

Martyn Wyndham

The Secret of the Silver Car



Wyndham Martyn

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Martyn Wyndham The Secret of the Silver Car / Further Adventures of Anthony Trent, Master Criminal

Chapter One THE PUZZLING PASSENGER

"Stop him," the second officer yelled, "he's going to jump overboard!"

The man who dashed past him and through a group of passengers waving hands at friends on the deck below, was too quick for those who sought to stay him. He balanced himself for a moment on the rail and then jumped ten feet down to the pier.

The gangplanks had already been withdrawn and the great liner bound for New York was too mighty a piece of momentum to pause now. Furthermore her commander was going down the river on a favoring tide and nothing short of a signal from the port authorities would have made him put back for a passenger who had chosen such a singular moment for a leap into the dark.

An hour or so later in the smoking room the disappearance was discussed with fervor. A collar manufacturer of Troy, named Colliver, was holding his group for the reason he had been standing by the rail when the young man jumped and had even sought to restrain him.

"He was too quick for me," Colliver declared. "I surely thought he'd hurt himself jumping ten feet down."

"What did he do after he jumped?" a man demanded.

"Picked himself up and looked around as if he expected to see someone. The last I saw of him was going from group to group of people asking something I couldn't hear."

"Very mysterious," another passenger commented. "I don't believe he was crazy. I believe he jumped off just at the right moment – for him. I believe we shall find he took some loot with him. The purser is making an investigation now."

"I've got a theory," another smoker asserted. "I was just going to ask him for a light when he began that run down the deck to the rail and believe me he can sprint. Just as I was about to open my mouth I saw his face suddenly change. Evidently he had seen or heard something that frightened him."

"So he ran away from danger?" Colliver added. "That might be. I tell you on a big boat like this we are surrounded by crooks, male and female, and they look on us as their lawful prey. He might have been a gambler who spotted a victim he was afraid of."

"Or a murderer," a Harvard theologian replied nervously. "I never feel really safe on a great liner like this. We all have to take one another on trust. I have been introduced to you gentlemen as a professor of pastoral theology. I may be a professional murderer for all you know. Mr. Colliver here isn't known to me personally and he may be a really high class bank robber for all I can tell."

Mr. Colliver took the suggestion sourly.

"Everybody in Troy knows me," he replied with dignity.

"Exactly," the theologian answered. "But Troy is not on the ship's passenger lists to any such extent as to corroborate your statement. There may be Harvard men on board who know me by name but for all they know I may be made up to represent Professor Sedgely so as to gain your confidence and rob you."

"My collars encircle the necks of more men than those of any other maker," said Colliver quoting one of his advertisements. "My name is known everywhere. No man is perfectly dressed without my collars. I presented a swimming pool to Troy and there isn't a man or woman in the city but would resent any slur on me."

"My dear sir," said the professor smiling, "I am not attacking your good name or your city's fame. I am only saying that if you were crossing with the idea of making a killing at games of chance I should not benefit because you assumed the name of one who ornaments the cervical vertebræ of perfectly dressed men. I only meant that anything can take place on a ship such as this is and that this man who escaped tonight may have done so to avoid capture and possible imprisonment or even death."

"The purser had a wireless sent to the company's office and no doubt has a reply by this time," another passenger broke in.

"He is probably in prison now," Professor Sedgely remarked.

"You certainly have a cheerful mind," Colliver commented.

"I read for mental relaxation the lightest forms of fiction," the professor answered, "and I am prepared for anything. I maintain that every passenger on a fast ship like this is regarded as a possible victim by the cleverest criminals in existence. For myself I have nothing of value, being poorly paid, but our friend there who has so finely benefitted his home city wears a diamond pin of great value. Furthermore there is a sapphire set in platinum on his finger which might well tempt the professional robber."

"Say," said Colliver a little uneasily, "you're observant all right. Anything else you saw?"

"That you have a gold cigar case with initials in emeralds. I have," the professor said modestly, "trained my powers of observation. I do it to protect myself."

He rose from his chair and bowed a courteous goodnight to the immediate group and then went on deck.

"I don't trust that man," said the manufacturer. "I never trust any man on a ship who wears smoked glasses. He wanted to conceal his eyes. I'll bet he never saw Harvard except on a picture postal. Damn it!" Colliver cried peevishly, "Why can't a man wear a passable ring and stickpin without it attracting the attention of other people?"

The Harvard theologian had sown seeds of suspicion. Colliver, as amiable a manufacturer of collars as any in Troy, looked over at Myers Irving who ran an advertising agency in New York and suspected him of being a confidence man.

"It's a pretty good looking ring," Irving said heartily. He wished he had one like it. Now that he knew who Colliver was he thirsted after his account. His overtures were accepted with marked reserve and a gloom fell upon the party until the entrance of the genial purser.

"Who was the mysterious man?" Colliver asked.

"His name was Anthony Trent," said the purser.

A man in the uniform of a captain in the United States army who had been playing solitaire and had taken no part in this talk, looked up with such sudden interest at the name that the purser turned to him.

"Do you know Anthony Trent?" he demanded.

"Yes," said Captain Sutton, "I do."

"Can you think of any reason why he should jump ashore just as we were starting for the Hudson River?"

"He might have been saying goodbye to his best girl and taken no heed of the warning to go ashore."

"That won't do," the purser declared. "All his kit is in his stateroom and he had already seen his table steward and arranged about his seat. He went off on the impulse of the moment and I'd like to know what that impulse was."

"Has anyone missed anything?" Colliver asked.

"Don't know," the purser said. "Haven't heard of anything so far. I wirelessly the office and the pier superintendent and they have lost all trace of him. The last they heard of him was that he was seen offering a taxicab driver double fare to drive fast."

"He saw someone on the ship he was afraid of," Colliver said with the air of one called upon to solve a deep mystery.

The purser was determined not to let Captain Sutton get back to his solitaire.

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you more about your friend," he said smiling, "the whole thing is so unusual that the old man wants a thorough investigation. In confidence, is there anything fishy about this Anthony Trent?"

"In confidence, I may tell you," Captain Sutton answered, "but my confidence will be in the captain's cabin and not here."

"Do you think we'd say anything to anyone about it?" Colliver demanded. He feared he was to be robbed of interesting details.

"I'm a lawyer by profession," Captain Sutton returned, "and I know how people talk even when they mean to be silent. Anthony Trent is a friend of mine and I shall constitute myself his counsel. He served under me in the war, was recommended for a commission, and won the *Croix de Guerre*. He is an American with enough money to play golf and flyfish for trout all he wants to. He was in a hospital in the Isle of Wight for three months after being wounded and I had a letter from him saying he would come over on this ship. I came by Liverpool just because I wanted to see him; and when I didn't see him at dinner I thought he had changed his plans. I can give no reason why he should have left the boat in the manner he did but as a lawyer I can assure the company that it is his affair and not theirs."

The purser was skilled in the ways of human beings. He had not straightened out difficulties for his company on half a thousand trips across the Atlantic for nothing. He could see plainly enough that Captain Sutton knew something about Anthony Trent that he would not tell the captain or anyone else unless process of law compelled. There had been a quick look of fear on his face when he realized Trent was the man of whom the group about him had been speaking. Whether Captain Sutton knew the reason why his friend had leapt from the ship's rail was doubtful; but that the act had conjured up sudden fear gave the purser food for thought.

"The company certainly does not want to bring suit against a passenger who has paid for a high priced state room and a number of excellent meals and refuses to benefit by them. The old man was annoyed that everyone was talking about it at his table and he wasn't able to get off his little crop of chestnuts as usual. He'd appreciate it if you would tell him what you know about Mr. Trent."

"If I see him it will be as Mr. Trent's lawyer," Sutton retorted.

The purser looked at him keenly.

"So you admit," he said genially, "that this mysterious Anthony Trent needs a defender?"

"I admit nothing of the sort," Sutton replied quickly. But he felt he had not conducted the affair with his usual skill. "There's been a lot of hot air talked about crimes on board ship and I'm not going to have my friend's name linked with that sort of thing."

"Of course not," the purser agreed. "I can understand why you come to the rescue; still there is bound to be some misunderstanding about a man who leaves all his baggage behind and takes a desperate jump as he did."

"He saw someone on this ship he was afraid of," Colliver insisted. "It might have been you for all I know."

"What do you mean by that?" Sutton demanded and flushed dusky red.

Colliver was amazed at the sudden heat. The purser was more interested than ever. He would have been even more amazed if he had known that Captain Sutton honestly believed that it was because Anthony Trent had seen him face to face that he had escaped. The letter of which he had

spoken was non-existent. He had lied because of the man whom he had, for the first time, claimed as his friend.

Sutton had been the officer; Trent the enlisted man and the discipline of the service prevented a friendship that would have been possible in other days and, now war was finished, might again become practicable. The space of an hour was the time the officer had been with the man and yet he was determined to fight for his interests. And he suddenly realized that he had begun his fight by antagonizing a very shrewd purser.

"My dear sir," the purser said gently, "I am sure you are taking this too much to heart. Nobody is accusing your client of anything more serious than risking a broken leg which, after all, is more his affair than even his counsel's. Captain Kingscote will ask you a few questions which you must understand, as a lawyer, a ship's commander ought to ask. There is such a thing as a log and it has to be written correctly. Tomorrow morning perhaps? You will be offered an excellent cigar and a drink that you can't get in all the length and breadth of your native land."

