted,” he said, taking her hand and squeezing it gently. “Until next Sunday, then!”

Ruth did not catch up with the other ladies until she reached Mrs Tucker’s house where she was forced to fend off a barrage of questions over luncheon.

“We did not know you have a young man,” said Miss Cramm, smiling across the table at Miss Stern as if they shared some shocking secret.

“I would not describe him as my young man,” protested Ruth.

“But that was the way it appeared to us, was it not, Emily?” said Miss Stern.

“Most certainly it was not!” said Miss Cramm.

“You said that he is an old acquaintance, Miss Mottram?” said Mrs Tucker, a little sternly.

“A childhood sweetheart!” said Miss Cramm.

“I would never describe him as a sweetheart!” said Ruth. “He is the son of the village doctor where I was brought up. I believe that he is a doctor now.”

“A professional man!” said Miss Stern. “I think I like him already!”

“A doctor?” said Mrs Tucker. “Then it must be all right for you to see him!”

Ruth was very cautious not to reveal that he had suggested that they should visit various locations in London, or go together to the seaside for a day. Both suggestions had a ring of impropriety about them and she did not want to sully his image in their eyes. But she did admit that he had asked to meet with her again, and that she had told him that she would spend no more than half an hour with him, in public view, if he presented himself outside the church at the same time the following Sunday.

Once back up in her room she thought that she could not believe what had happened. Here was someone who she knew, who she felt she could talk to, and who she could trust. The difficulty she now faced was how she could retain decorum yet raise with him subjects of great intimacy. “If I am too forward,” she told her uncle’s image, “he will think badly of me. Yet I cannot afford to risk losing him now that I have found him and I pray to God that he will be there, waiting for me, next Sunday.”

Later, she reproached herself for her reticence when he suggested that they should spend time together, telling herself that she could have accepted as it was his suggestion, not hers. It would be no difficulty to find where his practice was situated and visit him to tell him that she had come to a decision. Yet something counselled her to wait and be patient. As someone had once said to her, the larger the fish, the longer one must take if one wishes to land it.

Then she chided herself for thinking such a thing. She was not planning to net him for herself, was she? What would her mother say if she as much as found out that she had seen Matthew, or that he was living at barely any greater distance from her there than he had at Sutton Minety? And this was just the sort of thing that man would use to blackmail her! There she was telling her sister that she had nothing to fear from the man when, within days, she had earned her own secret! Except if he had threatened her with it, she would have told him to go and tell Mrs Mottram, and be damned!”

She sat down to work, but her mind never strayed far from the meeting. And as the evening approached and the shadows gathered amongst the gravestones outside and crept upwards into her room, she became increasingly morbid and depressed. It had been a chance meeting, she told herself, and he had being polite and making conversation. He had obviously been surprised to meet her, as was she, but there was no meaning in his words. He did not think any better of her now than he did before. He had always been willing to spend the time of day with her, but had never shown the slightest hint of affection towards her. Perhaps he would turn up on Sunday, but by the time she prepared for bed, Ruth was telling herself that the chances were that he would not be there. And she was also assuring herself that if he was not, nothing on Earth would make her go in search of him.

That week dragged by, with each hour seemingly more reluctant than that preceding to give up its allotted span. Sunday dawned bleak and cloudy, and there was more than a hint of rain in the air as Ruth and her lady companions walked to Church. She prayed that he would be there, but told herself that he would not appear. If he needed an excuse, the weather would provide one. Then she chastised herself for her lack of faith. Of course he would be there! And he was.

"This is the second time that we have met on a wet day, Ruth," he said, taking her arm. "You do not mind me calling you Ruth, do you? I would be happy to call you Miss Mottram if you would prefer."

"No, I do not mind, at least when we are not in company. If there were others near, it might give them the wrong impression. And am I to call you Mr Fayrbrother?"

"No, you may call me by my Christian name by the same token."

"Then, Matthew, I fear that we will not be able to sit and talk as we have no derelict boating house to shelter us this day. And I have told Mrs Tucker, my landlady that I shall be there for luncheon in half an hour."

"I do not think we should spend longer in the rain," he said. "There are still many ailments about that can be caught that way." Ruth thought of Victoria and the unsightly rash on her face, but said nothing. "I think the most important thing we should do is discuss arrangements for further meetings. I would beg your indulgence in this. I know it sounds forward, and it is forward and perhaps a little hasty on my part, but I am so grateful to find someone I know here. But in my enthusiasm and anxiety I have not asked to ascertain whether you are free to attend such meetings without compromise or upsetting another relationship."

"I am," she said, softly. "I know no-one else here, in London."

