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**MURDER AT THE  
FITZWILLIAM**

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# CHAPTER ONE

Cambridge, 1894

Daniel Wilson stood before the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, taking in the wide stone steps that led up to the eight tall white pillars that supported the ornately sculpted frieze at the front of the building. *Impressive. Imposing. But not to me*, he thought as he carried his small suitcase up the steps. During his time as a member of Abberline's team of detectives he'd been in many impressive and imposing buildings, including the Houses of Parliament at Westminster, and even Buckingham Palace – although, he had to admit, that had been via a side door rather than the front entrance. After those, even the magnificent building that housed the Fitzwilliam tended to appear slightly less imposing.

He reached the top of the steps and the large green door of the main entrance. It was shut. He checked his watch. A quarter before eight.

He tugged at the bell pull beside the door, and waited. He allowed a minute to pass, then, when there was no sign of the door being opened, he tugged at the bell pull again, longer this time.

The door opened just enough for a woman, wearing an apron and a headscarf and holding a broom, to peer out at him.

‘We’re closed,’ she said. ‘It opens to the public at ten o’clock.’

She began to push the door shut, but Daniel shoved his booted foot into the gap, halting the door’s progress.

‘My name is Daniel Wilson,’ he said. ‘I’m a private enquiry agent and I’m here at the request of Sir William Mackenzie.’ He paused, then added, ‘About the body.’

He saw the woman give a shudder at the word. Recovering, she shook her head.

‘Sir William ain’t in yet.’

‘I’m aware of that,’ said Daniel. ‘But he asked me to call as soon as I arrived to make my inspection.’

The woman hesitated, then reluctantly said, ‘I suppose you’d better come in.’

She pulled the door open wider, and Daniel stepped in.

‘You got anything to prove who you are?’ she demanded, her face showing her suspicion. ‘Only we’ve been warned to watch out for people who just want to take a look at where it happened.’

Daniel reached into his pocket and took out a buff envelope containing the telegram he’d received the previous evening from Sir William, along with his card.

‘Here,’ he said, holding them out to the woman. ‘These will prove I am who I say I am.’

The woman looked at both items suspiciously, but didn’t take them. Instead, she muttered, ‘You wait here. I’ll go and get Alice. She’s in charge.’

With that, she locked the outer door, then headed down

the marble stairs, still toting her broom, with a last warning to Daniel: ‘Don’t touch anything!’

As he stood, surveying the opulent adornments of the interior, Daniel wondered if he would have received a different reception if he’d announced that he was a detective from Scotland Yard. He doubted it. Even when he was with Abberline’s squad, their arrival at any establishment, whether as grand as this or a filthy illegal drinking den, was usually met with obstruction. People didn’t like the police poking their noses into their business. And they liked private enquiry agents even less.

He stood there, surveying the tall, wide columns of mottled green and black marble trimmed with gold that reached up to the high, decorated vaulted ceiling. Opulence. Money. Prestige. Grandeur. But it still needed the little people, the cleaners and the attendants, to keep it going.

The cleaner reappeared, accompanied by a stern-looking woman, also wearing an apron and a headscarf.

‘Mr Wilson?’ she demanded brusquely.

‘Indeed, ma’am.’ Daniel nodded, and again he held out the envelope with the telegram and his card. This time, they were taken. The woman took out the telegram and read it, then studied the card, before returning both to Daniel.

‘Very well,’ she said. Turning to the cleaner, she ordered, ‘Take Mr Wilson to the Egyptian Room, Mavis.’

Mavis shook her head.

‘I ain’t goin’ in there,’ she said. ‘Not after what happened. Anyway, the p’lice said no one was to go in there.’

‘Don’t be ridiculous,’ rebuked Alice. ‘The police have finished their examination.’

‘Yeah, but *he* may still be there,’ said the woman with a shudder. ‘His ghost.’

‘There are no such things as ghosts, Mavis,’ snapped Alice.

‘I ain’t goin’ in there,’ said Mavis doggedly. ‘My Bill says I shouldn’t have to. It’s not right.’