"Any time at all," Sutton answered with an effort to be as genial as the purser. "I only resented the idle chatter that centred around a man who fought very gallantly."

"If you mean me by that reference," Colliver said angrily, "I'd like to say that I have as much right to talk as anyone on board."

"Certainly," said Myers Irving, "and I can't see why anyone wants to get excited about it. It was that professor who began it. Mr. Colliver what do you say to a little smile?"

Colliver looked at the card Irving handed to him. He did not like advertising men as a rule but he felt this debonair head of a big agency was an exception. He had come to the aid of big business.

"It must be the salt in the air," he confessed, "I don't mind if I do."

Left to himself Sutton closed his eyes and lived over again those moments in France when Anthony Trent had been brought before him as adjutant on extraordinary charges.

Once or twice he had seen Private Trent and had been vaguely reminded of a forgotten face. It was only when Anthony Trent had been recommended for promotion and had declined it that he remembered the name. Trent had been the Dartmouth football captain in that historic year when Harvard was humbled. Sutton, a graduate of ten years previously, had shouted himself hoarse at the great run by which Trent had passed the crimson score.

Private Trent had been chosen on very dangerous business and the adjutant had no chance to speak to him as he had determined to do. Anthony Trent was one of those who volunteered to clean up machine gun nests left behind to harass the advancing troops of the Allies. He had done so well that Captain Sutton was proud of him for the sake of the old college in Hanover.

He remembered the shock he had when Lieutenant Devlin, a former detective in New York and a man to whom he was not drawn, declared that this same Anthony Trent was the most famous criminal of the day, a master craftsman who had never been in police toils.

Sutton laughed at the very suggestion. It was absurd. Devlin's answer to this made the soldier-lawyer less confident. Devlin said that Dr. Trent had left his son but a few hundred dollars and a rambling mortgaged home among New Hampshire hills. Young Trent had come to New York and settled down to writing detective and criminal stories for the lesser magazines. Then, suddenly, an Australian relative had died and left him a fortune. This was a lie, Devlin declared. There was no such relation. It was done to explain his sudden giving up of writing and living in a far better style.

Trent owned, so the detective asserted, a beautiful camp on Kennebago Lake in Maine, two automobiles and sundry other aids to a comfortable existence which his writings would never have gained for him.

Still disbelieving, Captain Sutton was shown the dying depositions of an English soldier who had been butler to a New York millionaire whose house had been robbed. Austin, the butler, had seen Trent and assumed him to be a friend of his employer. He had recognized him when British

and American troops were brigaded side by side and had told only Devlin a detective who had worked on the case.

Evidence at last seemed conclusive. Devlin, dying in hospital wished for the downfall of a man who had beaten him in three big cases. The adjutant remembered well one case when the Dangerfield ruby worth almost two hundred thousand dollars was taken.

Private Trent seemed quite calm. He assured his officer that these charges were preposterous. "What else could they be?" he had asked.

"They might be the truth," Sutton had said gravely.

He remembered the visit to the hospital where Devlin lay dying but eager to sign the testimony he had woven about his enemy. The ending of the incident was very curious. It made him like Devlin after all. When Devlin knew his end was come and the last rites of his church had been administered he had given up his plans for revenge. He had looked into the fearless eyes of the master criminal and he had seen there an unconquerable spirit which he admired. And so, with his last effort he had torn up the written evidence and declared that Anthony Trent was not the man; that it was all a mistake.

Sutton remembered the relief with which he had put his hand on the shoulder of the younger man and that he had said, "Trent, you were in luck this time. Don't take a chance again."

After the signing of peace he had determined to look up the old athlete and see if he could not offer him such opportunities that he could go straight. Sutton was a man of immense wealth and had mining properties in South America which needed supervision.

And now to find that Trent was aboard the ship and at the last moment had risked a broken limb in order to escape. It was not likely that a man who feared detection so much dare rely on the generosity of a man who knew his secret. There were probably rewards for his capture which, in the aggregate, offered immense inducement to deliver Anthony Trent to justice. How was Trent to know that Sutton the adjutant was financially secure enough to make the sacrifice? Undoubtedly he had seen Sutton and made the desperate leap.

Sutton determined to safeguard his interests. The baggage for instance, that should not be searched. There might be in it evidence as damaging as that which the brothers of Joseph put into the younger's sack. It would be far better to see the captain and make a friend of him. Why had not Trent been a better reader of character and recognized that in Captain Sutton he had a friend?

Sutton did not know that long ago Trent had seen that in the rich lawyer there was one whom he need not fear. Few were more skilled than the master criminal in the reading of those signs by which men reveal for a second or so the depths of their natures.

Anthony Trent had not jumped from the rails of the big ship because he had seen Sutton. He had no idea his old adjutant was on board. He had not jumped ashore because of any person on the liner. He took his reckless leap because among those who waited on the pier he heard the voice of the one man he feared, the man he had been trying to find since that day in France when death seemed at last to have claimed him.

Chapter Two

THE MAN IN THE DARK

One day late in October when the Allies were moving with such speed against the enemy Private Trent had been struck with a piece of shrapnel. There was the recognized noise of the flying fragments and then a sudden flaming pain in his left arm followed by black unconsciousness.

He came back very slowly to the realization that he was not seriously hurt. His wounded arm was bandaged. He was still rather weak and lay back for some moments before opening his eyes. Then he opened them to meet only a wall of unrelieved night. "I'm blind!" he thought.

Groping about him he felt dank earth, the earth he had been accustomed to in the trenches, slimy, sweating clay. With his undamaged hand he felt the bandages that were about his head. There was no wound near his eyes; but that would not be necessary, for he had seen so many cases of blindness due to the bursting of high explosives. It might be temporary blindness or it might be permanent.

There was a great silence about him. Gone were the myriad sounds of war that had enveloped him before his injury. Perhaps he was deaf, too. "My God!" he groaned thinking of this new infliction and then grew a little less miserable when he recognized the sound of his own voice. Well, blindness was enough! Never again to see the green earth or the morning sun stealing down the lake where his home was. At a little past thirty to see only through the eyes of others. No more golf, no more hunting and fishing trips, and of course no more of those taut-nerved nights when he, a single human being, pitted his strength and intelligence against the forces of organized society – and won. There was small consolation in thinking that now, at all events, Anthony Trent, master criminal would not be caught. He would go down in police history as the most mysterious of those criminals who have set the detectives by the heels.

A little later he told himself he would rather be caught, sentenced to a term of life imprisonment if only he might see a tiny ribbon of blue sky from his cell window, than condemned to this eternal blackness.

Then the miracle happened. A few yards from him came a scratching sound and then a sudden flame. And in that moment he could see the profile of a man bending over a cigarette. He was not blind!

"Who are you?" Anthony Trent cried not yet able to comprehend this lifting of what he felt was a sentence imposed. "Where am I?"

The man who answered spoke with one of those cultivated English voices which Trent had once believed to be the mark of decadence or effeminacy, a belief the bloody fields of France had swept from him.

"Well," said the man slowly, "I really don't see that it matters much now to anyone what my name may be."

"The only thing that matters to me," Trent cried with almost hysterical fervor, "is that I'm not blind as I thought I was."

The answer of the unknown man was singular; but Trent, who was not far from hysteria on account of bodily pain and the mental anguish through which he had been, did not take note of it.

"I don't think that matters much either," the voice of the man in the dark commented.

"Then where are we?" Trent demanded.

"There again I can't help you much," the unknown answered. "This *was* a common or garden dug-out."

"*Was*," Trent repeated, "What is it now?"

"A tomb," the stranger told him puffing at his cigarette. "I found you bleeding to death and I bandaged your arm. I was knocked out myself and your men and mine had gone on and there was never a Red Cross man or anyone else in sight so I carried you into this dug-out. All of a sudden some damned H. E. blocked up the opening. When the dust settled I explored with my few matches. Our tomb is sealed up – absolutely. I've often heard of it happening before. It looks as if a house had been lifted up and planted right on this dug-out."

"So that's why you said it didn't matter much if I could see or not?"

"Does it?" the man asked shortly.

"Have you another match?" Trent asked presently. "I'd like to explore."

"No good," the other retorted. "I've been all round the damned place and there isn't a chance, except that the thing may collapse and bury us."

"Then we are to starve to death without an effort?"

"We shall asphyxiate, we shan't starve. Don't you notice how heavy the air is? Presently we shall get drowsy. Already I feel light headed and inclined to talk."

"Then talk," Trent said, "Anything is better than sitting here and waiting. The air is heavy; I notice it now. I suppose I'm going to be delirious. Talk, damn you, talk. Why not tell me your name? What difference can it make to you now? Are you afraid? Have you done things you're ashamed of? Why let that worry you since it only proves you're human."

"I'm not ashamed of what I've done," the other drawled, "it's my family which persists in saying I've disgraced it."

Anthony Trent was in a strange mood. Ordinarily secretive to a degree and fearful always of dropping a hint that might draw suspicion to his ways of life, he found himself laughing in a good humored way that this English soldier should imagine he must conceal his name for fear of disgrace. Why the man was a child, a pigmy compared with Anthony Trent. He had perhaps disobeyed an autocrat father or possibly married a chorus girl instead of a blue blooded maiden.

"You've probably done nothing," said Trent. "It may be you were expelled from school or university and that makes you think you are a desperate character."

