



Shot in Southwold

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PROLOGUE

From his office window overlooking Parliament Square, Tom Carshalton MP surveyed the swirling traffic. He took a sip of tea, eyeing the few cyclists perilously weaving their way among the streams of vehicles, and thought of his young niece (or rather his half-niece by marriage) and her newly acquired bicycle.

Really, who on earth would choose to ride a bike in London these days? he mused. Only the vain and insane! But then of course, in his estimation Tippy was both. She always had to be different, which generally meant difficult. He took another sip, and continued to gaze at the mass of cars and lorries manoeuvring far below, and for a moment a smile twitched his lips. Perhaps the girl would get run over. A handy resolution! Ida would be upset, of course, but a trip to Paris and a new dress would soon settle that . . . For

a few moments he allowed the convenient thought to flutter gently in his mind. But then, with a prick of shame, he banished it abruptly, put down his cup and took out a fountain pen. He picked up the telephone and dialled his secretary. 'I am ready to go over those accounts now, Miss Fielding,' he said briskly.

CHAPTER ONE

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and Professor Cedric Dillworthy's mews house dozed sedately in the mellowing sun. Seated on the sofa, its occupant would also have liked to doze, but the crossword was being so beastly that scholarly pride denied such luxury until at least six clues were solved. The professor frowned, took another sip of tepid coffee, and was about to redouble his efforts when there was the sound of the doorbell. With a muted curse, he cast pencil and newspaper aside and went to the window to peer down into the little courtyard.

From that angle the bell ringer could just be discerned: slight, dapper and carrying a smart attaché case. It was his friend Felix Smythe, owner of the fashionable Sloane Street flower shop *Smythe's Bountiful Blooms* (with a royal warrant, no less). Cedric was puzzled. Why was Felix here

at this hour? No arrangement had been made, and besides, couldn't he have telephoned – or was the Knightsbridge exchange out of order again? And what did the briefcase signify? Floral briefings from Clarence House? He smiled, thinking of his friend's devotion to the gracious patron. Well, if that was where he had been one could kiss goodbye to crossword clues, let alone a nap!

Easing the cat from the top of the stairs, Cedric went down and opened the door.

'Ah,' Felix said, 'glad I've found you; thought you might be napping or something.'

'I was,' Cedric lied, 'but I am fully awake *now*.' He stood back and ushered the visitor into the narrow hall and hence upstairs to the drawing room.

Felix surveyed the cooling coffee pot and the sofa's discarded crossword. 'But not asleep on your bed, I note. I should hate to think I had disturbed genuine slumber.'

'It was perfectly genuine until you rang the doorbell,' Cedric sniffed. 'Why are you here? It's Sunday. We never meet on Sundays.'

Felix gave a mild shrug. 'Indeed. But exceptions can be made and this is one such.'

'Evidently.'

'I thought you might be interested in my news. You see, I have had rather an intriguing proposition, and I wanted to discuss—'

'My dear chap, you don't mean that at long last old Blakely-Edwards has declared himself, do you? I knew he would one day!' Cedric leered, his disturbed peace no longer an issue.

‘Oh, nothing so tiresome; much more diverting. The *proposition* is to do with me featuring in a film: I have been approached by the director. What do you think of that?’ Felix slicked his hair and beamed.

Cedric, initially puzzled, said, ‘Oh . . . you mean some sort of commercial venture to do with London flower shops? I don’t have television, as you know, but I gather that nowadays there is a channel that displays advertisements. Is that what this is, a little item promoting porcelain *cache-pots* or royal florists? Will you be sharing the screen with a corgi?’

‘Certainly not,’ Felix replied, clearly nettled, ‘this has nothing to do with advertising or commercial television! This is a *proper* film, a serious artefact for distribution in public cinemas and, who knows, possibly even in the United States.’

‘Goodness! You mean like *Ben Hur*? Now that really was something. I had no idea that gladiators actually fought with—’

‘Er, no, not quite on that scale – rather more intimate, more subtle. Apparently very British but essentially avant-garde; all to do with the current “New Wave” so I gather . . . although I have to admit I am not quite sure what that means. At least not entirely, but doubtless all will be revealed. The main thing is that he clearly feels I could contribute a certain *je ne sais quoi* and that my left profile is especially photogenic.’

‘Who does?’

‘What? Oh that boyfriend of Angela Fawcett’s loud daughter: Bartholomew Hackle. He has been dabbling for

ages, and now he actually has a sponsor who is prepared to back a full-length picture. Very enterprising, don't you think?'

