

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

"I am not sure that I have the time to be patient with this young lady," said Mr Arrowsmythe. "She may be withholding evidence which is vital to the case for the defence!"

"Can you be sure of that?" asked Mr Vincent.

"Sure? Not sure. It is just a hunch. She is a most delightful young woman, but I just do not know how to get her to open up. Perhaps if I took her out to dinner a few times?"

"And got her drunk, perhaps?" suggested the solicitor, daringly.

"That was not what I had in mind. I need to get her to trust me, to have confidence in me. Look at what we know at this stage. We know that the prosecution are building their case on very insubstantial evidence. Their case is flimsy and I think we could blow it away completely at the committal stage if we could only understand their motivation."

"Their motivation?" queried Mr Vincent feeling uneasy as he did not fully understand Mr Arrowsmythe's line of thinking.

"Well, I cannot be sure - you can never be absolutely certain of anything as far as the workings of the legal system are concerned - but I do not understand why the prosecution has been brought." The solicitor raised his eyebrows. "When you think about it," continued Mr Arrowsmythe, "the charges are the most serious that could have been brought, but the offences, if they really exist, are relatively minor and would justify no more than much lesser charges. There is a significant amount of overkill in this, and I do not understand why. However, I do believe the delightful Miss Sandra may hold the key, or one of them if there are more."

"You think that they are guilty?" asked Mr Vincent, incredulously, but trying to gauge the counsel's tone.

"I think that there could well have been fraud, or even a number of minor corrupt payments, little bribes, rewards for services rendered, that sort of thing, indeed the kind of practice pursued by some members of the police force every working day of their lives. It is a commonplace practice in the building industry, so much so it is expected and considered to be the done thing, like falsifying daywork sheets. I doubt that many of those practising it appreciate that it is an illegal practice. But guilt is not the real question here. We have the proprietors of the company charged with conspiracy as well as corrupt practice and false accounting, and not a shred of direct evidence against them that should stand up in court."

"You think they are not guilty? You believe their statements?"

"For what it is worth, yes, but as we know it is what the judge believes at committal, or the jury believes at a full hearing that matters. I think they are generally telling the truth and that I could convince most juries to accept that. Eileen Brown will make a particularly good witness as she is very calm and self-possessed and will hold up under cross-examination. I am not so sure about her husband, and I have to avoid putting Mr Brown senior on the stand because of his heart condition. I have been told by his wife that he can become very excitable, which is never a good thing in court at the best of times. I will argue that there is no prima facie evidence to link him to the contracts in question and that, except for a hostile statement of malpractice, the police have no evidence relating to him on any of the contracts, including that for Miss Bernstein. I think I can get him clear at the committal stage."

"Ah, you have mentioned the munificent Miss Bernstein. She is quite a mystery woman as none of our clients have ever met her. Have you had the pleasure?"

"I have not," said Mr Arrowsmythe, "but I do know her father extremely well and I have acted for him on a number of occasions. And, so long as my fees are paid - but that is another matter. I must return to this question of motivation and the missing pieces of the jigsaw, and that brings us back to Miss Brown. The question is, how are the two related?"

"Perhaps they are not in any way?"

"Oh, I think they are just as I think that Miss Brown holds the key. We know that two of the policemen involved in this case have paid more than professional attention to her. Mark you, I can understand why. We know that one of them almost came to blows with one of

those who now stand accused, one who maybe ought to be the only one who is accused of a felony, and that is not to say that he had committed one. Now, is there a link and, if there is, how am I going to persuade her to tell us about it?"

"You could always put her on the stand," said the solicitor.

"Indeed I could. I dare say that I could open her up wide without too many leading questions and she would probably answer truthfully, but I would rather not. I do not know how well she would cope with having to admit something in public that she will not discuss in private. For a variety of reasons I do not want to put her to that test, but if I have to, I will."

"Perhaps it will not come to that. Perhaps she will talk."

"I very much hope that I can persuade her to, yet I find that I am reluctant to take the task on myself. I think that Mrs Eileen Brown is the answer. She may provide the words which will unlock this young woman's inhibitions."