There was silence for a moment or so.

"As it happens," the unknown said, "I was expelled from Harrow and kicked out of Trinity but it isn't for that. I'm known in the army as Private William Smith of the 78th Battalion, City of London Regiment."

"I thought you were an officer," Trent said. Private Smith had the kind of voice which Trent associated with the aristocracy.

"I'm just a plain private like you," Smith said, "although the lowly rank is mine for probably far different reasons."

"I'm not so sure of that," Trent said, a trifle nettled. "I could have had a commission if I wanted it."

"I did have one," Smith returned, "but I didn't mean what I said offensively. I meant only that I dare not accept a commission."

Anthony Trent waited a moment before he answered.

"I'm not so sure of that," he said again.

The reasons for which Trent declined his commission and thereby endured certain hardships not unconnected with sleeping quarters and noisy companionship were entirely to his credit. Always with the fear of exposure before his eyes he did not want to place odium on the status of the American officer as he would have done had screaming headlines in the papers spoken of the capture by police authorities of Lieutenant Anthony Trent the cleverest of modern crooks. But he could not bring himself to speak of this even in his present unusual mood.

"It doesn't matter now very much," Smith said laughing a little, "we shall both be called missing and the prison camps will be searched for us. In the end my family may revere my memory and yours call you its chief glory."

"I haven't a family," Trent said. "I used to be sorry for it. I'm glad now." He stopped suddenly. "Do you know," he said later, "you were laughing just now. You're either crazy or else you must have your nerve with you still."

"I may be crazy," returned Private Smith, "but I usually make my living by having my nerve with me as you call it. It has been my downfall. If I had been a good, moral child, amenable to discipline I might have commanded a regiment instead of being a 'tommy' and I might be repenting now. By the way you don't seem as depressed as one might expect. Why?"

"After a year of this war one doesn't easily lose the habit of laughing at death."

"I've had four years of it," Smith said. "I was a ranker when it broke out and saw the whole show from August 1914. On the whole what is coming will be a rest. I don't know how they manage these things in your country but in England when a man has been, well call it unwise, there is always a chance of feeling a heavy hand on one's shoulder and hearing a voice saying in one's ear, 'I arrest you in the King's name!' Very dramatic and impressive and all that sort of thing, but wearing on the nerves – very." Private Smith laughed gently, "I'm afraid you are dying in rather bad company."

"We have something in common perhaps," Trent said. He grinned to himself in the covering blackness as he said it. "Tell me, did you ever hear of Anthony Trent?"

"Never," Private Smith returned quickly. "Sorry! I suppose I ought to know all about him. What has he done?"

"He wrote stories of super-crookdom for one thing."

"That explains it," Smith asserted, "You see those stories rather bore me. I read them when I was young and innocent but now I know how extremely fictional they are; written for the greater part, I'm informed, by blameless women in boarding houses. I like reading the real thing."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Reports of actual crimes as set forth in the newspapers. Cross-examinations of witnesses and all that, summing up of the judges and coroners' inquests. Was this Trent person really good?"

"You shall judge," said the American. "He wrote of crimes and criminals from what such actual practitioners had told him. He was for a time a police reporter on a big New York paper and had to hang around Mulberry Street. After that he tried the magazines but as editors are so remote as a rule from actual knowledge of the world's play and work, he didn't make much money at it. Finally his pet editor – a man with some human attributes – said in effect, 'I can't raise your rates; the publisher won't stand for it. If I paid decent prices he couldn't buy champagne and entertain his favorites.' This was in the era before prohibition. The human editor went on giving advice and wound up by saying, 'Why don't you do what your super-crook character does and relieve the dishonest rich of their stolen bonds? Conway Parker gets away with it, why shouldn't you?'"

"Of course he was rotting?" Private Smith asked.

"Yes," the American said, "He didn't really mean it but the thought germs fell into the right sort of broth. Anthony Trent wasn't naturally a crook but he hated having to live in a cheap boarding house and eat badly cooked meals and play on a hard-mouthed, hired, upright piano. Some ancestor had dowered him with a love of beautiful things, rugs, pictures, pottery, bronzes, music and a rather secluded life. Also he had dreams about being a great composer. He was a queer mixture. On the whole rather unbalanced I suppose. His father died and left him almost nothing. All he could do was newspaper work at first."

"You mean he actually followed the editor's advice?"

"Yes. He had certain natural gifts to aid him. He was a first rate mimic. It's a sort of gift I suppose. He had gone in for amateur theatricals at his college and done rather well. He pulled off his first job successfully but the butler saw him and did not forget. That was the trouble the butler

remembered. It wasn't a big affair. It didn't make any such stir as for example as when he took the Mount Aubyn Ruby."

"I read of that," Smith returned eagerly. "He knocked out a millionaire surrounded with detectives and got away in an airplane."

"He got away but not in an airplane," replied Anthony Trent. "On the whole the unknown aviator was rather useful to him but was absolutely blameless. Then there was the case of the Apthorpe emerald. Did you hear of that?"

"Haven't I told you," Smith returned impatiently, "that I read all about things of that sort? How could I have missed that even though I was in the trenches when it happened. It was the delight of my hospital life to read about it in Reynolds Journal. It was said a woman murdered old Apthorpe for it."

"She did," Trent admitted, "and she took the emerald but Anthony Trent got it from her and fooled them all. His last big job before the United States got into the war was getting the blue-white diamond that was known as the Nizam's Diamond."

"A hundred carat stone," Smith said reverently. "By Jove, what a master! As I never heard of him of course he was never caught. They are all caught in the end, though. His day will come."

For a moment the thought that Anthony Trent's life was coming to an end before many hours had passed took the narrator from his mood of triumph into a state of depression. To have to give up everything and die in the darkness. Exit Anthony Trent for all time! And as he thought of his enemies the police toiling for the rich rewards that they would never get for apprehending him his black mood passed and Smith heard him chuckle.

"They all get caught in the end," Smith repeated, "the best of them. The doctrine of averages is against them. Your Anthony Trent is one lone man fighting against so many. He may have the luck with him so far but there's only one end to it. They got Captain Despard and he was a top-hole marauder. They got our estimable Charles Peace and they electrocuted Regan in your own country only last month and he was clever, God knows. I think I'd back your Trent man against any single opponent, but the odds are too great. The pack will pull him down and break him up some day."

Again Private Smith of the City of London regiment heard the man he had rescued from danger to present him with death, laugh a curious triumphant laugh. He had seen so much of war's terror that he supposed the man was going mad. It would perhaps be a more merciful end.

"No," said the American. "Anthony Trent will never be discovered. He will be the one great criminal who will escape to the confusion of the detectives of New York and London. *I am Anthony Trent.*"

Chapter Three

THE BEGINNING OF THE SEARCH

"You?" cried Private Smith. "Ye Gods! And I haven't even a match left so I can see you before we go. I die in better company than I know." Trent could hear that he raised himself slowly and painfully to his feet. Then he heard the soldier's heels click smartly together. "Ave Cæsar – " he began. But the immortal speech of those gladiators being about to die was not finished.

There broke on Trent's astonished gaze a flash of sunlight that made him blink painfully. And the terrifying noise of high explosive hurt his ears and that swift dreadful sucking of the air that followed such explosions was about him again in its intensity. He had been dug out of his tomb for what?

The doctors thought him a very bad case. Of course he was delirious. He stuck to a ridiculous story that he was imprisoned in a tomb with one William Smith, a private in the 78th Battalion of the City of London Regiment and that H. E. had mysteriously disinterred him. H. E. did perform marvels that were seemingly against known natural laws but Private Trent was obviously suffering from shell shock.

When he was better and had been removed to a hospital far from the area of fighting he still kept to his story. One of the doctors who liked him explained that the delusion must be banished. He spoke very convincingly. He explained by latest methods that the unreal becomes real unless the patient gets a grip on himself. He said that Trent was likely to go through life trying to find a non-existent friend and ruining his prospects in the doing of it. "I'll admit," he said at the end of his harangue, "that you choose your friend's name well."

"Why do you say that?" Trent asked.

"Because the muster roll of the 78th shows no fewer than twenty-seven William Smiths and they're all of 'em dead. That battalion got into the thick of every scrap that started."

Trent said no more but made investigations on his own behalf. Unfortunately there was none to help him. The ambulance that picked him up was shelled and he had been taken from its bloody interior the only living soul of the crew and passengers. None lived who could tell him what became of his companion, the man to whom he had revealed his identity, the man who possessed his secret to the full.

When he was discharged from the service and was convalescing in Bournemouth he satisfied himself that the unknown Smith had died. Again luck was with Anthony Trent. The one man – with the exception of Sutton whose lips he was sure were sealed – who could make a clear hundred thousand dollars reward for his capture was removed from the chance of doing it even as the knowledge was offered him. The words that he would have spoken, "Hail Cæsar, I, being about to die, salute thee!" had come true in that blinding flash that had brought Anthony Trent back to the world.

But even with this last narrow escape to sober him Trent was not certain whether the old excitement would call and send him out to pit himself against society. He had no grievance against wealthy men as such. What he had wanted of theirs he had taken. He was now well enough off to indulge in the life, as a writer, he had wanted. He had taken his part in the great war as a patriot should and was returning to his native land decorated by two governments. Again and again as he sat at the balcony of his room at the Royal Bath Hotel and looked over the bay to the cliffs of Swanage he asked himself this question – was he through with the old life or not? He could not answer. But he noticed that when he boarded the giant Cunarder he looked about him with the old keenness, the professional scrutiny, the eagerness of other days.