"And you do not think I am too forward? Pray tell me to stop if you do!"

"I shall," she said, smiling.

"Then, have you thought about my suggestion that we might visit some of London's monuments or establishments together? Or, better still, have you considered my suggestion of a day trip to the seaside. There is no reason why we should not go now rather than wait."

"What, today?"

"No, not immediately, but one day soon. The most convenient arrangement would be to take a train to Ramsgate from Waterloo Junction. We would have to go on a weekday or a Saturday, but we could even go on to Broadstairs where Dickens kept his house. I am told that both resorts are delightful."

"I do not think that I should," said Ruth.

"Nonsense," said Matthew. "I am sure that we can both squeeze a day away from our duties. I am sure that if I can escape from the demands of my patients, you can escape the tyranny of the Daily Pitch, which I am endeavouring now to read."

"Well, I am pleased that I have been the cause of an increase of at least one in the circulation," she said, "but I do not think it would be proper for us to spend a day together, not yet."

"It would not be a great problem," he said. "In fact it is very easy for us both. There is a train that leaves Charing Cross at just after nine o'clock in the morning which would get us to Ramsgate by noon, and it is a very pleasant journey. I do not think I should accept a refusal, not unless there is someone else."

"There is no-one else," she said, thoughtfully, impressed by his knowledge of the railway timetables.

"I am pleased to hear you say that."

"How much will it cost?" she asked, provocatively, but thinking of the strain such a journey would place upon her over-taxed budget.

"You must allow me to keep that as a matter for myself."

"Oh, I could not think of going under such circumstances," she said, firmly.

"It is quite customary for young women to be treated thus without being placed under any obligation," he said. "It happens all the time!"

"Do you make a habit of it, then?"

“Oh, no! I do not make a habit of inviting young women out on trips to the seaside, or anywhere else.”

“I am pleased to hear that, but it does not change my mind. I could not allow you to pay for me, and I am not at all certain that I could afford to meet the outlay that would be required. If I place those considerations alongside my original concern as to the propriety of such a day, I do not think it is something I could agree to.”

“I do not know what to say,” said Matthew, seeming to be quite surprised by her reaction. Ruth, for her part, started to worry that she might be too negative and discourage him.

“Perhaps we can arrive at some other accommodation?” she said. “I could think about it during the coming week and if you are happy to do so, we could meet again next Sunday, and perhaps the weather will be kinder to us both.”

“Yes,” he said, somewhat to her relief. “Let us meet again next Sunday. If the weather is fine we can walk and you can tell me how you come to be here. And I can tell you of all my adventures. I still think it is something of a miracle that we should meet one-another like this. It must be Destiny.”

Back in her lodgings, after luncheon, Ruth retired to her room. She should have been happy but she was not. She found herself torn in two directions. On one hand she did not want to do or say anything that would cause Matthew to discontinue their meetings, but on the other there was the thought that her mother would be outraged if she knew of them. She would say it was a betrayal of her and that it was exactly the kind of happening that she feared and preached against. Ruth knew she would be denounced by Mr Clauncy, probably from the pulpit. She might never be able to show her face in Sutton Minety again. And there was Victoria. She might have tolerated a minor dalliance whilst they lived in the middle of nowhere, but now she was in London, and involved in Roger’s important venture, she would say that she had a position to maintain and a name to protect, and that she did not want her sister to appear to be dragging her down into the mud.

Yet Ruth did not feel that she was doing anything that should be censored or for which she should be scolded. After all, she longed to seek Matthew’s views on, and assistance with, if practicable, Victoria’s problem. In a perverse way, her meetings with him might help solve her sister’s difficulties. But it was not a subject that she could suddenly broach, not without them becoming more familiar with one-another. Worst of all, the plain truth was that she wanted to be with him. Perhaps she had always wanted to be with him? Perhaps that was, as he had said, their destiny?

“Oh, Uncle,” she said. “What am I doing? What am I starting and where will it all end? I should have refused him at the outset. I should have put an end to it right at the beginning and never allowed it to start! But how can I completely refuse him? I know that any continuation of this relationship will provoke my mother’s wrath, but how can I, in all conscience, send him away and say that I no longer wish to see him. Nothing could be further from my heart’s desires. And what possible harm can come from it?”

The short story that she wrote that week had an uncustomary touch of optimism about it, a point that was not missed by Mr Braithwaite or his partner. “It is probably on account of the Spring,” said Mr Sunbury. “Young artists, it can affect, especially those who are depressively obsessed”

“But will it affect our circulation? That is what bothers me. Our young lady has a following but I do not think she is yet at the point at which she will be read on the strength of her name alone, and even if she had reached that exalted position, she would not be exempt from criticism. She is successful because she is writing what the public at large wish to read, not because they wish to read anything she writes.”