Mrs Eileen Brown did not relish the idea of being recruited as a confidence breaker, no matter how good might be the cause, or how justified was the end. She sat and listened in silence as Mr Arrowsmythe expounded on the arguments why it should be her, and not he, who tackled Sandra. She was puzzled by his reluctance. After all, he was a leading counsel and was being, no doubt, paid a large sum of money to represent them. Then she suddenly realised what it was he was not saying. "He does not want to alienate himself with her," she told herself. "If he attempts to wheedle it out of her, or puts her on the stand, she will hate him for it, and that is what he does not want! He is caught both ways," she thought. "If he pays court to her before the secret is out she will only assume that he is trying to break her down. He is attracted to her and frightened of compromising himself!" Even so it would not be easy for her to persuade her sister-in-law to change her position, but Eileen now realised that she was not only being asked to do this for the accused, she was to do it for Mr Arrowsmythe as well!

The first lunch had been very painful. Sandra had called around later in the day and apologised profusely. "I shouldn't have walked out on you like that," she said. "I really shouldn't, but it just came over me. I had to run - you know what I mean?"

"I do," said Eileen, soothingly. "Let us forget the whole thing for the present." But the thing would not be forgotten, not by Sandra, nor by her tormentors. She was back at the house the afternoon following Eileen's meeting with Mr Arrowsmythe.

"Your house appears to be my only place of refuge," she told Eileen. "As home it is my mother, going on, all the time. It is most wearing!" Eileen shook her head.

"I do not know what to say," she said. "Mr Arrowsmythe has asked me to talk to you again."

"Oh, no! Why can he not leave me alone? He is just as bad as the others. No, he is worst! He is supposed to be on our side yet he wants to drag me through the gutter. I could hate him!"

"I wouldn't do that as that might be the very last thing he would wish!"

"What do you mean?"

"I think he may be, how shall I say? A little sweet on you? And don't worry. I wasn't over charitable with him, but I have to admit that I am slightly worried that he may feel obliged to call you as a witness at the trial and try to wheedle it out of you in court."

"How could he do something like that to me? Why should he? Anyone would think that I am the guilty party! It is a personal matter - intensely personal. I may have acted foolishly, stupidly, but something quite horrible happened to me and I do not want to relive it or share it with anyone! Least of all do I want it made public! I could not bear that!"

"What I don't understand is why you still continue to work at the police station."

"I don't want to give in to him! He knows he cannot touch me now and I am not going to give him the satisfaction of leaving. The girl before me did just that; she left, but I won't if I can help it."

"I get the impression that Mr Arrowsmythe does not want to have to force it out of you. If you were agreeable, I could tell him what happened if that would make it easier for you. I would not tell him anymore than the barest outline. It would save you going though

with it.”

“No!” Sandra almost shrieked. “I do not want to have to go through with anything. Anyway, if you told him he would only want to come and interrogate me. I don't want anyone to know what happened.”

“I am sorry, Sandra,” said Eileen. “I won't tell him anything unless you want me to. I just thought it might make things easier for you.”

“Having him know? Having it made public? It wouldn't, not for me it wouldn't!”

“Will you think it over, Sandra. I could talk to Mr Arrowsmythe. There might be ways of stopping it becoming public knowledge.”

“It could be in the local paper. I used to write a column for them!”

“Not if there is a way of stopping it. Could I at least ask him if there is a way?”

“No! I don't want you to even discuss the subject with him!”

“What ever you wish, Sandra, although I do not think that this problem will go away.”

“I could,” she said, lowly.

“Oh, Sandra! You surely wouldn't do anything like that! I think we have talked about it enough for today. Could I just ask you to think about it; just turn it over in your mind?”

“I suppose so,” said Sandra, reluctantly, “but I do not see the point of doing so.”

Eileen reported the outcome of the conversation to Mr Arrowsmythe who nodded his understanding. “I reckon she will come to see me tomorrow afternoon,” he said, and remained down at Eastgate for a further day in anticipation. But she did not come.

“I am sorry that I cannot receive you in anything grander than my sitting room, but as you can see the House is undergoing a major restoration and that still has some way to go.”

“So I can see, Miss Bernstein,” said Mr Arrowsmythe, waiting for her to sit. “I must say that this is a quite lovely house. I would imagine it was quite breathtaking at its best?”

“And it will be again,” said Stephanie firmly. “I am very pleased that you could come down to talk to me. I am very concerned about the Brown case.”

“So I gather.”

“Both Mr Bernstien and Miss Bernstein are anxious that everything that can be done in the defence of Mr Brown and his family and his business, is done,” said Mr Robart, rather stiffly. Stephanie shot a sideways glance at the solicitor. She was anxious that this leading counsel should not be prejudiced in his approach to the defence. She was also surprised to hear that her father had an interest in the outcome of the case. Why should that be? This was not an opportune time to ask.

