

## CHAPTER ONE

A small crowd had gathered there on the street in front of All Saints, where a giant stone gargoyle had come crashing down onto the pavement just a few moments before.

G. Morris Moneypenny stood nearby with the others, staring at the lifeless remains of Vicar Hawke, and noting that both the clergyman's head and the gargoyle's were strangely haloed in a dark pool of blood. He listened to the dull, predictable comments that were bobbing throughout the skit-tish crowd:

*"...an act of God..."*

*"...a terrible tragedy..."*

*"...a singular and unbelievable occurrence..."*

Morris eyed the bits of crumbled mortar scattered about the walkway. He had noticed them several days ago when he last passed by. Now he simply shook his head at the scene.

"Shoddy maintenance," he muttered. "Probably poor workmanship to begin with."

Morris slowly turned away and walked on into the twilight evening of February 27th, 1895. He felt truly sorry for the vicar. *A sad blow to the Church of England*, he thought.

But it mattered little. Moneypenny was a Catholic.

A few moments later, Moneypenny turned the corner and was more happily greeted by the bright, beaconing gaslights surrounding the entrance of The Magpie. A loud and raucous place, the pub's grimy plate glass windows presented a shining picture of boisterous humanity to each passerby. Like a candle lamp projecting colorful images on a darkened theater wall, so the pub projected its bawdy glory onto the street. Though it may not have been the most attractive place to be seen—especially for a respectable young architect in search of wealthy clients—it would do quite well for this night. Despite the unfortunate scene at All Saints, Morris was bent on celebrating the fact that he had already found a client. Celebrating meant a stop at The Magpie, with its social-climbing clerks, winsome show girls and inevitable politicians. It meant being with his friends; and there were always some of those to be found along the pub's long, seldom-polished mahogany bar.

"Moneypenny!"

Morris scanned the crowded room, and taking no notice of any one person in particular, he slowly paced his way towards the sound of the voice. Only at the very last moment, as he reached for the pint of ale that had been quickly set down before him, did he direct his glance across the bar to his old friend, Broome.

“Thank you, Broomie.” Moneypenny's twinkling eyes smiled over the glass.

“Don't thank me, man. 'Twas' your *German* friend over there—Mr. Lubeck—who proposed to 'ave this one waitin' for you. Shall I draw you another?”

“Not just yet.”

Following Broome's gesture, Morris saw Lubeck seated at a small cast iron table near a window, engaged in quiet conversation with a short, bald man wearing very thick spectacles. Seeing him, the two men smiled and nodded as Moneypenny happily raised his glass to them. Morris wondered who the stranger might be as he leaned backwards toward Broome.

“I am sorry,” said Moneypenny. “I can't stay tonight. I have an appointment shortly.”

“Oh—I see,” replied Broome. He grinned and nodded in the direction of the bald stranger. “Would that be your short appointment?”

“No,” Morris replied. “But who is that?”

“A Mr. Oveertshoen,” said Broome. “Lubeck says he's Dutch.”

Broome tucked the end of a dingy white towel into his pants and spread his big, bony hands along the bar, leaning forward.

“But I think he's one of the Kaiser's spies,” he whispered.

That made Moneypenny laugh out loud—so loud in fact, that a number of people, including Lubeck and the stranger, quickly glanced over at him. Morris smiled innocently and shook his head self-consciously. He regretted for a moment laughing so loud, since Lubeck would undoubtedly ask him what had been so funny. He tried to remember some joke he could repeat, but nothing credible came to him.



“I dunno, Mr. Moneypenny,” Broome said in mock seriousness. “I know yer friend Mr. Lubeck there got ya this new commission and all. But I'd be a tad more careful, if I were you. Before long, he'll have ya layin' out houses for Wilhelm himself...”

“This new job isn't for certain, yet, Broomie,” replied Morris. “I'll know whether to thank Lubeck after this evening's over. Now—what else did he tell you?”

“Noothin,” Broome said with a sly smile, “except that yer' patron-to-be has a lot of money to spend on his house. An' a very attractive wife, I might add.”

“You saw her?” a puzzled Moneypenny asked.

“No,” Broome said with a laugh. “But Mr. Lubeck there has. Says he was quite smitten with her, he was. Course, maybe she was one of them plump fraulein types, per'aps—comin' at him with heavin' breasts and a stein or two 'a lager...”

Moneypenny laughed out loud again and lightly slammed one of the bar's privacy panels in Broome's face. Shaking his head, he turned slowly and waded through the

crowd, over to the little table where the two men were sitting.

“So, Morris,” chirped Lubeck, “Are you ready to become a rich and famous architect?”

Lubeck's smooth, well-polished countenance gazed up at Moneypenny as he spoke. Bright, good-humored and careful in his personal habits, he was popular among a wide circle of friends which, for the last year or so, had included Moneypenny. His administrative duties in the shipping office of Tektinson & Ballard had put him in contact with a number of successful businessmen—many of whom, Moneypenny hoped, would desire to build houses.