“This is just one story,” said Mr Sunbury, shrugging. “I do not think I hear the alarm bells being rung already. And the circulation, how can we be certain that the increase is as a result of this one young lady?”

“What else could it be? Her contributions are the only significant changes we have made recently. And you will recall that you agreed that we should increase her fee on account of the improvements. Is that no proof enough?”

“Perhaps I was hasty. Perhaps I think that now in the light of this new story?”

“You are thinking that we should wait?”

“Yes, my friend,” said Mr Sunbury. “Wait we should.”

He was there on the following Sunday, waiting, when Ruth left the Church. Mrs Tucker saw him first and winked at the two teachers who each smiled knowingly. Miss Cramm might even have allowed herself a slight sniggle. When Ruth saw him, standing on the opposite side of the road, watching the members of the congregation as they slowly emerged, Ruth was reminded of Victoria’s wedding and the sight of him and his father standing on the opposite side of the village green. Given what had transpired since, it was a memory on which she did not wish to dwell. Making her excuses to her companions she crossed the road to where he was standing.

“Well, Ruth,” he said, taking her arm. “We meet again.” Ruth was watching Mrs Tucker and the two teachers who were engaged in conversation and had no doubt that it concerned her. For a brief second she thought that Mrs Tucker might be thinking that this liaison had progressed far enough and that she should inform her mother. But that was silly! How could she?

“We are late this morning and I have less time than usual,” she said. “It was one of those sermons that went on and on and, I must confess, here I am not half an hour later and I can barely recall a word of it! I trust that my writing does not have the same effect on those who read it!”

“Not as far as I am concerned. Now that I have read some of it I would like to think that I have become one of your most ardent admirers. I would like to think of myself as the most ardent, but I dare say that the competition at the top is fierce. I cannot believe that I am the only one who is paying attention to you. I am sure that you must have other admirers!”

“No,” she said, feeling herself shiver when she thought of the note that was propped against her uncle’s image on the writing desk. “I really do not have not, nor would I have the time to deal with such admirers so perhaps it is no bad thing.”

“Well, if I may be as bold to say so, you do have me,” he said, softly. It sounded a very forward statement and one she should rebuke, but she could not bring herself to do so.

“As an admirer of my writing,” she asserted.

“As an admirer,” he said. “Now are you to tell me your story first, or shall I start with mine? Do we have the time to indulge in such luxuries?”

“There is not much to tell on my account,” she said. “My uncle, Earl Mottram, who as you probably know passed away recently -.”

“I did not know!” he said, apologetically. “I am sorry, but I had no idea. It only serves to show how insular and out of touch I have become. How did he come to die? But pray, Ruth, do not tell me if it pains you.”

“He had an accident and developed a poisoning of his foot which, they say, spread throughout his body. It was a great loss to me as it was he who supported me in my writing and he who arranged for me to come to work here in London.”

“Then I am indebted to him,” said Matthew, gravely.

“And he was partly instrumental in my sister, Victoria, marrying my cousin Roger, but then you know of that!”

“Yes, I was able to witness the occasion. And I also recall coming to the dance in Farmer Owen’s barn and not daring to ask you for a single dance for fear of your mother!”

“Oh, surely that cannot have been the case,” she said, lightly. “That you would fear my mother!”

“The fear was that I might embarrass and offend you,” he said, “but you were telling me your account of how you came to be here.”

“It was shortly after the wedding. I received a letter from Braithwaite & Sunbury, the publishers of the Daily Pitch, came up to London armed with a large portfolio of short stories, and here I am!”

“And your mother? What does she think of this?”

“Oh, she does not approve of it in the least!”

“I can understand that,” he said, smiling. “I do not think she will ever forgive me for being my father’s son any more than I can forgive him for being my father. Perhaps, on that account, it is wrong of me to be seeing you now?”

“Not at all! I know very few people in London and I have made even fewer friends. I would not want to lose one now that I have found one!”

“But, as at the dance, I would still not want to embarrass or harm you by my acquaintance.”

“You must allow me to be the best judge of whether I am likely to be embarrassed or harmed by this acquaintance,” she said, smiling again.

“Ah! If I may say so, it is good to see you smile. I felt when I read your writing and indeed when we met two weeks ago that you were troubled by something, and now I have made you smile. If I have achieved anything, I have achieved that!”

“Do I not smile? I must give the World a very poor impression of me if I do not smile!”