“This is a very unusual meeting, Miss Bernstein,” said Mr Arrowsmythe, “although I would not describe it as anything other than a pleasure and a privilege to be here. I won't enquire as to what your interest, or your father's interest, is in respect of this case, unless of course it is germane to the case for the defence.”

“I greatly doubt that my interest has any bearing on the present case,” said Stephanie, trying to appear outwardly calm although inside her passions were raging.

“I may assume, however,” continued Mr Arrowsmythe, allowing himself a smile, “that it something more than just trying to retain a builder to complete the restoration of this delightful house?” Stephanie smiled back. There were some who might have taken offence at the innuendo but that might have been unwise for although this man was engaged to act for her, there was something about him that told her he retained his independence and his own mastery. “Nor will I ask why you asked us all to come here instead of us meeting in London or Eastgate,” continued Mr Arrowsmythe, carefully watching for a reaction from this beauty, but detecting none.

“It just seemed a better idea to me,” said Stephanie, “to hold the conference in the country rather than in a stuffy office. We can go outside if you would like to?” Mr Arrowsmythe shook his head.

“Later, perhaps,” he said.

“In any case,” said Mr Robart, “I do not think our mutual clients motives are an issue for us today.” Mr Vincent who had said nothing since the introductions, nodded his assent.

“Very well,” said Mr Arrowsmythe, then paused as Miss Lightfoot brought in a tray crammed with coffee cups and saucers, biscuits and cakes. “I suppose I should explain that I find the whole case quite mystifying. It simply does not add up. The police case is weak and unless they are going to come up with something new and substantive I intend to attempt to get it struck out at the committal stage. Even if one of the council's employees decides to plead guilty, there is no tangible evidence to link either Mrs Eileen Brown or Mr Arthur Brown to the alleged offences.”

“Mr Arthur Brown,” said Stephanie, feeling anxious. “Don't you mean Mr Richard Brown?”

“No.”

“Not Richard?”

“No, defending his position, as he was in direct charge of the contracts which are central to the case, is much more difficult.”

“Oh!” Stephanie was unable to disguise the disappointment she felt, and the smile she forced was weak and failed to convince Mr Arrowsmythe, although, amongst the legal company there, only he understood, or thought he understood. For Stephanie concern now mingled with expectation. Richard had started to visit Newington, substituting for his father. She, of course, had no idea that he was coming. Indeed she might never have known that he had been there had it not been for a casual remark made by Mr Brodie. Would he come regularly, she asked herself. Oh, how she was tempted to hide in the laurels and rhododendron at the side of the drive, just in the hope of glimpsing him as he passed. Or she could go to the hay lofts above the stable yard and look down on him, as she had done one before from her flat, as he went into Jack Barnes's office for his meeting. The question was how long she could remain concealed if she did either of these things. So, on fine days she would still flee to the extremities of the Estate, to places that he would never dream of going. And on days when the weather was inclement, she would stay in her suite of rooms, a virtual prisoner, saying that she was unwell and with strict instructions that she was not to be disturbed.

What did he think, when he came and saw the House? What would he think? He would not know that it belonged to her. When he stood in the corridor by the inner garden and discussed the replacement of the floor or the specification for the plaster-work, he had no idea that she was there, perhaps only feet away, separated by one or two walls. And now there was this dreadful problem threatening to descend upon him and take away his freedom. She could not believe he was, or could be found, guilty. And she had done everything she could think of to assist him. “How long will it be to the committal proceedings?” she asked, hoping that the question would direct attention away from her anxiety and expecting that the answer would be of the order of two or three weeks.

“I would expect it to be in the Spring,” said Mr Arrowsmythe. “I have pressed for it to be heard earlier because of the potential damage to the business as a whole, but we still do not have a date. I take it, Miss Bernstein, that you are happy to continue with the builder you have?”

“Definitely,” she said. “My architect tells me that the Council have decided not to rescind the contracts they have with Browns'.” Mr Arrowsmythe raised an eyebrow. Stephanie saw this. “I sought his advice,” she added.

“It is true that the Council has agreed to stay their hand but that was a result of me telling the Town Clerk in no uncertain terms that to do so would not only be a breach of contract but it would be seized upon by the prosecution as evidence of malpractice and used to undermine their own defendants.”