Thirty-two years old—the same age as Moneypenny—he was well off enough to have purchased a large, old Jacobean brick house in the city. Having met at a party, the two of them had conspired together on some small additions to the back of the house, which Morris had designed with both great ingenuity and extreme sensitivity to the existing structure. Thus a solid friendship was made. Like Morris, Lubeck was just as comfortable behind a cricket bat as behind a keg of beer, which he enjoyed, upon occasion, in great quantity. Apparently this was such an occasion.

Lubeck placed some papers in his coat pocket with one hand and motioned Morris to sit down with the other.

“There are no rich and famous architects, Willie” said Moneypenny, who nevertheless remained standing beside the table. “Appreciated and famous—yes. Rich? No.”

Morris set his empty glass upon the table.

“I would stay,” he said, “but as you know, I'm going to see a client...and I had better be off. Besides, Willie—it's not good to meet prospective clients reeking of cigars and stout.”

“Too late then,” said a grinning Lubeck. “You already reek of cigar smoke. But as it is after dinner, I suppose Mr. Aimlinson will reek as well.”

“George Aimlinson? Asked a surprised Moneypenny. “Good God, man—are you referring to the Bat Poop King?”

“None other,” said Lubeck with great satisfaction. “The Empire's leading importer of bat guano—*the first choice of fine gardeners throughout the whole of Britain and the world.*”

Dug from caves off the coast of South America, bat guano was in great demand; once a supply was retained, it was cheap to mine it, ship it across the sea and collect a tidy sum. Mr. George Aimlinson was a very rich man indeed.

“Morris—didn't you read the notes I sent over to your office?” questioned Lubeck. “They contained all the details—except the exact street address. Here it is.”

He handed Moneypenny a scrap of paper with a number scribbled hastily upon it.  
*No. 807 The Waymore Road*

“Forgive me. I was out of the office for most of the afternoon,” Moneypenny explained. “I had Rixton send correspondence and such over to the house, since I didn't expect to be in.” He stared at the paper for a moment, then folded it very precise-

ly and pushed it into his vest pocket.

"My God, Willie," Morris exclaimed, "tell me about this job..."

"First, allow me to introduce my friend, Paul Oveertshoen," interjected Lubeck.

The compact little bald man sat stiffly in his worn gray suit, saying nothing. He failed to put forth his hand—opting rather to nod and smile at Moneypenny. About forty years of age, he had soft gray eyes that seemed genuinely interested in the architect's latest opportunity. *An interesting person, perhaps*—Moneypenny thought—but there was simply no time to get acquainted just now.

"Pleased to meet you, Herr Oveertshoen."

There was a brief yet awkward pause, then Lubeck finally sighed and spoke up.

"Very well, then," he said, "...about the commission. Aimlinson's address is a large attached house across from the park. *Regency*, I believe—but you would know more about that, Morris. Plain style; very staid—boring to me...he hates it, too. Has a house he likes in London, however—big, brick, Free Classic and all. In the way of newer development, though. Must come down."

"That's why he's going to build?"

"Oh, no—he'd build anyway," Lubeck said with a chuckle. "Has to, you know. In his position, I imagine he'll probably need two houses. It's a sad situation."

"Sad?" asked Morris. Time was running short. He had to leave.

"For his wife, I mean," Lubeck replied. "Leaving the house in London. Losing all her artistic friends, it seems. Really a blow to her."

"And him?"

"He wants *new*," explained Lubeck. "Like the London house, perhaps. But better. Masculine; you know—billiard room and all that. God knows what she wants. But he's paying, Morris. Look at her, if you like. But listen to *him*."

As he said those last four words, Lubeck looked at his watch and pointed at the door.

"You had better be on your way," he said. "Be firm. Be calm. Don't discuss fees at this point—he won't. With his income, it's not of any consequence. And he really is a nice fellow. A real gentleman."

As Broome came to the table with two full glasses, Moneypenny took a step towards the door and shot a look back at Lubeck.

"Tell me," he asked, "is she really that beautiful?"

"His wife? No—not really," said Lubeck. He looked up at Broome and grinned. "Actually, Morris, she's rather a fraulein-type. Not your thing at all."

Even Broome laughed at that. As Moneypenny rushed toward the door, Lubeck suddenly stood up at his table.

"Morris!" he yelled over the crowd, "Tell me—what was so funny when you came in?"

Pretending he couldn't hear over the noise, Moneypenny walked on, only smiling and waving at his friend through the pub's plate glass windows. It was late, and he would now have to run at least part of the way if he was to make his appointment on time.

He glanced over in the direction of All Saints and noticed that the crowd was gone. There were just two figures in the darkness now, standing over the scene of the accident. As Morris looked away, he heard the slapping and sloshing of two large buckets of water being tossed across the pavement, washing the last traces of the vicar into the street. Walking on, he felt mild regret over the callous comment he had made earlier; he knew the vicar to be a gentle and kindly man—in fact, Morris had made small talk with him on the street upon several occasions.