“As I remember it, as I used to watch through the shutters as you and your sister passed by the house, you always looked thoughtful, sometimes even a little severe, and your sister was one who had enough in the commodity of smiles for the two of you. But then, I do recall you smiling, and me complimenting you for it, that afternoon we met on Maggot’s Bridge.”

“You can remember that particular?” she said, reflectively. “It now seems such a long time ago!”

“Oh dear! Now I have made you sombre again!”

“Not at all!” she said, shaking her head and forcing a smile. “It is just that I appear to have been launched upon a sea of trouble and misfortune.”

“Then you shall tell me all about it!” he said brightly. “But it had better not be immediately as I am conscious that I am keeping you, and possibly your companions, from your lunch, unless they will carve the meat without you?”

“Yes,” she said. “Perhaps I had better go.”

“And I shall see you at the same time and place next Sunday, except we must hope that there is a more considerate sermon!”

Back at her lodgings Mrs Tucker was awaiting her. “We have been discussing this development of your’s,” she said. “We have agreed that as you are making a habit of meeting with this young man, he should be invited to join us for luncheon next Sunday.”

“Oh!” Ruth exclaimed, taken by surprise. “I am sure that he would find that acceptable but I do not know what his arrangements might be, and I have no way of contacting him in the interim.” Glances were exchanged across the table and Ruth felt foolish and uncomfortable. “I have not thought to ask where he is living except I know it is on the other side of the river.”

“Then next Sunday,” said Mrs Tucker, determined to have her way, “you shall invite him here the following Sunday. Then there need be no confusion in the matter!”

“Oh, I would be delighted to do that!” said Ruth, and she smiled at everything that was said throughout the remainder of that meal.

The following Sunday dawned bright and mild. For Ruth it appeared to be an idyllic day, and she could not but think of how pleasant it would have been at home or, perhaps better still, in the Italian Garden at Hazleton Court. At that thought she felt sad. Then she found herself thinking of the scene she had started to paint the day after her meeting on Maggot’s Bridge. She wondered if the unfinished work was still in her bedroom. One day she would finish it, she thought. And that had been the day that she and her sister had first met their cousin Roger. Would either of them have thought that not a year later one of them would

have been married to him? Or that she would have been there, preparing to meet no-one other than Matthew Fayrbrother?

“You are looking very attractive this beautiful morning, Miss Mottram,” he said. Ruth lowered her head and thanked him. She was unused to receiving compliments about her appearance although that morning she had taken special care to look at her best, at least to the extent that black would permit her to do so.

“Before anything else is said,” she went on, “I am requested to invite you to join me, my landlady, Mrs Tucker, and my two companion lodgers for luncheon.”

“I do not think I could accept your offer today,” he said.

“But next Sunday?” she pressed him.

“Of course! I would be delighted to join you all! Now, when we parted last week you were about to tell me about certain difficulties you have. I assume that they concern your sister?” It was said so lightly, so suddenly, a casual flick of the tongue. It sounded to her so innocent and innocuous, yet it penetrated right through what ever defence that Ruth had been able to muster in response to her sister’s plea and exploded with devastating effect. “It was just the way you mentioned her name when we were talking,” he added.

“I am very worried about Victoria. I really should not talk about it, especially if I am to believe everything that she has said, but I cannot keep it all to myself and I do not know who else there is who I can talk to. Yet, I feel that I should not burden you with my family’s problems!”

“I am always prepared to listen. That is an essential part of my profession.”

“I fear that she is in terrible trouble!”

“Terrible? How could your pretty, little sister get herself into terrible trouble? She has not been gambling, has she? Or is her husband beating her. It is said to occur in the very best of circles!”

“No,” said Ruth, shaking her head. “It is nothing like that. It is hard to describe but something dark and sinister is engulfing her life. It is as if an evil cloud has descended upon her household.”

“If I may say so,” said Matthew, “this sounds like something from one of your stories.”

“Well, you may not say so!” Ruth said sharply. “It is not fiction and I am in deadly earnest about it.”

“Very well, then. You must tell me all about it.”

“Have you ever heard of a man called Calaceli, Angelo Calaceli?”

“No,” said Matthew, looking puzzled.

“You may count yourself amongst the fortunate, then. If I am to believe Victoria, and I have no reason to disbelieve her, he is an international criminal and a very dangerous man who appears to have some control over both my sister and her husband. She thinks that he uses blackmail as a weapon for extortion and to manipulate people. Roger is involved in some large business venture and Victoria thinks that this man is seeking to take control of it and presumably deny Roger the reward he expects to achieve. Victoria says that he has spies and agents everywhere and that she is watched. She thinks that even I may be watched, or that he may seek to make me one of his victims.”