Cedric said nothing, recalling that Bartholomew Hackle's enterprises were many and unremarkable. (Or possibly too remarkable: the stewards at Newbury were still smarting from his wild attempt to run his uncle's filly in the Hennessy – a disastrous undertaking resulting in five horses being brought down and two jockeys hospitalised.) Still, it seemed churlish to dampen his friend's excitement, and instead he enquired where the film was being shot.

There was a pause while Felix adjusted his cufflink and cleared his throat, and then said casually, 'Uhm, Southwold actually.'

Cedric stared in astonishment. '*Southwold*, in Suffolk?' But you said that nothing would induce you to go there again – not after that frightful flower festival drama we had to endure.¹ Why, only last week I heard you telling Rosy Gilchrist that even the very thought of the east coast was enough to give you a heart attack.'

'That was last week; circumstances do alter cases – or so our Latin master was always muttering. One cannot be too rigid in this life . . . Besides, Cynthia Paget's last party was so crashingly awful that one had to say something to enliven things.'

'Hmm. Not notably efficacious. In fact, rather the reverse, I seem to recall. But tell me more about this film; and when do you propose going up there?'

There was a further pause. And then Felix said winningly,

¹ See *A Southwold Mystery*

‘Actually, Cedric, I rather thought that *we* might travel up at the end of next week . . . Oh, and by the way, I’ve brought you some chocolates, your favourite Charbonnel et Walker.’ With a flourish he produced a large beribboned box from the snakeskin briefcase and laid it on the console.

Cedric regarded the package in silence, and then enquired sternly whether the assortment contained the rose or the violet creams.

‘Both!’ Felix declared triumphantly. ‘*And* the vanilla ganache!’

‘Most kind,’ Cedric murmured. ‘Remarkably so.’

In the purlieu of London’s Sloane Street, blackmail was also being applied . . . or at any rate its way was being paved. Lady Fawcett’s drawing room was considerably larger than the professor’s, and in this domain it was the guest who was the target not the incumbent.

They were discussing her daughter’s marriage prospects. ‘You see,’ she said earnestly to Rosy Gilchrist, ‘although Bartholomew seems perfectly pleasant, one cannot be *sure*. Fundamentally decent, of course – I knew his father – but just a trifle headstrong, though I daresay age will remedy that. And his manners are impeccable, not like that terrible Desmond she produced last year. He was a disaster – almost as bad as the extraordinary Frenchman she had in tow when we returned from Suffolk that time. Do you remember? Well, at least that’s all over, thank goodness!’ Lady Fawcett closed her eyes in painful recollection. Opening them, she added, ‘After all, the dear girl is nearly twenty-five; it is high time she was settled. Wouldn’t you agree?’

At thirty-six and unmarried, Rosy wasn't entirely sure what she was expected to say. 'Er, well, I suppose—' she began tentatively.

The supposition was unfinished for in the next instant the older woman had said hastily, 'Well of course it's different for you, Rosy dear. I mean you have that important post at the British Museum and your fiancé was killed in the war – a real hero – but Amy has no such excuse. She really must pull herself together.'

Rosy smiled. 'Are you feeling broody for grandchildren?'

'Not in the least. One generation is quite enough. No, as it happens I am thinking of Amy's future; marriage would be so *stabilising* . . . Besides, I am becoming just a teeny bit tired of Mr Bates; he's so shifty. I found him eating jam in the pantry the other day.'

Rosy was startled. 'Mr Bates? Who's he?'

'Oh, didn't I tell you? A replacement for Mr Bones; he died and we've buried him under the pear tree. Amy was inconsolable so I bought her this whippet. Not as cuddly as the pug but less lazy, and actually he is quite lucrative. It certainly means I don't have to increase Amy's allowance.' She laughed.

'Really? In what way lucrative?' Rosy was puzzled.

Lady Fawcett lowered her voice. 'He has *stud* potential, if you see what I mean. She takes him on little missions and charges the most outrageous fees . . . And that is why I need your help.'

Had she not been eating a slice of cake, Rosy's jaw might have dropped. What on earth was the woman talking about? How could the whippet's amatory missions have anything to do with her?

‘Er, I don’t quite follow . . .’ she began.

‘Well it’s Bartholomew, you see. He is about to make a film, or “movie” as he calls it. It’s his first proper go and he is most eager for Amy and me to visit and lend support – you know the sort of thing: dispensing sandwiches and being generally helpful on the set.’