Still, Money Penny had seen death before. As a child, he had seen one of his friends trampled by horses in the street. He saw one man bludgeoned to death during a factory riot he had witnessed as a youth. While working, he had been present at several building site accidents, some of which had been fatal. He remembered vividly how one man had his rib cage flattened under a collapsed stone beam. At another, a roofer had slipped off a gable and been impaled on a wrought iron fence.

Quickening his pace, Morris bundled the poor vicar together with all the other unfortunate souls from his past, and said a solemn, silent prayer for all of them. That done, he then began to focus his concentration upon that evening's upcoming appointment.



Money Penny made his way quickly down the street and glanced again at the address given to him by Lubeck. This commission—assuming all worked out—was beyond anything he had anticipated. It was almost unheard of for an unproven young architect like himself to be given the job of designing a country house for a major client like Aimlinson. True, he had served for a time under Ernest George and Henry Peto, and even in the office of Richard Norman Shaw for about a year. But so had a great many others.

Perhaps it was the quality of Money Penny's draftsmanship which attracted Aimlinson. Some of Morris' drawings had been reproduced in *The Building News*, and had received very favorable comment. The drawings Morris put on exhibition last year had also been widely acclaimed. But this did not seem enough to base a major commission upon. Lubeck did say Aimlinson could probably build two houses; perhaps this first one was just a test.

As he turned onto Tanquers Street, Money Penny picked up his pace, and wondered what kind of influence Lubeck might have with Aimlinson to induce him to take his suggestion of architect to heart.

Mostly, he wondered if he would be up to it all.

For Morris did have talent. Sir George had turned over to him a number of significant construction details on the firm's major projects. He had spent a great deal of time with Money Penny, helping to train his eye—to understand architectural mass and the handling of spatial volumes. This had been George's particular gift; a rare ability to

design a house as an attractive three-dimensional form right from the start. He would produce a handsome perspective drawing, then have his assistants transfer these ideas to specific plans, elevations and sections. It was a unique aptitude that had brought Sir George a large and very successful practice.

For sheer, brilliance, however, no one could match Richard Norman Shaw. He was the primary force behind the revival of the style he came to call Olde English—or the Tudor Revival. For a Victorian society that revered the traditions and legends of knight-hood and chivalry, his houses had come to stand for everything every good Englishman could ever hope for, or want to be. Even as a youngster, Money Penny had practically swooned over engravings of tiled and half-timbered Shaw houses. As for the year he had spent in the man's office, Morris recalled with some regret that it was not the opportunity he had expected. As the years had passed, Shaw had taken an increasingly classical course in his designs; first to Queen Anne and then to large, Baroquish piles and on to Neo-Georgian. Indeed, by the time Money Penny joined the practice, there was little work to be done on the kinds of houses he had loved as a youth.

Dreams of a classical empire might tempt one, Morris supposed—but for living day in, day out—he would much prefer to retire to Merry Old England.

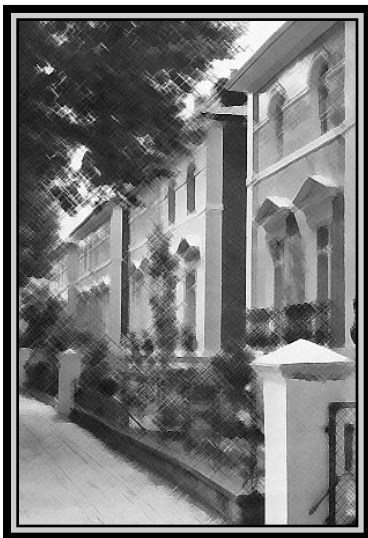
“Very sad,” he recalled Lubeck having once remarked, “This classical inspiration that has taken hold; beautiful, yes—but primarily imported. English, yes—but less so than your traditional type.”

All that, *and from a German*, no less—Money Penny thought, as he approached a broad park on The Waymore Road. Based on Lubeck's appraisal, this commission might offer the opportunity to design a house that both the architect *and* the client would like. The description of Aimlinson's London house sounded much like the red brick, Flemish-gabled houses he had worked on so often in George and Peto's office. Perhaps, with a bit of guidance, this client could be directed into something even a little more traditional.

Money Penny was in full stride now. The music of the pubs and show houses had long since faded, until the only sound he heard was the *clip-clop-clip-clop* of a carriage coming up behind and then passing him. There were few people on the street, though the hour was not yet late. He checked his watch and slowed to a more leisurely pace, cutting diagonally across a corner of the park underneath some ancient plane trees. It was unseasonably warm on this particular evening. The salt smell that drifted in from the West came as a pleasant surprise, as it had been bitterly cold over the past several weeks.