‘If you’d just take me to the entrance to the Egyptian Room, I’m sure I can find my way around,’ offered Daniel, keen to make peace between the two women.

But Mavis shook her head again, firmly.

‘I can’t stay ’ere after what ’appened,’ she said. ‘That’s what my Bill says, and ’e’s right. I’ll finish ’ere today, Alice, but that’s it.’

Alice stood looking at Mavis, a grim expression on her face.

‘Very well,’ she said. ‘But I am *very* disappointed.’ She turned to Daniel and gestured. ‘If you’ll follow me, Mr Wilson.’

As Daniel followed Alice down the marble stairs, he said apologetically, ‘I’m sorry if my arrival has caused this upheaval.’

Alice shook her head dismissively. ‘Mavis is a halfwit. She’s always finding things that seem to prevent her doing her work properly. And now this talk about ghosts. It’s just brought things to a head that have been simmering for a while.’ They arrived at the bottom of the stairs, where a pair of massive stone lions – or some creatures partly resembling lions – flanked a wide entrance.

‘This is where he was found,’ said Alice.

Daniel followed her into the room, past rows of artefacts stacked, possibly awaiting display, to a large heavy grey stone box: a sarcophagus. The lid had been removed and was now leaning against it.

‘He was inside here,’ said Alice.

‘I see,’ said Daniel. ‘And who exactly discovered the body?’

‘I’ll let Sir William answer your questions, if you don’t mind,’ said Alice primly. ‘I’ve got to get my work done.’

‘Fine.’ Daniel nodded. ‘Perhaps you’ll be good enough to leave a message with Sir William’s secretary to let him know that

I'm here. And also, I'd appreciate it if you could advise everyone that my orders are for no one to come in here until I've finished.'

She hesitated, as if about to argue with him, then nodded and left, heading out of the room and back up the stairs.

Alone, Daniel Wilson took the time to take in the vast array of Egyptian artefacts that filled this room. And the next, because Daniel could see that the Egyptian Room went on from this room into another, and from there into yet another.

The items in this room were a veritable treasure trove. Some attempt had been made to bring order to the assembly: ornamental statues had been lined up along one wall, and an unusual group at that, all life-sized with humanised bodies, but some with heads of falcons, some with those of cats, others with wings on their backs, all carved in stone, with the faded colours of their original paint still adhering to some of them. Mostly, his eye kept being drawn back to the mummified bodies, the cloths that covered them yellowed and worn. Some of the mummies were very small, infants, their tiny cloth-wrapped bodies in crumbling wicker baskets. Others were larger, adults, their bodies laid in wicker or stone coffins. Daniel noticed that the cloth covering on one of these larger mummies had eroded to the extent that a bony foot poked through. *How old?* he wondered. *Three thousand years old? Four? Five? More?*

His reverie was interrupted by a woman's voice snapping angrily at him, 'You dare to bar me! This is intolerable!'

## CHAPTER TWO

Daniel turned and saw a tall, well-dressed – and, he had to admit – attractive woman in her mid-thirties stood glaring at him.

‘I beg your pardon, madam?’ he said. ‘But, for the moment, the Egyptian collection is closed to visitors.’

‘I am not a visitor. I am making an inventory of the collection for the museum,’ she said curtly.

‘That may be,’ he began, ‘but a body was found here and I have been asked to look into it. My name is Daniel Wilson—’

‘I know who you are,’ snapped the woman. ‘You were formerly Inspector Wilson of the Metropolitan police, Chief Inspector Abberline’s assistant on the notorious Jack the Ripper case, now operating as a private detective. Sir William advised me yesterday that he would be telegraphing you.’



‘Private enquiry agent,’ Daniel corrected her politely. ‘In that case, you have the advantage of me, madam.’

‘I am Abigail Fenton, archaeologist, with an honours degree from Girton College in the Classics. I am not just some nosy local busybody. As I informed you, I have been asked by the Fitzwilliam to make an inventory of the Egyptian collection, and it was I who found the body.’