“But Spring is so far away,” said Stephanie. “Imagine having this hanging over you for all that time, five months!” Poor Richard! She could think of no reasonable or acceptable way to comfort him. No doubt Eileen was having that pleasure, although she also had to worry about herself.

“I am afraid that if the case goes to full trial we could be talking of another two years,” said Mr Arrowsmythe, solemnly.

“Indeed,” said Mr Robart.

“Is there nothing that can be done in the meantime?” asked Stephanie anxiously.

"I do have two pressing problems to solve, both relating to female witnesses. The first is one Miss Logan who kept the company's books and who appears to have disappeared off the face of the Earth. With your consent I would like to engage an Agency to track her down. I must talk to her if at all possible."

"Of course, Mr Arrowsmythe. You must do what ever you consider is necessary."

"Thank you Miss Bernstein. I feel that finding Miss Logan will be nothing compared with the problems I have with Miss Brown who has somehow got herself significantly involved in the business but will not tell me how."

"Sandra?" exclaimed Stephanie, unguarded. "Is she involved?"

"She would appear to be or to know something which could be critical to our defence. What makes matters worse - or easy, depending on one's viewpoint - is that Eileen Brown appears also to know what ever it is, but has given, it seems, an undertaking to Miss Brown that she will not reveal the gory details."

"They are gory?" said Stephanie, astonished.

"A figure of speech," said Mr Arrowsmythe.

"Perhaps Eileen is guilty?" she suggested hopefully, then reprimanded herself for harbouring the thought. Yet it would be neat. Eileen could go to prison; Richard would divorce her and she could then move in.

"Who? Mrs Brown? I think not. There is virtually no case against her. I do not know what the big secret is. I can only speculate at the present, but I can tell you, in confidence, that it appears that Eileen Brown knew that the case was going to break before the police mounted their raids."

"Do you mean that Mrs Brown knew that the police were going to arrest her and her husband?" said Mr Robart.

"I am convinced of it," said Mr Arrowsmythe. "I think Miss Brown knew as well; she probably knew first and told Eileen Brown. What is strange is neither of them used, or took advantage of, the knowledge."

"You mean they did not destroy or hide any incriminating evidence?" said Mr Robart.

"There was, of course, none to hide or destroy, certainly not in Eileen Brown's possession. What is extraordinary is that assuming for the moment that I am right and both knew what was likely to happen, neither told anyone. Miss Brown did not tell her father. Mrs Brown did not warn her husband. Now why should that be, we should ask ourselves? Under what circumstances would a loving daughter, because that is what she is, not warn her father that he is about to be arrested?"

"Perhaps she did not know?" said Stephanie, dreading that he was going to describe Eileen as a loving wife.

"Eileen Brown has admitted that she knew and as good as indicated that she was told by Sandra Brown. Miss Brown works at the police station as a civilian. She must have learnt it there."

"Perhaps she is worried about the breach of confidentiality?" said Mr Robart. "She would lose her job if the truth came out."

"What truth?" asked Mr Arrowsmythe. "That she knew? The breach is not in knowing but would be in using the knowledge, which she did not do. No, I cannot invent a satisfactory explanation, but I am convinced, having talked to Eileen Brown, that what ever it is that Miss Brown knows, it is of importance to our case."

"Eileen would not have told her husband if she was guilty," suggested Stephanie.

"Maybe not," mused Mr Arrowsmythe, "but I do not think she is guilty. He may be, but she is not."

"But they live together!" protested Stephanie, unable to face the prospect of Richard being found guilty and his wife not.

"I do not think that being husband and wife normally implies each is guilty of the other's offence under English Law, Miss Bernstein," said Mr Arrowsmythe, thinking that the beautiful woman sat opposite him clearly did.

"Perhaps she knew there was evidence and left it so, knowing that the police would find it?" said Stephanie, colouring as she felt his eyes place her under even closer scrutiny.

“Yes,” said Mr Arrowsmythe reflectively, “who is to say what lengths people may go to, or what motives they have for saying and doing, or not doing, things?”

“Is it not possible,” asked Mr Robart, “that these two young ladies simply did not know what to do with their knowledge? Perhaps they disbelieved it, thought that the police could not possibly be contemplating arresting members of their families? Or perhaps they were concerned that they might be accused of crying “Wolf!” if they told everyone and nothing happened? And, of course, now it has happened they are both worried about the way in which the remainder of the family will react if they do admit they had forewarning yet said, or did, nothing.”