An image of Lady Fawcett being helpful on a film set did not come readily to Rosy’s mind; but she nodded, still unclear of her link with the whippet or indeed the latter’s connection with the cinema. She was to learn.

‘Anyway, the problem is that Amy tells me she cannot possibly oblige as it cuts across Mr Bates’s busy schedule in Shropshire, and she suggests that I go alone . . . Frankly, I’m not too keen on that as I don’t know Bartholomew all that well, and anyway such ventures are much more fun with a chum. Thus I was about to bow out gracefully, when it suddenly occurred to me that it would be an excellent chance to get to know the young man better, while at the same time making a *crafty* assessment of his suitability for Amy. Indeed, with the dear girl absent one might get a better perspective.’ She laughed gaily. ‘Don’t you think that’s a neat wheeze? Pretty canny, as my Gregory used to say!’

Politely Rosy agreed that it was very neat, and enquired the film’s location.

‘Well that’s just it,’ her hostess exclaimed merrily, ‘Southwold. It is being shot in Southwold. Would you believe it?’

Coincidences being more frequent than popularly supposed, Rosy did believe it. She was surprised,

nevertheless; but even more so by Lady Fawcett's evident elation. After all, with two murders and a suicide, their visit to the little place a couple of years previously had not been what you might call a feast of gaiety. The town, of course, was delightful, but the circumstances had been less than enlivening.

'But don't you think that could be a bit worrying?' she asked. 'I mean, you might feel haunted by certain memories – your friend Delia, for example, buried in St Edmund's churchyard . . .'

'Oh no,' the other replied blithely, 'few things haunt me – except perhaps that frightful Frenchman of Amy's in his beret! In fact, returning to Southwold in happier circumstances will probably be a good thing; lay the ghosts, as it were. And as for dear Delia, well naturally I shall pay her my respects, and I am sure she will welcome me at her graveside . . . Uhm, remind me, it was the *third* yew they put her under, wasn't it?'

Rosy assured her that it was, and then asked if she might not feel at a bit of a loose end on her own: 'Obviously during the day there will be Bartholomew and his film crew, but the evenings could be a little dull; and without Amy to do the driving won't it be a bit tricky getting about?' And then feeling that sounded too negative, she added hastily, 'although naturally there are bound to be local buses.'

Lady Fawcett looked faintly puzzled (a not infrequent expression) and said vaguely, 'I don't think I am mad about local buses . . .'

She took a sip of tea, while the mild eyes abstractedly roamed the room before once more alighting on the young woman opposite. She flashed a dazzling smile and

proffered more cake. ‘And that brings me to *you*, Rosy dear.’

Oh yes – it would, wouldn’t it, Rosy thought grimly. I asked for that; walked straight in!

But before she could muster any sort of response, with practised agility Lady Fawcett had outlined her proposal. This was to the effect that Rosy should come as her guest to Southwold. (‘No worries, my dear, it is totally all my treat! They say the bedrooms at The Swan are so restful, and don’t you remember those superb dinners we had at The Crown last time?’) She urged that when not ‘hobnobbing’ with those ‘doubtless delightful film people’, she and Rosy could explore the Suffolk countryside, immersing themselves in local history and toying with cream teas at Aldeburgh or Snape. It would be, she assured the lucky chauffeuse, a veritable feast for mind and palate. Rosy sighed . . . Hmm, perhaps.

In fact, Rosy was warily fond of Angela Fawcett and could certainly think of far worse people to spend time with in Suffolk. And in spite of its grisly events, her earlier trip with the older woman had been largely congenial . . . Yes, she had to admit that the prospect was quite appealing – especially as apparently expenses would be minimal! But what about the film business? Did she really want to be roped in to serve sandwiches and be factotum to a novice camera crew and a bunch of amateur actors? Instinctively she thought not . . . Yet from the back of her mind she heard her mother’s voice of long ago: ‘Oh, go on, Rosy, don’t be such an old stick-in-the-mud. You’ll love it, really.’

And echoing the past, her companion’s voice exclaimed: ‘You know, I think we might love it – a treat for both of

us!’ And then more pressingly: ‘I really do need a second opinion of Bartholomew, and an ally in these matters is such a comfort. Gregory would undoubtedly have had a view. But alas, the dear man is no longer here. So you *will* come, won’t you?’

Rosy nodded. ‘I would love to,’ she said.