Almost stepping into a deep puddle, Money Penny continued to look on ahead at the row of townhouses that now stretched in front of him, rather than on what lay in his path. As a result, he almost missed a step while approaching the street, and barely avoided turning his ankle. Muttering his private disgust, he went straight away across the street and turned to his left...795...801...and then—807.

Just as Lubeck had said, it was part of a block of white stucco Regency townhouses. They were very plain and very proper—though the applied stucco exterior had been somewhat discolored over time. Two white Doric columns stood as silent sentries at both sides of a glossy green-black doorway, and there was a lacy fanlight under a delicate classical pediment above the door. A shallow two-story bow window was on the left, with a huge, plate glass sash; you could see inside the house at night almost as clearly as you could into *The Magpie*.



In short, the house was like thousands of other buildings scattered across the cities and towns of England. This was what the Empire had to thank John Nash for.

Glancing down at his shoes—which were wetter than he would have liked—Moneypenny stepped up the short flight of stairs and clunked the knocker firmly...*One. Two. Three.*

Almost immediately the door opened. A very frail, gray-haired man stood part way behind it, barely looking up. He said nothing.

“Yes, well...good evening,” said Morris. “I am Mr. Moneypenny—to see Mr. Aimlinson. My appointment was for 8 o'clock, I believe.”

“Yes. Do come in.”

The old man opened the door a little wider, barely allowing Morris room to pass through to the inside.

“No coat?” the man asked unenthusiastically.

“No. Not tonight,” answered Morris. Seeing there was nothing to put on a hanger, the old man turned and quietly walked towards the back of the entrance hall.

For all the plainness of the exterior, the house's interior was jarringly ornate—and of entirely different style. There was green painted wainscoting, chest high; block-printed golden and ochre wallpaper—probably from Morris & Co.—with a spectacular dado pattern higher on the wall; a riot of old oil portraits in gilt frames packed along the stairway, reaching up into the darkness which defied the warm glow of a brass medieval lamp. Moneypenny also saw a beautiful painting on a far wall in the style of Rossetti, a curious stack of dusty ledger books under a mahogany table; and the inevitable brass umbrella stand, which held no umbrellas at all but a single hand-carved cane and two old, well-polished cutlasses that appeared to have seen service at one time. *All very good...so far*; Moneypenny thought—then he heard the old man's voice echo from the end of the hall.

“I'll announce you now.”

He expected to see the butler return; instead a tall man, perhaps a few years older than Morris himself, came stepping out of a doorway and into the hall. His hair was

very dark—almost black—and combed straight back. His suit, which was of very fine quality, fit in a somewhat loose manner, as if he might have recently lost some weight. Under a broad, well-kept mustache, a bright smile of perfect teeth flashed at Money Penny, who was practically attacked with a handshake.

“Mr. Money Penny!” said the man. “I am so glad you could come by. I’ve been looking forward to speaking with you.”

“And I you,” blurted Morris.

His heart was beating fast, now. He took a deep breath and directed an earnest gaze at George Aimlinson.

“Forgive me,” said Morris. “When Mr. Lubeck told me that he had arranged this meeting, he initially neglected to mention your name. I was made aware only a little earlier this evening, so I must confess—I am only a little recovered from the surprise.”

“Surprise you, did he?” laughed Aimlinson. “Well, that’s Lubeck for you.” He raised his eyebrows in a sneaky sort of way and drew closer to Money Penny, lowering his voice—not in volume, but in tone.

“And I suppose he is taking full credit for our interview?”

Money Penny smiled in a relaxed way, taking great comfort in the fact that someone else was familiar with the workings of Lubeck’s mind.

“Yes,” replied Morris. “Of course he did.”

With a smirk upon his face, Aimlinson turned quickly and motioned for Morris to follow him down the hall. As they approached what appeared to be a library, the prospective client’s voice echoed down and up and around the hallway.

“Actually,” Aimlinson said, “Mr. Lubeck’s influence was only a part of why you are here.” He stopped inside the doorway and stretched out his arm towards a pair of dark green, tufted chesterfield sofas. The room was enclosed in tall mahogany bookcases. A large Elizabethan library table stacked with papers and large folios dominated one corner, and a pleasant mix of pastoral scenes and military paintings ringed the walls. Money Penny entered and glided onto one of the sofas. The room smelled of smoke—but from a pipe, not a cigar. Aimlinson sat directly across from him.

“I had already seen your drawings,” he said. “They were very fine indeed.”

“Thank you,” replied Money Penny. “Were they published, or on exhibition?”

“Both.”

“So...you follow the profession closely?”

“Indeed.”

Aimlinson leaned over a small cocktail table on his right and brought two small glasses and a heavy crystal decanter of brandy down onto a smaller table in front of him. He gestured silently to Money Penny, offering him a drink.

“Thank you,” said Morris.

At that moment, Morris noticed several copies of *The Building News* upon the table. Conspicuously located on top was the very issue in which his drawings had been published. He accepted the drink as Aimlinson picked up the magazine and set it on his lap.