He tipped the head steward heavily and then consulted the passenger list and elected to sit next to a Mrs. Colliver wife of a Troy millionaire. She was a dull lady and one who lived to eat, but he had heard her boasting to a friend on the boat train that her husband had purchased a diamond tiara in Bond Street which would eclipse anything Troy had to offer. Mrs. Colliver dreaded to think of the duty that would have to be paid especially as during the war less collars were used than in normal times.

It was with a feeling of content that Anthony Trent paced the deck as the liner began her voyage home. Two years was a long time to be away and he felt that a long lazy month in his Maine camp would be the nearest thing to the perfect state that he could dream of when he heard, distinctly, without a chance of being mistaken, the voice of Private William Smith shouting a goodbye from the pier.

Trent had a curiously sensitive ear. He had never, for example, failed to recognize a voice even distorted over telephone wires. William Smith had one of those distinctive voices of the same timbre and inflection of those of his caste but with a certain quality, that Trent could not now stop to analyze, which stamped it as different.

All Trent's old caution returned to him. It was possible that the man whom he had supposed dead had come to see the Cunarder off without knowing Anthony Trent was aboard. But the passenger lists could be inspected and even now the law might have been set in motion that would take him handcuffed from the vessel at quarantine to be locked up in a prison. He was worth a hundred thousand dollars to any informant and he could not doubt that the so-called Smith had gone wrong because of the lust for money to pay his extravagances. It was inevitably the reason in men of the class of Smith and Despard.

He was obsessed with the determination to find out. He would track the man he had known as Smith and find out without letting him be any the wiser. A hundred ideas of disguise flashed across the quick-working brain. He tried to tell himself that it was likely that the voice might have proceeded from an utter stranger. But this was false comfort he knew. It was Smith of the 78th City of London regiment who was on the pier already growing inch by inch farther away.

The second officer tried to stop him and a passenger grasped him by the arm as he climbed the rails but they tried vainly. He dropped as lightly as he could and picked himself up a little dazed and looked around. He could see a hundred faces peering down at him from the moving decks overhead. He could see a crowd of people streaming down the pier to the city. And among them was the man he sought.

"One moment, sir," said a policeman restraining him, "what's the meaning of this?"

"Just come ashore," Trent smiled. The policeman loomed over him huge, stolid, ominous. The man looked from Trent in evening dress and without hat or overcoat, to the shadowy ship now on her thousand league voyage and he shook his head. It was an irregular procedure, he told himself and as such open to grave suspicion. But he was courteous. Trent was a gentleman and no look of fear came to his face when the officer spoke. The man remained close to Trent when he approached the few groups of people still on the pier. To every man in the groups the stranger contrived to ask a question. Of one he asked the time, of another the best hotel in Liverpool.

"It may seem very strange," said Trent pleasantly to the perplexed policeman, "but I did an unaccountable thing. I thought I saw a man who was in the trenches with me in France during the war and saved my life and I sprang over the side to find him and now he's gone."

The policeman waved a white gloved hand to the people who had already left the landing stage.

"Your friend may be there, sir," he said.

"You don't want to detain me, then?" Trent cried.

"It's dark, sir," said the policeman, "and I could hardly be expected to remember which way you went."

At the end of the short pier was a taxicab stand and a space where private machines might park. Anthony Trent arrived in time to see a huge limousine driven by a liveried chauffeur with a footman by his side begin to climb the step grade to the street. As it passed him he could swear he heard Smith's voice from within, saying, "It's the most rotten luck that I should be a younger son and not get the chances Geoffrey does."

Trent could not see the number plate of the big machine. He could note only a coat of arms on the door surmounted by a coronet. He had no time to ask if any of the dock laborers knew the occupants. He sprang into the sole taxi that occupied the stand and commanded the driver to overtake the larger car. So eager was the man to earn the double fare that he was halted by a policeman outside the Atlantic Riverside Station. The time taken up by explanations permitted the coronetted limousine to escape.

In so big a city as Liverpool a car could be lost easily but the sanguine taxi driver, certain at least of getting his fare, persisted in driving all over the city and its suburbs until he landed his passenger tired and disappointed at the Midland Hotel.

On the whole Anthony Trent had rarely spent such unprofitable hours. He had paid a premium for his state room on a fast boat and was now stranded in a strange city without baggage. And of course he was worried. He had believed himself alone to have been rescued when the high explosive had taken the roof from his tomb. Now it seemed probable that the British soldier, Smith, had also made his escape.

Although it was quite possible Trent was following a stranger whose voice was like that of Private Smith, he had yet to find that stranger and make sure of it. Trent was not one to run away from danger.

As he sat in the easy chair before the window he told himself again and again that it was probable the voice he identified with the unknown Smith was like that of a thousand other men of his class. He had acted stupidly in jumping from a ship's rails and risking his limbs. And how much more unwisely had he acted in that black silence when he was led to cast aside his habitual silence and talk freely to a stranger. In effect he had put himself in the keeping of another man without receiving any confidence in return. He blamed the wound, the shock and a thousand physical causes for it but the fact was not to be banished by that. Smith knew Anthony Trent as a master criminal while Anthony Trent only knew that Smith has enlisted under another name because he had disgraced his own. It might easily be that this unknown Smith was like a hundred other "gentlemen rankers" who could only be accused of idleness and instability. But Anthony Trent stirred uneasily when he recalled the eagerness with which Smith spoke of some of those crimes Anthony Trent had committed. Smith knew about them, admired the man who planned them. Trent on thinking it over for the hundredth time believed Smith was indeed a crook and as such dangerous to him.

Few men believe in intuition, guess work or "hunches" as do those who work outside the law. Again and again Anthony Trent had found his "hunches" were correct. Once or twice he had saved himself by implicitly acting on them in apparent defiance of reason. At the end of many hours during which he tried to tell himself he was mistaken and this voice owned by someone else, he gave it up. He knew it was Smith.

To find out by what name the Smith of the dug-out went by in his own country must be the first step. The second would be to shadow him, observe his way of life and go through his papers. So far all he had to go upon was a quick glance at an automobile of unknown make upon whose panels a coat of arms was emblazoned surmounted by a crown. Had he possessed a knowledge of heraldry he could have told at a glance whether the coronet was that of a baron, viscount, earl, marquis or duke and so narrowed down the search. And had he observed the coat of arms and motto he could have made certain, for all armorial bearings are taxable and registered.

To try to comb the counties of Lancashire and Cheshire for the occupants of an unknown car would take time and might lead to police interest in his activities.

Before he retired to his bed a courteous agent of the Cunard Company had called upon him to inquire at what he was dissatisfied that he left the ship so suddenly. To this agent he told the same story – the true one – that he had told the policeman.

The purser was able to inform the group in the smoking room ere it retired.

"I don't believe that for a moment," Colliver declared.

"Why not?" asked the Harvard professor, "don't you know that truth in the mouth of an habitual liar is often a potent and confounding weapon?"

"Maybe," Colliver said dryly, "but I'm an honest man and I'd like to know why you think that man Trent was an habitual liar."

"I don't know," the professor answered amiably. "I always think in terms of crime on board ship."

"There's no need to on this ship," the purser said testily.

"I hope not," said the professor, "but coming back from the far East last year on another line I made friends with a man much of the build of Mr. Colliver here. I did not like him very much. He had only prejudices and no opinions. A typical successful man of business I presume."

"Thank you," said Mr. Colliver finding one of his own neck adornments growing tight.

"He was murdered," the theologian went on, "because he carried some diamonds for his wife in a pocket. Some thieves found it out."

"What thieves?" Colliver demanded.

"It is one of the undiscovered murders on the high seas," the professor said placidly.

"Mighty awkward for you," Colliver said, still angry.

"Fortunately I had an alibi," said the other, "I was violently ill of *mal de mer*."

"Mighty convenient," Colliver commented.

Later he asked the purser's private opinion of the professor. Myers Irving joined with Colliver in resenting the professor's attack on business men.

"Ordinarily," Colliver said, "I don't like advertising men, but you're different. They're like vultures after my account as a rule."

"You'd have to force your account on me," said Myers Irving seriously. "I'm not an ordinary business or advertising man. Primarily I'm a business builder. I leave nothing to underlings. I direct everything personally. I take few accounts. If my clients don't make good on their end of it I give them up. I make money for my clients. I have no other ambition. I believe in advertising. It might be that fellow Trent jumped ashore for some publicity stunt. Supposing he said he did it because he forgot to order some special dish at the Adelphi or Midland? Such a dish would get more publicity than you could shake a stick at. But I'm not here to talk shop."

Colliver watched the trim advertising man saunter off.

"A bright boy," commented the Troy magnate, "maybe he'll be surprised before this trip is over. Maybe he'll have to talk shop."

Captain Sutton listened to the purser's explanation as though they were entirely reasonable. But all the time he said to himself, "why need he have been afraid of me?"

Anthony Trent bought himself a suit of clothes in the city and set out for London on the ten o'clock train. An Army List showed him the names of the officers of the City of London Regiment. He decided to call upon the adjutant, a Captain Edgell. It took him little time to find out that Edgell had resumed his former occupation of stock broker and was living with his family at Banstead in Surrey.