“I cannot say that I have ever heard of anything like that. I have heard talk of there being gangs and master criminals, but I have always dismissed this as talk. Are you not able to find anything out about this man through your newspaper? What did you say his name is?”

“Angelo Calaceli. I could find out little more than I knew already. I should explain that I have only once come face to face with the man, and that I took an immediate dislike to him!”

“You have actually met him?” Did he appear like an international blackmailer?”

“In as much as I know what men of that sort look like, yes. I shudder now when I think about him and the way he looked at me.”

“And has your sister met him?”

"I believe so. I believe that he has visited their house on more than one occasion. Outwardly, you see, he appears as a respectable lawyer, but he leads a double life. Victoria clearly is very fearful of him and what he may do to her and Roger."

"I am not sure that I know how I can be of help. Obviously your sister has considered going to the police, though if it is blackmail that he uses as his weapon, contact with the police is frequently amongst the last actions that victims will take."

"I did not imagine for one moment that you would be able to do anything to help," said Ruth, lowly. "But what should I do?"

"I am not sure what to advise. If what your sister says is correct, it may be very difficult to do anything. She might consider the use of a private detective, but what avail would one be against a powerful criminal? However, first we must try and find out something about this man, to see if we can corroborate what she says."

"I would ask you to apply the greatest of caution in everything you may do. As I said, this man has spies and informers everywhere and he can be very dangerous. I understand that he may go to any end to achieve his aims, whatever they may be."

"I understand," said Matthew. "I will take every precaution as the last thing I would want to do is to jeopardise you or your sister. But I do have a number of contacts at a senior level in the Police Force here in London. I have no reason to believe that any is other than absolutely trustworthy. I would like to talk to them and see if they have heard of this man, Calaceli did you say?"

"Oh, Matthew! Is it worth the risk? What if they establish a link between us and back to Victoria?"

"I cannot see how that could happen. I will not mention her name or your name and no-one knows that we know one another any more than this man knows who I am. I can ask discreetly, without there being any risk of a connection being made."

"But what if we are being watched at this very moment? That man sitting over there for example. He has been sat there since we arrived here and I am sure he has been watching us! He could be one of this man's agents and he would only have to follow you to find out who you are!"

"You could be right," said Matthew, glancing at the man Ruth had singled out. "When I leave you I will take great care to ensure that I am not followed. I do not think I shall be, Ruth, but I will do it to give you peace of mind."

"Thank you," she said. "It does not matter should I be followed as they already know just who I am and where I live. Perhaps I should not involve you in this at all. I would not want harm to come to you. Perhaps it would be wrong for you to come to lunch next week as if Mrs Tucker's house is also watched, you will be seen."

"I think that you seem to have all this worked out to the last detail. I am beginning to wonder whether you are planning to take up writing mystery stories!"

"This is all very real!" she said anxiously. "Please do not mock me. If you had seen the agitated condition of my sister you would not doubt me. She is not well, either."

"Not well? Now you are arousing my professional interest. In what way is she not well?"

"I am not certain as she was not specific. It concerns her nerves and what ever it is has brought her out in an ugly rash."

"A rash? What kind of rash?"

"She has these small blotches, about the size of a thumb print, on her face and neck. They vary from pink to a violet-purple and look as if she has been bruised. I thought someone might have been beating her, but she said it was an allergy."

"I must say that I have never heard of such symptoms being produced by a nervous state, but perhaps I could make some enquiries here as well. With your permission I would be happy to approach the physician who is treating your sister. I doubt that would be hard to discover. I may be able to talk to him on a professional level, explaining that I am associated, if I can describe it that way, with her family. I would have to stress that I was only seeking information and not interfering in whatever treatment has been recommended. Would you be happy if I try this as well?"

“I would not want to put you to so much trouble,” said Ruth. “I know how busy you are.”

“It will be no trouble. I am pleased to be able to help you. In a way I am pleased that there is no-one else here that you can turn to and that it has to be me. Now, I fear I may once again be keeping you from your luncheon. I will return to my house, taking precautions of course to ensure that I am not followed, and I will meet you again next week at the same time and, unless you have changed your mind, I will accept the invitation to join you all for lunch. I hope I may have something to tell you by then. I hope it may be something that will put your mind at rest on both scores. Is that all right?”

“Thank you, Matthew,” she said. “I am deeply indebted to you.”

“In the meantime I will ask you not to worry. And I will also ask you to be vigilant and to take care. I would not want for anything to happen to you. Until next week, then?”

She watched him walk away, and then turned to look at the man who she thought was watching them, but he had gone, too.

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