“I do follow the profession closely,” said Aimlinson. He casually flipped through the pages without really looking at them. “Closely enough to recognize talent. And your talent has been recognized by others whose opinions I value highly. I speak not of Mr. Lubeck, but of your former employer, Mr. Ernest George. And others.”

Money penny was pleased.

“Mr. George is very kind to recommend me. I learned a great deal from him.”

Money penny sipped the brandy, which was strong but quite good. Feeling a little more relaxed, he decided it was time to speak more frankly.

“I must say,” said Morris. “My only point of confusion is why you're not hiring Mr. George himself. You certainly are in a position to do so.” He laughed as he spoke, hoping that Aimlinson would quickly brush aside his point.

“Yes,” noted Aimlinson, “I could at that. Or Mr. Lethaby, or Mr. Ernest Newton—or even Mr. Shaw, I suppose—though I find his latest works less...*appealing*. As it is, and as you well know, they are all quite busy.”

Aimlinson grinned politely at Morris.

“And I am not,” noted Money penny. He laughed self-consciously and took another sip of brandy. He glanced quickly at a painting on a far wall, which appeared to be of Wellington, though he could not be sure from where he was sitting. Morris wished he had a broader portfolio of work to present. Or any meaningful portfolio, for that matter.

“Well, how could you be?” said Aimlinson. His grin turned to a warm smile as he sensed his guest's mild discomfort. “You are young, and one has to start somewhere.” There was a brief moment of silence, then in a more casual tone, he inquired, “By the way—are you familiar with Mr. Lutyens?”

“Oh yes,” replied Morris. “We were both in Mr. George's office at one point. A very talented chap, indeed.”

*And a damned lucky one too*, thought Money penny. Lutyens—always the rising star, the boy genius—had received excellent commissions early on, and was well on his way to building a large and successful practice. Money penny cringed every time he heard the name, partly with guilt—for the young man had enviable talent—but mostly because Lutyens was enjoying a growing reputation, while Money penny and others who lacked his self-promotional skills were struggling.

“Well,” continued Aimlinson, “Mr. Lutyens speaks very highly of you.” He leaned forward and sat on the edge of the big couch.

“Wanting to give some consideration to new talent,” he continued, “I had approached him regarding my project. He is somewhat busy, however—being engaged in a project in Surrey for Miss Jekyll, the garden writer. Among other things.”

“Yes. So I understand.”

Money penny bristled. *So this is what it is*—he thought. *I'm to get the crumbs that fall from Edwin Lutyens' table*. Morris looked again at his prospective client and sank deeper into the soft sofa, wondering to himself.

*Oh well. Some very nice crumbs, indeed!*

Aimlinson eventually found the pages in *The Building News* which featured Money Penny's drawings and pushed it forward on the table.

"I showed him these," said Aimlinson. "He remembered working with you and recalled—as these drawings indicate—that you had a great deal of talent. I need talent, Mr. Money Penny. Most of all, I need your undivided attention."

Morris finished the last of his brandy.

"And that is what I would give you," he answered firmly. "As you can understand, I am very anxious to get started on a project such as yours. If you are sure you wish to proceed, then I can suggest a plan of action."

Money Penny's tone indicated that he had now taken grasp of the situation. He sensed that he clearly had the job, and so set out to win Aimlinson's confidence by a forceful display of his own. He leaned forward and sat on the edge of the sofa.

"We can discuss design, style and so-forth later—as there is too little time to discuss these issues right now," he said. "You've seen my work, so I assume the traditional building styles appeal to you. By that, I mean no Georgian or Classical influences..."

Aimlinson nodded briskly.

"Yes," he replied. "Olde English—definitely. Not too stiff or formal. Masculine, yet, relaxed. Comfortable, spacious...my wife has some ideas about the interiors. She very much desires an artistic approach; Morris & Company papers, etc. I like most of it but, well—we can work it all out I am sure."

"I suppose she would have had you hire Philip Webb," said Money Penny.

"I suppose," Aimlinson said with a chuckle. "But I understand he is of a very different type. Not for everyone, they say."

"No," said Morris. "Not for everyone."

Money Penny did admire the products of the Arts and Crafts movement. The beautiful buildings, furnishings, artwork and approach to design espoused by men like Webb could take his breath away. Yet he was less enthusiastic about the social doctrines and theorizing so prevalent in the movement. *Strange birds that make beautiful music*. Then he thought of Mrs. Aimlinson.

"Your wife," asked Money Penny, "Was she privy to your decision?"

"Regarding architects? Yes, I should say so," replied Aimlinson, who stood and walked across to the library table. "In fact, it was she who brought your drawings to my attention. The ones you had on exhibition."

"Really?"

"Yes," explained Aimlinson. "Thought I would like them. ..as she did. Said they had a very—how should I say—*delicate* quality. *Very thoughtful*, she said."