Edgell was a golfer of distinction and before the war had been a scratch man at the club on the Downs. Five years absence had sent his handicap up a bit but he was engaged in pulling it down when a golfing stranger from the United States giving the name of Trent who had the club's privileges for the day asked him if he could introduce him to a member for a round of golf. It so

happened that most of the men waiting to play were ruddy faced gentlemen with handicaps of from twelve up to twenty-four. They did not excite Edgell.

"Glad to," he said heartily. He had been brigaded with Americans and liked them. "Do you play a strong game?"

"I have a two handicap at Wykasol," Trent said.

"Good business," cried Edgell, "we'll play together."

They played. They became intimate during the game and Edgell learned with regret that Trent was not one of the many American business men engaged in their work in London. Trent beat the stockbroker on the twenty-third hole.

"If I could only putt like that," said Edgell, "I'd have a chance for the open championship."

"I wish I could drive a ball the length you do," Trent said not to be outdone.

"Of course you'll have dinner with us," the stockbroker said. "We don't dress for it any more since the war so you've no excuse. I learned to make cocktails from some of your fellows in France so you ought to feel at home."

"As home used to be," Trent corrected. "I'd love to come if I'm not putting you out."

Edgell's home was a half-timbered house standing in an acre of lawn and flower garden. It was thoroughly comfortable. There seemed to be a number of children but they did not obtrude. Trent could see them playing in different parts of the garden, the little ones with their nurse and the elder playing clock golf on a perfect green in front of the house. Always the quiet secure atmosphere of a home such as this brought to Anthony Trent a vision of what he had lost or rather of what he could never obtain.

Little six-year old Marjorie Edgell liked Trent on sight and liking him announced it openly. She told him what a great man her father was and how he had medals and things. Finally she asked the visitor whether he would not like to have medals. It was the opportunity for which Trent had been looking. Ordinarily averse to talking of himself, he wanted to get on to the subject of the war with the late adjutant of the seventy-eighth.

"I have," he told little Marjorie.

"Daddy," she shrieked in excitement, "Mr. Trent has medals too."

"So you were in the big thing?" Edgell asked. "Honestly wouldn't you rather play golf? I can get all the excitement I want on the Stock Exchange to last me the rest of my life. I enlisted in a city regiment as a private and I left it as adjutant after four years and I'm all for the piping ways of peace. My battalion was the 78th and we always had the luck with us. Whenever we got anywhere something started."

"The seventy-eighth battalion," Trent commented, "I had a pal in your battalion, a pal who saved my life. I'm going to look him up next week. Curious that I should be talking to his adjutant. William Smith was his name. I wonder if you knew him?"

"I wonder if you know how many William Smiths and John Smiths are lying in France and Flanders with little wooden crosses over them?"

"This one came through all right," Trent said.

"At least ten William Smiths came through," Edgell asserted. "I think I remember them all. Which was your man? Describe him."

Trent lighted his cigarette very deliberately. To be asked to describe a man he had claimed as a pal and yet had never seen face to face was not easy.

"I think you would recognize my William Smith," Trent answered, "if I told you he was not really William Smith at all but a man who had assumed that name as a disguise."

"I understand," Edgell exclaimed, "a slight blond man very erect and rather supercilious with what the other men called a lah-de-dah voice. I remember him well. I had him up before me for punishment many times. Little infractions of discipline which he constantly committed. Used to

rile me by his superior airs. Quite a mysterious person. Saved your life did he? Well, he had all the pluck a man need have."

"I want to thank him for it," Trent said, "but I've only known him as William Smith. The War Office people tell me he was demobilized three months back and they have no address. If you'll tell me, in confidence, his real name I can find him out."

"But my dear chap," said Captain Edgell, "I don't know it. None of us knew it. My sergeant-major swore he'd been a regular and an officer but that's mere conjecture. He *was* a regular now I come to think of it and sent to us when his own regiment was wiped out in the Autumn of 1914."

"Who would be able to tell me?" Trent asked eagerly.

"The colonel knew," Edgell declared, "I sent him up to the old man for punishment once. The colonel looked at him as if he could not believe his eyes. 'You are down here as William Smith,' he said."

"That is my name, sir," said Smith."

"Then the colonel knew him?" Trent asked.

"Undoubtedly. I was told to leave them alone. I should like to have asked Colonel Langley but he is one of those men it's hard to approach. Doesn't mean to be standoffish but gives that impression. One of those very tall men who seem to be looking through you and taking no interest whatsoever in the proceeding."

"I want to find out," Trent said, "could you give me a letter of introduction?"

"Glad to," Edgell replied, "but he's like that native song bird of yours, the clam. He is a silent fighter. The men respected him and went to their deaths for him but they would have felt it disrespectful to love him. He lives at a place called Dereham Old Hall in Norfolk. A great county swell with magnificent shooting. One of those places royalty stays every year for a week at the partridges. Always thought it a funny thing he was given the command of a lot of cockneys considering he was Sandhurst and Tenth Hussars till he married and chucked the service, but he made good as you fellows say."

While Captain Edgell was writing the letter Trent had leisure to reflect that the identity of Private William Smith might remain permanently veiled in obscurity if Colonel Langley refused to talk. If the colonel was not to be lured to disclose what Trent needed to know, the American would be left in a very unpleasant position. Until he knew whether his "hunch" was right or wrong he could never again sleep in peace with the name Anthony Trent as his own. He was in danger every minute. Smith might have tracked him to the liner to have him arrested in America. That he had left the boat might easily be known. Therefore in order to win twenty thousand sovereigns English money, or a half million francs in the coinage of the country where the two had spent weary months, Smith had only to start the hue and cry in England. The ports would be watched. In the end they would get him.

There was no escape over the borders to Mexico or dash to safety over the Canadian frontier as he had planned to do under similar conditions of peril in his own country. Here on an island they had got him. He was weaving evidence that could be used against him by making this display of interest in Private Smith. Captain Edgell could give testimony that would not help his case.

"Here you are," said Edgell genially, "I've taken the liberty of calling you an old golfing pal. I've done all I could but Colonel Langley is not easy of approach. I'm not at all hopeful."

"It isn't really serious," Trent explained after thanking him, "but I'd like to see him again. He did undoubtedly save my life and carried me into safety. Quite a physical feat for one of his weight. What do you suppose he weighs?"

"About ten stone seven," the other answered.

That was one hundred and forty-seven pounds. Trent was gradually building up a portrait of the man he feared.

"And about five feet seven in height?" he hinted.

"That's the man," Edgell asserted. "Quite a good looking chap, too, if you care for the type. Rather too effeminate for me although, God knows, he is a man."

It was not easy to see Colonel Langley, D.S.O. Trent knew that county magnates such as he was did not see everyone who desired an interview. He stayed at a good hotel in Norwich and enclosed Captain Edgell's letter in one of his own.

The answer came back in the third person. It was favorable and punctiliously polite. Colonel Langley would be happy to see Mr. Anthony Trent at eleven o'clock on a certain morning. Dereham Old Hall was a dozen miles from Norwich, city of gardens, city of Norman cathedrals and many quaintly named parish churches. Trent hired a motor car and drove through the leafy Norfolk lanes.

Colonel Langley's residence was the work of Inigo Jones and a perfect example of the Renaissance style. It stood at least a mile from the high road. The lodge keeper telephoned to the house and Trent's driver was permitted to drive through the deer park and pull up before the great front doors.

The room in which Anthony Trent waited for the colonel was evidently a sort of smoking room. Trophies of the chase adorned the walls. It was evident Langley was a hunter of great game and had shot in all parts of the globe from Alaska to Africa.

He was a man of six feet four in height, grizzled and wore a small clipped military moustache. It was not a hard face, Trent noted, but that of a man who had always been removed from pursuits or people who wearied him. There was a sense of power in the face and that inevitable keenness of eye which a man who commanded a regiment could not fail to have acquired.

He bowed his visitor to a seat. He did not offer to shake hands.

"You have come," he said politely, "from my former adjutant to ask a question concerning the regiment which he writes he could not tell you. I can think of nothing to which this would apply. He had every thread of the business in his hands."

"Captain Edgell could not tell me the real name of one of his men who enlisted under the name of William Smith."

There was no change of expression on the rather cold face of the lord of broad acres.

"And what made Captain Edgell assume I could help you, sir?"

"I don't know all the particulars but he was certain you knew his real identity."

"If I do," Colonel Langley returned, "I shall keep that knowledge to myself. I regret that you have had this trouble for nothing."

"William Smith," Trent told the other, "saved my life. I want to thank him for it. Is there anything odd in that? You alone can help me so I come to you. I want to help William Smith. I have money which I should not have been able to enjoy but for him."

"You imagine, then, that William Smith is penniless, is that it?"

"He told me he was," Trent answered promptly. "I can offer him an opportunity to make good money in New York."

He looked at Colonel Langley as he said it. If Smith was indeed of a great family the idea of being offered money and a job must amuse the one who knew his real name and estate. Sure enough a flicker of a smile passed over the landowner's face.

"I am happy to inform you," he said, "that Mr. Smith is living at home with his family financially secure enough not to need your aid."

"That," said Trent deliberately, "is more than you can say."

"I am not in the habit of hearing my word doubted," the older man said acidly.

"I am not doubting it," Trent said suavely, "I mean merely to remind you that he may need my aid although it may not be monetary aid. You will remember that there have been passages in Mr. Smith's life which have not been entirely creditable."