‘I see,’ said Daniel. ‘In that case I would be most interested to hear what you have to say, Mrs Fenton . . .’

‘Miss,’ Abigail stressed firmly.

‘Miss Fenton,’ Daniel corrected himself. He gestured at the sarcophagus. ‘Would you show me how you discovered the body, and what position it was in?’

Abigail joined him.

‘It was yesterday morning, Wednesday, at about ten o’clock. I had been examining the object the day before, both externally and internally.’

‘Did you have assistance in removing the lid?’ asked Daniel. ‘It’s very heavy.’

She shook her head.

‘The lid had been slid partly to one side, enough to enable me to see inside. On Tuesday the sarcophagus was empty. I know that because I was particularly keen to see if there were any decorations on the interior; the ancient Egyptians were very keen on colour and adornment.’

‘Yes, so I see.’ Daniel nodded, indicating the other objects in the large room, many of them colourfully painted.

‘In fact, as you will have observed, the interior of this particular sarcophagus has not been decorated; the ornamentation has been kept to the outside. However, when I left the museum on Tuesday evening, I left the lid pushed to one side so I could carry out a

more detailed examination of the interior the next day, in case there were holes in the stone that might show where a different form of decoration had been used.’

‘And when you returned on Wednesday morning . . .’

‘The lid had been pushed back in place. I assumed it was one of the museum staff who’d done it, possibly for reasons of safety, although I can assure you I had not left the lid in an unsafe or precarious position . . .’

‘No, I’m sure you didn’t,’ murmured Daniel.

‘I started to push the lid to one side – it moves surprisingly easily because the Egyptians had used highly polished stone on the top of the actual box – and saw at once that there was something inside. At first I thought someone had dumped a pile of old clothes inside it, but then I saw the man’s head . . .’

‘If it distresses you . . .’ began Daniel gently.

‘Of course it doesn’t distress me,’ Abigail snapped at him. ‘Life and death are facts of nature. I’ve not long returned from an archaeological dig at Gaza in Egypt, and out there human life is far more precarious than it is here in Britain. Death is an everyday fact of life there.’

‘I apologise for being overprotective of your feelings,’ said Daniel.

She sniffed, but appeared to be slightly mollified.

‘I apologise for the sharpness of my tone,’ she returned. ‘But I am fed up with being treated as some kind of fragile flower just because I am a woman. We do not all swoon at the sight of death or injury. If we did, there would have been no Florence Nightingale or her nurses to bring comfort and aid to soldiers during the Crimean War.’

‘No, indeed,’ agreed Daniel, making a mental note that this woman would be a formidable adversary, but at the same

time could be a very useful ally in the right circumstances.

‘At first I thought he might be drunk, but I smelt no alcohol. And then I noticed the unnatural angle of his head and realised that his neck looked as if it was broken.’

‘You have medical training?’ asked Daniel.

She shook her head. ‘While I was in Egypt I saw the body of a man who’d been hanged. His head was at the same angle to his body.’

*This is a formidable woman indeed,* Daniel thought. *Unafraid, not easily put off.*

‘I immediately went to see Sir William Mackenzie and reported my discovery to him. Sir William came down, confirmed what I had found, and called the police.’ Her expression hardened. ‘Some idiot called Inspector Drabble arrived, who promptly ordered me to leave. He said the dead body meant it was no place for a woman.’

‘I pointed out to him that we are surrounded here by dead bodies with all these mummified remains, but he was adamant, and he actually called for a constable to escort me from the premises. I complained to Sir William, but he told me that the site was under the jurisdiction of the police. Inspector Drabble didn’t even ask me about the body, despite the fact that I was the one who discovered it.’

‘There was a reason for that,’ snapped a voice, curtly.

They turned to see the short, round, moustached figure of a man descending the steps, bowler hat firmly wedged atop his head, the buttons of his suit jacket straining over his ample stomach.