Moneypenny stood slowly and looked at another painting on the wall—some ruined castle that he did not recognize. He smiled and turned around as Aimlinson came toward him with a handful of papers which he was pressing into a book.

“Tell me, Moneypenny—how are you on garden planning?” he asked.

Morris thought for a moment.

“I’ve read Robinson and Blomfield,” he replied, referring to the two popular writers who had enjoyed a very public feud as to the merits of formal and informal garden planning. Moneypenny had come to the conclusion that the real problem was that the two men simply did not understand one another.

“Excellent,” said Aimlinson, pushing his book into the architect’s hand. “Mr. Sedding here has some excellent ideas as well. The papers inside are some of my notes on the property and house accommodations. See if you can make sense of them.”

Moneypenny held the little book up and looked at the cover. Its title was *Garden Craft: Old and New*.

“The relation of houses...to gardens and such,” added Aimlinson, as he stepped out into the hallway. “Not to be overlooked, you know.”

“Yes. Very vital,” replied Moneypenny.

The architect followed his new client down the hall and stopped in the entryway for a moment, as if he had forgotten something. He looked up the stairway into the dark, beyond the old portraits which stared back at him without emotion.

“Your wife—is she at home?” he asked.

“No,” said Aimlinson. “In London. You know about the house there...”

“Yes. Lubeck said—”

“In fact,” Aimlinson suddenly interrupted, “you should go there to see the house.” He put his arm on Morris’ shoulder and squeezed it gently. “I believe it would help you—especially concerning my wife’s tastes and requirements. I shall make arrangements.”

Moneypenny turned toward the door and realizing that he had no coat, paused briefly to contemplate the cutlasses in the umbrella stand. *Perhaps he uses them to trim his topiary*, he thought, laughing silently to himself.

“It’s been a pleasure,” said Morris. He shook hands with Aimlinson.

“I’ll contact you in a few days,” said the client, flashing his brilliant smile once again as he began to ease the door shut. Moneypenny was mesmerized just briefly, then his gaze was broken by the appearance of a woman who appeared at the far end of the entry hall—barely glimpsed within the last foot or so of gently closing doorway...

*Kla-chunk!*

*Not dressed like a housekeeper*, mused Moneypenny.

He turned and skipped down the stone stairs onto the street below. Looking back once more toward the house, he saw that the windows were absent of life, motion or shadow. He pointed himself across the park and began walking briskly toward home.



Money penny briefly toyed with the idea of stopping back at The Magpie before returning home. It would be nice to report his success to Lubeck, but the hour was growing late and he wished to review Aimlinson's notes before bed. He turned onto the damp darkness that was Lansdowne Street, and stepping over a strangely grouped mass of horse dung near the curb, he crossed down one block and stood in front of a cluttered shop. Above his head, gilded letters ran wide across the facade, spelling out *N. B. Manderston, Chemist.*

Money penny thought he saw a light in the back of the store, but he did not have the time nor the inclination to make a close inspection. His friend, Mr. Manderston, often kept late hours; reading over trade and medical journals, or sorting through the latest remedies for a wide range of ailments. Money penny walked a few more paces and pushed inside a doorway which led up to his room, which looked out over the street above the chemist's shop.

Entering his darkened room, Morris took off his tweed jacket and slung it carefully over a chair, then quickly loosened his tie and walked over to turn up the gas light near the window. Stepping over to an old pine cupboard, he retrieved a small metal contraption out of a dark corner and set it squarely in front of him.

It was a small Bunsen-burner device which Manderston had rigged up for him as a favor. A small gas line was carried up from the lab downstairs, which Money penny now turned open. He picked up a rusty spark igniter and held it close to the burner.

*Scritcha...scritcha....boof!*

Money penny adjusted the blue flame and—swishing a small kettle around to make sure there was still water inside—set it upon a circular frame above the burner.

After clutching a small tin of orange pekoe from the shelf above, he took Aimlinson's book and notes over to a large Morris chair by the window. He gazed at the blue and green tapestry upholstery and was silently pleased that it seemed to be holding up so well, considering the rather hard use to which it had been put. He adjusted the chair to sit more upright—he had slept in it the night before—and plopped down into a fabric field of willows and birds. Glancing quickly over to the water on the burner, he withdrew the notes from the gardening book and carelessly set them aside on a small table.

*The Garden. That is one thing we can worry about later,* he thought.

The first page of Aimlinson's notes was a list of the rooms which would be required in the house. It was a fairly conventional arrangement, including a large, double-height Living Hall, a Drawing Room and Dining Room, Library, Office and Billiard Room; at least five Guest Bedrooms in addition to a Master Chamber, a small conservatory and a full service wing, including accommodations for a staff of 6 to 10. There were some additional notes regarding a partial cellar and some secure underground storage, but as

Money penny scanned the list, he failed to see anything out of the ordinary. He found this just slightly disappointing. Indeed, it was a straightforward and typical room schedule for—and this was the part he found disappointing—a large, but certainly not grand house.