"Are you claiming to be friend or accomplice?" Langley snapped.

"Let us say friend and confidant," Trent smiled. "Perhaps he made certain confessions to me _ "

"To you also?" Langley cried.

In that moment he had said too much. During that hour when Edgell left the private alone with his commanding officer the officer had obtained his confidence and very likely a confession. He saw the soldier throw a quick glance at one of those old safes which disguised themselves as necessary articles of furniture. Trent's eyes dwelt on it no longer than the owner's did, but he saw enough. Colonel Langley had told him plainly that the confession was locked in the safe which looked like a black oak sideboard on which decanters and a humidior were arranged.

"To me also," Trent repeated, "and it is because of it that I knew he did what he did for the reason he needed more money than a younger son could expect. Colonel Langley, I only want his real name. I want to help him. That's why I spoke of offering him money."

"You will be glad to know," the colonel answered, "that Mr. Smith is at present in no need of money."

"You mean," Trent said sharply, "that you will not give me his real name and address?"

"I cannot tell you," Colonel Langley answered. "If you like I will write and say you have called and give him the opportunity to do as he pleases."

Trent reflected for a moment. If Smith were not already aware of his presence in England it would be very unwise to advertise it. He was beginning to see he had been less than cautious in calling upon Edgell and Colonel Langley under his own name.

"I need not trouble you to do that," he said, "if you wish to conceal his name it is no doubt your privilege and he will do well enough without my thanks."

He made his chauffeur drive home at a temperate speed. The man knew all about the Langleys and was glad to tell the affable stranger. As they passed through the gates several carriages laden with men and some station carts filled with baggage passed into the gravelled drive.

"Gentlemen come for the shooting," the chauffeur volunteered. "Tomorrow is September the first when partridge shooting commences. The colonel is a great shot and the King comes here often and the German Emperor has shot over those turnips in the old days. This is supposed to be the best partridge shoot in the kingdom and the birds are fine and strong this year – not too much rain in the Spring."

"I suppose there'll be a regular banquet tonight," said Trent.

"Tomorrow night's the night," said the chauffeur grinning, "tonight they all go to bed early so as to be up to an early breakfast and have their shooting eyes. The colonel's terrible man if any of the guns only wound their birds. They've got to shoot well tomorrow if they want to come here again. I know because my uncle is one of the keepers."

The man was surprised at the tip his American passenger handed him when they reached the Maids' Head Hotel, and charmed with his affability. He told his fellows that Trent was a real gentleman. He did not know that his unsolicited confidence had given the American a hint upon which he would be quick to act.

As Trent had been driven along the Dereham Road approach to Norwich he had seen a little cycle shop where gasoline was sold and repairs made. The war had sent English people of moderate circumstances back to the bicycle again and only the wealthy could keep cars or buy petrol at seventy-five cents a gallon. In his drive he had seen several people of seemingly good position pedalling cheerfully through the lanes. The chauffeur had touched his hat to one and spoken of him as rector of a nearby parish. Cycles were to be hired everywhere and the prevailing rate seemed to be sixpence an hour or three and six for the day.

After dinner Anthony Trent found his way back to the little shop in the Dereham Road. "The Wensum Garage" it proudly called itself. Here he said he wished to hire a bicycle for a day. As dusk fell he was pedalling along to Dereham Old Hall. Few people were about and those he passed

evinced no curiosity. Avoiding the main road which passed in front of the lodge and gates by which he had entered, he hid his wheel between two hay stacks which almost touched. Then he made his way through the kitchen gardens to the rear of the house. It was now ten o'clock and the servants' part of the big house seemed deserted. Already the lights in the upper stories were evidence that some guests were retiring to rest well before the "glorious first."

From the shelter of the rose garden he could see a half score of men and women on the great terrace in front of the splendid house. He could see that they were all in evening dress. In a mosquitoless country this habit of walking up and down the long stone terraces was a common practice after dinner. Trent came so near to the guests that he could hear them talking. The conversation was mainly about to-morrow's prospects. He learned there was little disease among the birds, that they were phenomenally strong on the wing and hadn't been shot over to any extent since 1914. Some guests deplored the fact that dancing was taboo on this night of nights but it was the Langley tradition and they must bend to it.

"Think of it," he heard a woman say, laughing, "lights out at twelve! How primitive and delightful." She yawned a little. "I'm looking forward to it; we all stay up too late."

"Good night, Duchess," he heard the man say. "Sleep well and pray I may be in form."

"Duchess!" In the old days Anthony Trent would have thrilled at the title for it meant invariably jewels of price and the gathering of the very rich. But he was waiting outside the masterpiece of Inigo Jones not for any of those precious glittering stones for which he had sacrificed all his prospects of fame and honor but for the documents which he believed were hidden in the iron box, that ridiculous "pete" covered with black English oak. It was another of the "hunches" which had come to him. He had never been more excited about any of the many jobs he had undertaken.

As he sat among the roses waiting for time to pass he reflected that the few failures that had been his had not been attended by any danger. He had lost the pearls that were wont to encircle the throat of a great opera singer because her maid had chosen an awkward hour to prosecute her amour with a chauffeur. The diamonds of the Mexican millionaire's lady were lost to him because the house took fire while he was examining the combination of the safe. But they would wait. He would yet have them both. The booty for which he had come tonight was more precious than anything he had ever tried for. It was probably the key to safety that he sought. Trent did not doubt that there was a document in the safe which would enable him to hold something over the head of Private William Smith.

He waited until twelve had struck from the stable clock and the terrace had been deserted a half-hour. To open the doors leading from the terrace was simple. Anthony Trent always carried with him on business bent two strips of tool steel with a key-blade at each end. With these two "T" and "V" patterns he could open the world's locks. A nine inch jimmy was easy to secrete. This was of the highest quality of steel and looked to the uninitiated very much like a chisel. But it differed from a chisel by having at its other end two brass plates set at right angles to one another. These could be adjusted to what angles were needed by turning countersunk screw bolts. It was the ideal tool for yale spring locks.

He did not need it here. The doors opened at will with the "V" pattern skeleton key. Great oriental rugs deadened sound and the boards of the house were old, seasoned and silent. He found his way to the room in which the colonel had received him with little difficulty. First of all he opened the window and saw that he could spring clear out of it at a bound and land in a bed of flowers only three feet below. Then he came to the antiquated safe. The combinations were ridiculously easy. His trained ear caught the faint sounds as he turned the lever easily. These told him exactly the secret of the combination. It was not two minutes work to open the doors. An inner sheeting of steel confronted him but was opened by his jimmy. It was not safe to turn on the electric lights. In so big an establishment with so many outdoor servants there might be many to remark an unexpected illumination. His little torch showed him all he wanted to know.

Colonel Langley had the soldiers' neatness. There were few valuables in the safe. They would be presumably in his banker's strong boxes. There were packets of letters tied up and one long envelope. On it was inscribed, "Not to be Opened. In case of my death this must be destroyed by my heir, Reginald Langley." On the envelope was the date, July 27, 1918, and the single word, "Ladigny."

Ladigny was a little village in France forever memorable by the heroic stand of the City of London regiment when it lost so terribly and refused to retreat. Trent opened the envelope in such a way that no trace of the operation was seen. Then for ten minutes he read steadily. Almost a half hour was expended in copying part of it in a note book. Then the envelope was resealed and the safe closed. As he had worn gloves there was no fear of incriminating finger prints. He did not think anyone would notice that a jimmy had been used. Then he closed the safe and its outer doors of black oak.

He permitted himself the luxury of a cigarette. He had done a good night's work. If Private William Smith had sufficient evidence to place Anthony Trent behind the bars the master criminal had sufficient certain knowledge now to shut the mouth of the man he was tracking. Who would have thought a man reared in such a family would have fallen so low! It is a human failure to make comparisons whereby others invariably shine with a very weak light, but Anthony Trent was saying no more than the truth when he told himself that with Smith's opportunities he would never have taken to his present calling.

With Smith's opportunities he would be sitting in a big room like this and sitting in it without fear of interruption. The strain of the last few days had not been agreeable and this strain must grow in intensity as he grew older. It was always in such peaceful surroundings as these that Trent felt the bitterness of crime even when successful.

He stopped suddenly short in his musing and crushed the bright tip of his cigarette into blackness beneath his foot. Someone was fumbling with the doorhandle, very quietly as though anxious not to disturb him. He cursed the carelessness that had allowed him to leave it unlocked. He had not behaved in a professional way at all. Very cautiously he rose to his feet, meaning to leave by the open window when the door opened. Trent sank back into the shadow of the big chair. To make a dash for the window would mean certain detection. To stay motionless might mean he could escape later. Similar immobility had saved him ere this.

The intruder closed the door and his sharp ears told him it was locked. Then a soft-treading form moved slowly through the dim light and closed the window, shut off his avenue of escape, and pulled across it two curtains which shut out all light. There were two other high windows in the room and across each one was pulled the light-excluding curtains. Then there was a click and the room sprang into brilliance.

Anthony Trent saw the intruder at the same moment the intruder stared into his face.

It was a girl in evening dress, a beautiful girl with chestnut hair and a delicious profile. She wore an elaborate evening gown of a delicate blue and carried in her hand a fan made of a single long ostrich plume. Her hair was elaborately coiffured. She was, in fine, a woman of the *beau monde*, a fitting guest in such a house as this. But what was she doing in this room at one o'clock at night when the rest of the household had long been abed?