“I have considered those possibilities, but having met and talked to the ladies in question, I do not think that either of them would have taken the orders of silence they appear to have adopted if it was that simple. No, I believe there is more, and Eileen Brown has as good as admitted that there is more. So I feel in addition to finding Miss Logan, I must break down one of these young women.”

“Cannot Richard, or his father talk to them? Surely they could persuade Sandra to talk?”

“Neither of them know that there is a secret, something withheld, and I do not want to harass or put any undue pressure on Miss Brown.” Now it was Stephanie who was looking intently at Mr Arrowsmythe. “I would like her to be able to go into the witness box voluntarily and, as Eileen Brown has been taken into her confidence and knows what ever it is, she is the best person to tackle Miss Brown.”

“When will you start the search for Miss Logan?” asked Stephanie, wondering what else could be done. She played with the idea of going to see Sandra to plead on Richard's behalf, but they had not exactly been the best of friends when they had met, and it would reveal her part in the game. No, trying to intervene or directly helping appeared not to be available to her. She would have to continue to hide there, and pray. Did she say “pray”, to herself? Yes, she would pray for Richard, and even for Eileen, if her conscience would permit her when the time came.

“Immediately,” said Mr Arrowsmythe. “Now, that is really all I can tell you as far as the evidence is concerned. I reiterate that think that the prosecution's case is incredibly weak providing everyone holds his or her nerve. Even if the Council employees pleaded guilty and turned Queen's evidence, I think that the case will become limited to only one or two individuals and quite minor charges.”

“You clearly think that something improper did occur?” asked Stephanie.

“I think it is highly likely,” sighed Mr Arrowsmythe. “This kind of thing is endemic in the building and civil engineering industry. It may surprise you that it is frequently the employer's agent that makes the first approach, not the builder, although I do not think that you have anything here to be concerned about, Miss Bernstein.”

“I think that Mr Brodie and his assistant are above suspicion,” she said, smiling. “So you are reasonably confident?”

“I am quietly confident that I can get most if not all of the charges withdrawn. However, I will feel a great deal more so when we find our missing book-keeper and convince our two young ladies that they should talk. Those matters aside, it looks promising.”

“I am more than delighted to hear that,” said Stephanie. “Thank you for coming down here to see me.”

“It was the least I can do,” he replied, much to the surprise of the two solicitors. “In a way I have to thank you. Not only do I owe your father a couple of long standing favours which I will be pleased to re-pay, as it were, but it may also have provided me with another, shall I say, opportunity. We shall see.” Stephanie's heart gave a twitch at the mention of her father. It seemed ironical and cruel that the few men who were important to her in her life were perpetually absent and never at her side. Was she doomed always to suffer in this way?

Mr Robart came across to her as they stood and prepared to leave. “Your father asked me to give you these,” he said, holding out an envelope. “They are his keys to Rose Cottage. You may recall you asked a few weeks ago whether he still wished to maintain his interest in the property. I am instructed to tell you that he no longer wishes to use it and it is at your

disposal.”

“He no longer wishes to use it?” she repeated, disappointed because this removed one of the reasons why he might visit the Estate. “Why?”

“I believe it has something to do with his forthcoming marriage.”

“Marriage?” It was like a thunderbolt hurtling out of a clear blue sky, descending upon and obliterating her without warning, without cause and without reason. She did not know what to say or think. Who on earth could he be marrying? If he was to be married, how would it affect her position and relationship, such as it was, with him? Was she now, having had two stepfathers, to also have a stepmother?

“I am afraid that I am not able to give you any other details,” said the solicitor. “No doubt your father will communicate with you in due course. For the present, the cottage is yours, without hindrance or reservation.”

Stephanie was left in a state of confusion and fear. Mr Robart had not been able to say any more, and had certainly not been reassuring about her position. “The Estate and House are mine!” she repeated to herself, over and over again. “I signed deeds and documents. He cannot now take them from me!” But the documents had been laced with a web of notwithstanding, hithertos and aforesaid. It would have been so easy for him to slip in a few words which would enable him to rescind the gift and take everything back for himself. If that happened she could find herself back on the streets and nearly penniless, except she still had a little money of her own. Perhaps that explained why he had never come to see her? He simply could not look her in the face, knowing all the time what he had in mind! What more should she expect of a father who had forsaken seeing his daughter for virtually all of her life?