*Abhh...a test house*, thought Money penny as he glanced over again at the kettle on the cupboard. *But what else would you realistically expect?*

The fact that there were only five guest rooms was enough to tell him that this was not a house for grand weekend parties. There was no ballroom. The small staff which Aimlinson had indicated in the notes could not handle it, in any case. As the teakettle began to hiss, Morris stood up and tossed the notes back onto the chair. *There is a difference between a Country House and a House in The Country*—he reflected, preparing his tea steeper and placing it in a delicate blue and white china cup—and *this is definitely the latter*.

Money penny shuffled over and poured the water into the cup. He shut off the gas supply and returned to his chair to pick up the notes once again. He looked again at what Aimlinson had written at the bottom of the list...*partial cellar...secure storage...special considerations...to be discussed later*—what was that about? *Secure storage?* Did he not keep his money in the bank like everyone else? Money penny checked to see if his tea was ready, then withdrew the tin steeper and stirred the cup. He shook his head at the first page of notes and set it aside.

Turning to the next page, Morris saw a list of additional items under the heading: GROUND. These included a forecourt, a small kitchen court, a herb garden, stables and coach house for six vehicles, a formal garden with terrace and a tennis lawn. An additional storage barn was also noted here, along with a gardener's residence and a power house. Again, there was nothing out of the ordinary...the tennis lawn was becoming more common; as a sport, tennis was continuing to grow in popularity—more strenuous than croquet, yet conveniently open to the participation of women. That was not something that could be said of cricket, which Money penny enjoyed, though he was an average player at best.

Noting the power house, Morris made a mental note to review a catalog of electrical works as he set the second page aside.

The next page answered his question. Under the heading of ESTATE, there were more notes offering a brief description of Aimlinson's holdings: approximately 600 acres on the coast of Northumberland, with fine views to the sea and a small stream running from the west to the eastern shoreline. Half the land was wooded; and the notes also mentioned the existence of some ruined fortifications at the southeastern portion of the estate. Morris read on:

7 Mi. from Morpeth...Small sheep farm SW. ...Rough terrain, N.; W. boundary to sea, much wooded...Sloping hills to S. and E. flatter inland, SE corner; open; marshy closer to sea...

The property seemed to offer interesting opportunities for sighting and views, but that could only be determined by an on-site inspection. Morris was not familiar with the area, having traveled very little in the North. Happily noting the small stream, he wondered about the possibility of a water-powered dynamo to provide electricity.

Obviously Aimlinson was not planning to be a sheep farmer, since a property of 600 acres was very small in comparison to most country estates—especially those of successful industrialists. Nevertheless, it was just enough land for the modest house he had been retained to build.

Morris was fascinated by the idea of ruined fortifications. Perhaps the house could be situated in such a way that they could be brought into view. Moneypenny was a true romantic at heart, and the picturesque opportunities offered by a broken down wall or tower were simply too good to pass by. He finished his tea and set the cup gently down on the saucer. It was even possible that the ruins were of Roman origin.

He set the third sheet down and saw that the next page featured some very crude sketches of architectural details—probably from houses or buildings Aimlinson had seen. Moneypenny was about to inspect them further when a gentle knock came at his door.

“Morris? It's Nelson. Are you still about, man?”

Moneypenny set the remaining notes aside and went to the door.

“Well now, I suppose you could hear my footsteps down below,” Morris whispered. He opened the door and motioned for the chemist to come inside.

Nelson Baines Manderston was an aging man who had lived in Liverpool his entire life. He was a thick set gentleman, with lazily-trimmed hair and beard, and slightly reddened eyes peering out from behind his spectacles. Morris found him to be quite intelligent, personable and eager to please, though he could only take his company in small doses—smelling, as he often did, of strong chemicals and such.

Nelson stepped inside and sat down in Morris' favorite chair. He flopped a dog-eared scientific periodical onto his lap along with his folded lab apron.

“Would you like tea?” asked Moneypenny. “I just had some. The water might still be hot.” He turned to the cupboard, rolling his eyes as he did so. *God, why couldn't he have left that smelly apron downstairs?*

“No, thank you,” replied Manderston. “I can't stay for long.” He motioned to the cupboard as Moneypenny turned around to face him again. “Is the burner still working satisfactorily?”

“Oh yes,” replied Morris. “It really is a convenience.”

Without fail, Nelson found some way to remind Moneypenny of the favor each and every time he stepped into the room. Nevertheless, that fact—and the sour chemical smell—was a small price to pay for Nelson's insights on business, science, and life in general, which Morris found to be quite valuable.

Nelson removed his spectacles and rubbed at them with a clean corner of his apron.

“So...the last time I talked with you,” he said, “you mentioned the possibility of an important commission.”