‘Inspector Drabble, I presume,’ said Daniel. ‘My name is Daniel Wilson—’

‘I know who you are,’ said Drabble brusquely.

‘I assume you have finally come to talk to me about finding the body,’ said Abigail, her disapproval clear in her tone.

‘You assume wrong,’ said Drabble. ‘I gained all the information I needed from Sir William Mackenzie and the other staff.’

‘But I found the body!’ exploded Abigail angrily.

‘I am aware of that, and it was noted,’ said Drabble coldly. He turned to Daniel. ‘I’ve been advised by Sir William that he has brought you in to investigate this case.’

Daniel nodded. ‘That is correct.’

‘I have advised him that your presence is unnecessary, and also could be a distraction.’

‘Really?’ said Daniel.

He’d been expecting this. So often, when he was called in, he encountered hostility from the local police force, who resented him.

‘The reason I say your presence is unnecessary is because our study of the situation, and of the premises, indicate that the man broke in during the night of the Tuesday. With all the external doors and windows being secure, this suggests he gained entry by climbing a drainpipe up to the roof, then traversing the roof to the courtyard area, down another drainpipe into the courtyard, where he was able to access the interior of the building, the doors and windows from the courtyard being less secure.’

‘That seems a very circuitous route,’ mused Daniel.

‘We have examined the building and it is the only answer,’ said Drabble tersely.

‘Unless someone let him in?’ suggested Daniel.

‘We’ve spoken to the nightwatchmen who were on duty during the night and they both insist that no one entered the building while they were here,’ said Drabble. ‘As I say, all the evidence so far points to the fact that this man had come to

steal some artefacts, and he was in the act of climbing into the sarcophagus when the heavy lid fell down on him, killing him.'

'And that's your conclusion?'

'It is. However, we shall continue with our investigations in case new evidence arises, and if it does, we shall reappraise the situation.' He stepped close to Daniel and thrust his face forward. 'If anyone's going to solve this case, Wilson, it's me and my men. Local bobbies using proper police procedures, not a so-called private enquiry agent. If you ask me, you and Abberline have done a disservice to the police by setting yourselves up the way you have, just because you had a bit of luck on some high-profile cases.' He sneered. 'The fact is, you never brought Jack to justice, did you. It was all hot air. You and Abberline were chancers, the pair of you.'

Daniel was used to attacks like this and they didn't bother him, but the jibe at his much-loved former boss stung him.

'Chief Inspector Abberline received eighty-four commendations and awards for his excellent work during his years on the force before he retired,' he growled. 'How many have you received?'

'You don't fool me, Wilson,' snapped Drabble. 'You call it private investigation, I call it taking money under false pretences. You're not wanted or needed here.'

'Sir William obviously disagrees with you, or he wouldn't have contacted me,' replied Daniel coolly, having regained his temper. 'But you may rest assured that anything that Miss Fenton and I discover, we will impart to you.'

Drabble's mouth dropped open in bewilderment. He looked from Daniel to Abigail, then back again.

'Her?' he burst out, stunned.

'Miss Fenton is not only the person who found the body, she

is also an expert on the ancient Egyptians and as such will be able to offer valuable insights into the reasons why the victim was here, and why he may have been killed.'

'I've told you, it was an accident!' raged Drabble. He pointed a stubby accusing finger at Daniel. 'You're just spinning this out to make more money!'

'On the contrary, I'm intending to get to the bottom of this, as a proper policeman – current or former – should.'

Drabble glared at him. He was obviously boiling with rage and doing his best to not let it spill out.

'A chancer and a woman!' he spat. 'Well, I'm warning you now. You interfere with this investigation and I'll have you both arrested!'

With that, the inspector turned on his heel and stomped up the stairs.

Abigail waited until he'd gone, then turned to Daniel, her face showing her bewilderment.

'Me?' she said.

'If you're agreeable to work with me,' said Daniel.

She smiled. 'It will upset Inspector Drabble?'

Daniel nodded. 'Most certainly.'

'Then count me firmly in.'