The girl saw a slender but strongly built man of something over thirty with a pale, clean-shaven face, shrewd almost hard eyes and a masterful nose. He looked like a rising English barrister certain at some time to be a judge or at the least a King's Counsel. He was dressed in a well cut suit of dark blue with a pin stripe. He wore brown shoes and silk socks. She noted he had long slender hands perfectly kept.

He rose to his feet and smiled at her a little quizzically.

"Really," he said, "you almost frightened me. I was sitting in the dark making plans for the glorious 'first,' which has been here almost an hour, when I heard you trying to open the door."

There was no doubt in her mind but that he was one of the guests who had arrived from London on the late train and had not changed to evening dress. There was a train due at Thorpe station at half past ten and the motor trip would take forty minutes more.

"I had no idea anyone was here," she said truthfully, "or I shouldn't have come. You see one can't sleep early even if one is sent to bed as we all were tonight." She glanced at the clock. "I'm not shooting tomorrow but if you are why don't you turn in? You know Colonel Langley is a fearful martinet where the shooting is concerned and insists that every bird is killed cleanly."

It was plain that she wished to get rid of him. Trent was frankly puzzled. The girl had shown no fear or nervousness. Ordinarily the conventions would have had their innings and she would have hesitated at the possibility of being found alone with a good looking man at such an hour. She would have excused herself and left him in the belief that he was a guest she would meet tomorrow at dinner and dance with after it. But she showed no such intention. He knew enough about women to see that she had no intention of waiting for the pleasure of a friendly chat. She had rather a haughty type of face and spoke with that quick imperious manner which he had observed in British women of rank or social importance.

"I have neuralgia," he said amiably, "and I prefer to sit here than go to bed. Perhaps you left something here? Can I help you to find it?"

"I came for a book. Colonel Langley was talking about some African hunting story your Mr. Roosevelt wrote."

So she knew him for an American. Well, she would find the American not easily to be gulled. There came to him the memory of another night in Fifth Avenue when a woman who seemed to be of fashion and position had so completely fooled him and had been left in possession of a large sum of currency.

He moved toward a bookcase in which were a collection of books on fishing and shooting.

"African Game Trails," he said, "here it is."

There was no doubt in his mind that the look she threw at him was not one of complete amiability. She wanted him to go. He asked himself why. It would have been easy for her to go and leave him, and the best way out of the difficulty, unless she had come for one specific purpose. If she had come for something concealed in the room and needed it badly enough she would try and wait until he went. Trent was certain she had no suspicion as to his own mission. In so big a house as Dereham Old Hall fifty guests could be entertained easily and it was unlikely she should know even half of them. He had observed that it was not the fashion in England to introduce indiscriminately as in his own country. Guests were introduced to their immediate neighbors; but that appalling custom whereby one unfortunate is expected to memorize the names of all present at a gulp was not popular. Because she did not know him would not lead to suspicion. He was in no danger. Even a servant coming in would see in him only a friend of his employer.

"Thank you," she said, taking the book with an appearance of interest. "Do you know I never thought to see Americans at Dereham Old Hall with the single exception of Reginald's old friend Conington Warren. Colonel Langley is so conservative but the war has broadened everyone hasn't it and stupid national prejudices are breaking down."

"Conington Warren here?" he asked.

"He lives in England now," she told him, "his physicians warned him that prohibition would kill him so they simply prescribed a country where he could still take this cocktail. You know him of course?"

"A little," he said; she wondered why he smiled so curiously. He wondered what this beautiful girl would say if she knew it was at Conington Warren's mansion in Fifth avenue that he had started his career as a criminal. So that great sportsman, owner of thoroughbreds and undeniable shot, was in this very house! After all it was not a strange coincidence. The well known Americans who

love horse and hound with the passion of the true sportsman are to be seen in the great houses of England more readily than the mushroom financier.

"What other people are there here you know?" she demanded.

"I can't tell you till tomorrow," he returned, "I only said a word or two to the Duchess. She deplored having to go to bed so early and was disappointed at not being able to dance."

"She is one of my dearest friends," the girl answered.

"Which means you see her every fault," he laughed.

"Isn't your neuralgia better?" she asked after a pause.

Anthony Trent shook his head.

"I shan't sleep all night," he said despondently. "Going to bed would only make it worse."

She was obviously put out at this statement.

"Then you'll stop here all night?"

"At all events until it gets light. It's only two o'clock now. If you are keen on big game hunting you won't sleep if you begin that book."

"You'll frighten the servants in the morning," she said later.

"I'll tip them into confidence," he assured her.

The girl was growing nervous. There were a hundred symptoms from the tapping of her little feet on the rug to the fidgeting with the book and the meaningless play with her fan. She started when a distant dog bayed the moon and dropped her book. It rolled under a table and Trent picked it up. But when he handed it back to her there was an air of excitement about him, an atmosphere of triumph which puzzled her.

"You look as though you enjoyed hunting for books under tables."

"I enjoy any hunting when I get a reward for my trouble."

"And what did you find?" she asked "a little mouse under the chair?"

"I found a key," he said.

"Someone must have dropped it," she said idly.

"Not a door key," he returned, "but the key to a mystery. Being a woman you are interested in mysteries that have a beautiful society girl as their heroine of course?"

"I really must disappoint you," she said rather coldly, "and I don't quite understand why you are not quick to take the many hints I have dropped. Can't you see I want to sit here alone and think? Your own room will be just as comfortably furnished. In a sense this is a sort of second home to me. Mrs. Langley and I are related and this room is an old and favorite haunt when I'm depressed. Is it asking very much that you leave me here alone?"

"Under ordinary conditions no," he said suavely.

"These are ordinary conditions," she persisted.

"I'm not sure," he retorted. "Tell me this if you dare. Why have you the combination to a safe written on a little piece of mauve paper and concealed in the book on your lap?"

She turned very pale and the look she gave him turned his suspicion into a desire to protect her. The woman of the world air dropped from her and she looked a frightened pathetic and extraordinarily lovely child.

"What shall I do?" she cried helplessly. "You are a detective?"

"Not yet," he said smiling, "although later I intend to be. But I'm not here even as a great amateur. Consider me merely a notoriously good shot suffering equally from neuralgia and curiosity. You have the combination of a safe concealed in this room and you want me to go to bed so that you may take out wads of bank notes and pay your bridge debts. Is that right so far?"

"You are absolutely wrong," she cried with spirit. "I need no money and have no debts. There are no jewels in the safe."

"Letters of course," he said easily.

She did not speak for a moment. He could see she was wondering what she dare tell him. She could not guess that he knew of the three packages of letters each tied with green ribbon. It was, he supposed, the old story of compromising letters. Innocent enough, but letters that would spell evil tidings to the jealous fiancé. They might have been written to Colonel Langley. Men of that heroic stamp often appealed to sentimental school girls and the colonel was undeniably handsome in his cold superior way. His heart ached for her. She was suffering. What had seemed so easy was now become a task of the greatest difficulty.

"Yes," she said deliberately, "letters. Letters I must have."

"Do you suppose I can stand by and see my host robbed?"

"If you have any generosity about you you can in this instance. I only want to destroy one letter because if it should ever be discovered it will hurt the man I love most in the world."

Anthony Trent groaned. He had guessed aright. There was some man of her own class and station who did not love her well enough to overlook some little silly affectionate note sent to the *beau sabreur* Langley perhaps a half dozen years before. It was a rotten thing to keep such letters. He looked at the girl again and cursed his luck that she was already engaged. Then he sighed and remembered that even were she free it could never be his lot to marry unless he confessed all. And he knew that to a woman of the type he wanted to marry this confession would mean the end of confidence the beginning of despair.

"I shall not stop you," he said.

She looked at him eagerly.

"And you'll never tell?"

"Not if they put me through the third degree."

"But ... oughtn't you to tell?" she asked.

"Of course," he admitted, "but I won't. I can see you are wondering why. I'll tell you. I've been in just such a position – and I did what you are going to do."

Without another word she went swiftly to the concealed safe and began to manipulate the lock. For five minutes she tried and then turned to him miserably.

"It won't open," she wailed.

"I'll have a shot at it," he said gaily, and went down on his knees by her side. He soon found out why it remained immovable. It was an old combination. She did not understand his moves as he went through the same procedure which had opened it before. She only saw that the doors swung back. She did not see him pry the iron sheathing back with the jimmy. It was miraculously easy.

Then he crossed the room to his chair and lighted another cigarette. "Help yourself," he cried and picked up the book which had held the combination.

The girl's back was to him and he could not see what she was doing. He heard the scratch of a match being lighted and saw her stooping over the stone fireplace. She was burning her past. Then he heard her sigh with relief.

"I shall never forget what you have done for me," she said holding out her hand.

"It was little enough," he said earnestly.

"You don't know just how much it was," the girl returned, "or how grateful I shall always be to you. If I hadn't got that letter! I shouldn't have got it but for you. And to think that tomorrow we shall be introduced as one stranger to another. I'm rather glad I don't know your name or you mine. It will be rather fun won't it, being introduced and pretending we've never met before. If you are not very careful the Duchess will suspect we share some dreadful secret."

"The Duchess is rather that way inclined, isn't she?" he said.