“Yes. Well, it's all very definite, now,” answered Moneypenny. “Spoke to the client tonight, in fact.” Morris gathered up the notes and stuck them back into the gardening book, then sat down at a small table in the center of the room. “As it turns out, the client is George Aimlinson.”

Nelson suddenly stopped rubbing his glasses and raised his eyebrows.

“The Aimlinson of bat guano fame?” asked Manderston. “The noted purveyor of *Finest Quality Fertilizer for Flowers and Gardens?*” Such was noted on every package of the product.

“The very same.”

Moneypenny found it difficult to hide his overall pleasure, tempered as it was by the modest scale of this initial project. Nelson Manderston noted Morris' trademark smirk as he put his glasses back on.

“Finally—a substantial project,” Manderston proclaimed with great satisfaction. “I'm quite happy for you, Morris. What's he going to build?”

“A large house, in Northumberland,” replied Morris. “Not a huge estate, mind you—but still, as you said—substantial. I was just reviewing some of his notes.” Moneypenny gestured haphazardly to the book and the papers.

Manderston did not follow Moneypenny's gesture. His gaze suddenly seemed to be lost somewhere out the window.

“Well, that sounds about right,” Nelson said. “Aimlinson's sitting on a substantial fortune, of course. But the business isn't quite what it was.”

Moneypenny leaned forward in his chair and looked out the window to see what his friend was looking at. Seeing nothing, he inquired further.

“*Not what it once was, you say?* Has he fallen on hard times?”

“By no means,” said Manderston. “but you must understand, the whole bat guano thing was somewhat short lived. His father and older brother brought that about, at least twenty years ago. Somewhere off South America...well, you know...”

Moneypenny nodded.

“In any case,” continued Nelson, “the deposits of bat dung they so successfully exploited—well, they are not inexhaustible. Thousands of years old, and deep of course—but in comparative short supply by now. Fortunately for Aimlinson, as the supply has dwindled, the cost has risen. Thus, the premium price has restricted it's use to only the finest flowers and gardens...the blue ribbon crowd, you understand.”

Moneypenny rested his elbow on the table and his chin upon his fist.

“Not bad, but hardly something to sustain a fortune on,” Morris noted. “What of his father and brother?”

“Both dead,” said Manderston. “His father, about five years ago. His brother more recently. Killed in Africa, I believe.”

There was silence for a moment as Moneypenny absorbed what Nelson had told him. Then, a puzzled look came over his face.

“According to Lubeck,” Morris pointed out, “Aimlinson is still among his largest

customers. If the guano supply is worked out..."

"Nitrates," Nelson answered. He chuckled lightly. "That's the fertilizer most commonly used today. No doubt he's mining it from some South American desert. Chile, perhaps. Not as good as the guano—but extremely plentiful. No doubt that's what's keeping him going. Certainly you've heard of Colonel North."

Of course—*The Nitrate King*, recalled Money Penny. Now there was a rich man; North was right up there with diamond magnates like J.B. Robinson and any one of the South African rand lords.

"I'm sure Aimlinson's holdings are just a fraction of the Colonel's," noted Manderston. "Enough to provide a substantial income for now, but in the long run, he would do well to diversify his interests. The company is publicly traded, you know. Stock is down. But he remains the majority stockholder. By a wide margin."

"Is there anyone else of note?" Money Penny asked. "Stockholders, I mean."

Nelson played with the journal and apron upon his lap.

"I honestly couldn't tell you," he said. "It's public record, however. I suppose I could find out—if it's important to you."

"No," said Morris. "There's no need. It's really of no consequence."

Slowly, Nelson Manderston stood up and walked over to the window. He gazed down into the darkness of the street. It was getting colder in the room; Morris could just see his friend's breath upon the glass. He shifted uncomfortably in his chair, wondering if Nelson had anything more to say.

"In any case, my friend" Manderston finally said, "you now have a very successful client with a great deal of money to spend. Perhaps this project does not indicate the depth of George Aimlinson's resources, but rest assured—this is only a beginning."

Money Penny stood up and walked over to the window. Standing there next to Nelson, he found himself feeling a little better. He looked up over the warehouses across the street, into the night. Large, fluffy gray clouds drifted aimlessly inland under a blue-black sky, and the stars were clearly visible between the spaces in the clouds. For just a moment, it seemed Money Penny could feel the world's slow rotation beneath his feet.

"Willie did say he could build *two* houses," said Morris, with a sigh.

"I have no doubt."

There was a silent pause, then the old chemist stepped back towards the door, paper and apron in hand. He opened it and took a short step into the darkness of the hallway.

"And I have no doubts about you, Morris. Good night."

"Good night to you, Nelson."

Money Penny continued to gaze out the window for a few moments after the door shut behind him. Finally he turned down the gas light and took off his shoes. He then stepped over to the big Morris chair, and casually picking up a newspaper, he waved it back and forth to dissipate the residual chemical smell which lingered in the air. Money Penny readjusted the back of the chair downward, then, stuffing a pillow under his head, he settled in for the night.