She flung herself on her bed and drove her fists into the pillows in frustration. For a while all manner of wild, insane, thoughts flew through her mind. She could sell off all the booty stored in the hay lofts and go abroad on the proceeds. She could even burn the House to the ground! She had been right from the outset - it was all too good to be true! He, her father, was going to marry again, and he had not even felt obliged to tell her, his daughter! Perhaps there was the significance in the keys that Mr Robart had handed her? She was to be banished from the House and was to live in Rose Cottage, a kind of poor relation, whilst her father and his new wife, whoever the bitch might be, lorded it up in the newly restored mansion and handed her charity! All her work, all the planning, all the conferences with Mr Brodie and the decisions, it was all for the benefit of someone else, another woman!

“The news must have been very, very bad,” Miss Lightfoot told Jack Barnes later that afternoon. “What ever it was that those gentlemen from London came to say, it has really upset Miss Bernstein. I have never seen her look or act like this! She appears to be absolutely desolate and I do not know what to say to her or to do to console her.”

Jack Barnes carried this information with him to the Newington Arms that evening where all of Miss Bernstein's sorrows were roundly drowned by proxy. “It could be money problems, you know,” said the Welshman. “With all that expenditure on the House. I looked through one of the windows only the other afternoon and the transformation is breathtaking!”

“It is beginning to take shape and look good again,” agreed Jack Barnes, “though there is still a fair way to go.”

“Perhaps what they came and told her was to do with them threats?” suggested Ned. “I mean, it all seems to have gone very quiet, aint it?”

“That may be,” said Jack Barnes. “I can't see how that would upset her that much.”

“Have you seen her, Jack? Since these men left?” asked the landlord.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “Miss Lightfoot said that she is not seeing anyone at all.”

“Perhaps it has something to do with all the trouble with the builder?” said Wormley, harshly. He ignored the attempts of his companions to shout him down. “There's more there than meets the eye, I can tell you. More there!”

“I can't see the connection,” said Jack Barnes.

“I would not listen to him,” said the Welshman. “You know Wormley, always trying to dig things up.” They all laughed, except the grave digger.

“Perhaps it is time he started trying to bury them again,” said Jack Barnes, with more than an edge to his voice. They laughed again.

“Ah!” Wormley scowled. “You may all laugh, all of you, just as much as you like, but there are things about your precious Miss Bernstein that you do not know.”

“And you do, Wormley?” hissed Jack Barnes, leaning forward in so threatening a manner it alarmed his companions.

“May be I do, maybe I do not. That is all I am saying.”

“Oh come on, man!” exclaimed the Welshman. “You cannot raise our curiosity like that without saying anything else!” Wormley responded by leaning forward himself, out of his corner.

“I will tell you this much,” he whispered. “Bernstein is not her proper name. At least it is not the name she went under before she came here. And she is not his daughter!”

“Rubbish!” cried Jack Barnes. “They should lock you away for saying such things.” But he found himself suddenly in a minority.

“What makes you that?” asked the Welshman.

“We’re back to the same old story,” said Jack Barnes. “We have been over this all before!”

“I am not saying anymore,” said Wormley. “One has to be careful nowadays what one says, even amongst friends. Except that these problems with the builders are tied up in some way with it.”

“Just supposing that what you say has a grain of truth in it, how do you know all this?” asked Jack Barnes.

“I can’t say,” said Wormley, defensively.

“No,” said the Welshman insistently, “you must tell us. How did you find out all these things about Miss Bernstein?”

“He’s just making it all up!” said the manager.

“Yes, Wormley,” said Ned, “you should be telling us all you know and how come you know it.”

“It’s just someone I know,” he said weakly.

“It’s all untrue,” insisted Jack Barnes. “Look! You can see it in his face. He’s been making the whole thing up. I don’t believe a word of it, any of it! For all we know you may have been the person who was sending all these threats to her!”

“That’s a lie!” shrieked Wormley, leaping to his feet and sending small table sliding across the floor. “That’s an out-right lie! You want to watch what you say, Jack Barnes! There’s such a thing as slander and I am not afraid to use it, that I am not!” They watched him back and edge his way around the room until he reached the door and then disappeared into the night.

“What was that all about?” said the Welshman. “Can’t say a word to him nowadays without him flying off the handle!”

“I don’t know about that,” said Jack Barnes, “but I would suggest that we keep to ourselves all that we have heard this evening. There’s no need to start further malicious rumours. There’s been enough of those floating about. We can leave that part of the business to Wormley. Are we agreed?” They were.