He held the hand she offered him almost uncomfortably long a time. She would look for him tomorrow in vain. He supposed she would begin by asking if there were any other Americans there except Conington Warren. After a time she would find he was not a guest of the Langleys. She would come at last to know what he was. And with this knowledge there would come contempt

and a deliberate wiping his image from her mind. Anthony Trent had no sentimental excuses to offer. He had chosen his own line of country.

He looked at her again. It would be the last time. Perhaps there was a dangerously magnetic quality about his glance for the girl dropped her eyes.

"Faustus," he said abruptly, "sold his soul for a future. I think I'd be willing to barter mine for a past."

"*Au revoir*," she said softly.

When she had closed the door he walked across the room to shut the safe. What secrets of hers, he wondered, had been shut up there so long. He found himself in a new and strange frame of mind. Why should he be jealous of what she might have written in the letter that was now ashes? She had probably thought hero-worship was love. She had a splendid face he told himself. High courage, loyalty and breeding were mirrored in it. He wondered what sort of a man it was who had won her.

He looked at the neatly-tied bundle of letters. It seemed as though they had hardly been touched. Suddenly he turned to the compartment where the long letter had lain, the letter from which he had made so many extracts, the letter it was imperative Colonel Langley should believe to be intact.

It was gone. In the hearth there were still some burned pages. He could recognize the watermark.

Anthony Trent had amiably assisted an unknown girl to destroy a letter whose safety meant a great deal to him. If Colonel Langley were to discover the loss it would be easy enough to put the blame upon the bicycle-riding American who had pretended to be a friend of Private William Smith.

As he thought it over Anthony Trent saw that the girl in blue had not lied to him, had not sought to entrap him by gaining his sympathy as the "Countess" had succeeded in doing before another open safe in New York. He had assumed one thing and she had meant another.

What was William Smith to this unknown beauty? Trent gritted his teeth. He was going to find out. At all events he now knew the real name of the private soldier who had shared the dug-out with him. The next thing was to find out where he lived.

Chapter Four

A LADY INTERRUPTS

Anthony Trent told the obliging manager of the Maids' Head Hotel that he was interested mainly in the study of cathedral churches and since he had now studied the magnificent Norwich cathedral would push on to Ely.

He found England an exceedingly easy place to shake off pursuers despite its small size. There were always junctions where he could change from one line to another without incurring suspicion. He started for Ely but was soon lost among the summer crowds which thronged the university city of Cambridge. The convenient system of merely claiming one's baggage and ordering a porter to take it to car or taxi rendered the tracking of it by baggage checks almost impossible.

While it was true he was not pursued, so far as he knew, he wanted to be careful. It was not likely Langley would charge him with the theft of the Ladigny confession but it was quite probable that the Colonel might suspect the writer of the confession. He might think that Smith had hired a clever American safe breaker to win for him what was very necessary for his freedom of action. And Smith, if he did not already know it, would find the man over whom he held many years in American prisons almost within his clutches.

It was necessary that Anthony Trent should see Smith first and make a bargain with him. It was imperative that he meet the man alone and where he could place the cards on the table and talk freely.

In a room of the quaint half-timbered hostelry in Norwich Trent had come across some useful books of reference. There were, for example, such guides to knowledge as "Crockford's Clerical Directory"; "Hart's Army List"; the "Court Directory of London" and "Lodge's Peerage and Baronetage." The name for which Trent sought diligently was that of Arthur Spencer Jerminham Grenvil. By these names Private William Smith had the legal right to be known. By these names he had signed a confession.

A. S. J. Grenvil had admitted forging a check for two hundred pounds. The signature he had skilfully imitated was that of Reginald Langley of Dereham Old Hall in the county of Norfolk.

There was a copy of a letter written by Colonel Langley to Grenvil dated six years before. On the whole it was a letter which impressed Trent favorably. It was written from rather a lofty altitude by a man to whom family honor and the motto *noblesse oblige* meant a whole code of chivalry.

"Until you went to Sandhurst you were a credit to your name and the great family from which you spring," he read. "Suddenly, without any warning, your habits altered and you became a gambler. Well, many of your race have gambled, but at least they played fair and paid what they owed. You did not even do that. It was with great difficulty that your father was able to get you your commission in my old regiment. We hoped you would feel that in the presence of so many men of birth and breeding that you must alter your habits and wear with credit your sovereign's uniform. And now you are a common forger. Of course the signature you forged will be honored. But I require this of you: that you will confess to me your guilt; that you will leave the regiment; that you will do some honest work and re-establish yourself in my eyes. I will see to it that work of a not unpleasing kind is found for you in Australia. On my part I will undertake to keep your secret so long as you keep away from England. Remember, Arthur, there are other discreditable things I could bring to your notice if I chose. I am anxious that my kinsman, your father, should not suffer any more from your escapades. On receipt of this letter proceed to my lawyers whose address you know. They have instructions what to do."

It was plain that the father of the man he had known as William Smith was of rank. The fact that he was a kinsman of Colonel Langley might be explained by reference to the fifth book on the shelf at the Maids' Head – "Debrett's Landed Gentry of Gt. Britain."

He turned to Langley of Dereham Old Hall. Langley's mother, it seemed, was the Lady Dorothea Grenvil daughter of the ninth, and sister of the present Earl of Rosecarrel. Grenvil, therefore, was the family name of the Earls of Rosecarrel.

In the peerage all the particulars concerning the Grenvils were laid bare. The tenth earl, who had been British Ambassador to Turkey, was a Knight of the Garter, etc., etc., had married Elizabeth only daughter of Admiral, Lord Arthur Jerningham and had issue:

First the heir, Viscount St. Just, major in the Royal Horse Guards, V.C.G.C.B. Second and third, two sons killed in the great war. Fourth, Arthur Spencer Jerningham Grenvil of whom no particulars were given. Fifth came the Lady Rhona Elizabeth Onslow married to the Duke of Ontario in the peerage of France and last the Lady Daphne Villiers Grenvil, unmarried. Trent reckoned out that she would be a girl of twenty-one. Private Smith would be twenty-six.

The town house of the Earls of Rosecarrel was in Grosvenor Place and their country seats were Alderwood Hall in Cambridgeshire and Rosecarrel Castle in Cornwall.

Alderwood Hall was six miles from the university city and the house could be seen on one of the small hills to the west of the town. A guide book informed Trent that the house was thrown open to visitors on Thursdays at a small fee which went to the local hospital. There were to be seen some notable examples of the "Norwich School" works by Crome, Cotman, Vincent and Stark.

The butler was distressed by the heat of early September and dismissed the visitors as soon as possible. But he regarded the American tourist in a different light for Trent had slipped him a half sovereign.

"I want to take my time," said Trent, "I like pictures and I want to examine these more closely."

"Certainly, sir," said the butler. "Anything I can do to help you I shall be proud to do."

Anthony Trent, who had a wide knowledge of paintings of the outdoors and possessed one of the world's missing masterpieces, none other than *The Venetian Masque* of Giorgione which he had taken from a vulgar and unappreciative millionaire, looked at the fresh, simple landscapes with joy.

"Is the family in residence?" he asked when he had finished.

"The Earl always spends the summer at Rosecarrel," the man answered. "He keeps his yacht in Fowey Harbour. I'm afraid his lordship is failing. You see the loss of Master Gervase and Master Bevil was a terrible shock. We lost seven out of our twelve gardeners here and two of them that came back won't ever be much good."

"What about Mr. Arthur Grenvil?" Trent asked idly. "I used to know him."

"He's back," the butler said. But the look of affection which the old family servant had shown when he spoke of the two who had fallen was gone. "I'll say this for Master Arthur, he fought too and got wounded. There's none that can say aught against his pluck."

"He is cool enough," Trent said, and thought of the scene in the dug-out when he and Arthur Grenvil waited for death and did not give way to terror. "He's down in Cornwall with the Earl, I suppose?"

"And Lady Daphne," the butler added. "Since the death of the Countess she looks after everything."

Trent visualized one of those managing domineering young women who rule tenants relentlessly but after all exercise benevolent despotism in bucolic matters.

"Was he badly hurt?" Trent asked before he left.

"I hardly knew him," the butler said. "I give you my word I was fair shocked at the difference; isn't for the likes of me to question the ways of Providence but why Mr. Arthur was left and the others taken I don't understand."

Anthony Trent wondered, too. It would have saved him a great deal of worry if things had been reversed. On the whole this *mauvais sujet*, of an ancient family was a consistent trouble maker.

A Bradshaw's time table showed Trent that as Lord Rosecarrel's yacht was at Fowey he would be wise to make a trip to the Delectable Duchy, as a Fowey author has termed Cornwall, and disguise himself as a tourist and thus pave the way for a meeting with Private William Smith.

He purchased a large scale automobile map of Cornwall and when he reached the quaint seaport had a fair idea of the locality. Rosecarrel Castle lay some ten miles away on the moorland. The local guidebook told him all about it. It was the great house of the neighbourhood, a granite built fastness which had suffered siege many times. The Grenvils were a Cornish family of distinction and happier in their own West Countree than on the Cambridge estates.

Trent had always found the consultation of local newspapers a great help toward knowledge of a community and he immediately solaced himself with what Fowey had to offer. A perusal of the advertising columns gave him a good idea of what he could do to pass his time in a manner that would seem logical to the countryfolk. Since he was not a painter, and Fowey had no golf links, his occupation in the absence of a sailing or power boat was merely that of a sightseer and he felt out of his element in this innocent guise.

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