



## CHAPTER TWO

Over the course of the next few days, any reservations Moneypenny may have had concerning Aimlinson's project promptly melted away. He attended church, to offer earnest thanks for his good fortune, and began to make preparations for commencement of the work. All in all, his mood remained quite cheerful, as if he had finally been freed from some state of suspended animation; some career nether world where he was neither here nor there—not visibly depressed, nor spoken of by his friends as unfortunate—yet clearly not employed to his full potential; unable, up to this point, to taste the sweet fruits of tangible success.

On Monday, he had a discussion with his employer, Mr. Beverly. Beverley was a builder whose large practice benefitted from Moneypenny's architectural experience and ability to interpret plans for the workmen, who were occasionally unable to do so through lack of education or—as an increasing occurrence—because they were foreigners who could neither read nor speak English. Whether masons or stonecutters, woodcarvers or plasterers, Moneypenny had developed a keen sensibility for directing workmen, offering clear and helpful direction without giving offense. This was clearly more important for the Englishmen than for the eager-to-please foreigners; for an increasing number of the skilled English craftsmen were socialists—always sensitive to matters of class and the precariously-balanced social hierarchy.

Moneypenny was able to do this without trick or affected disposition. Though well educated through the schools, Morris' father had been a tradesman himself, and had instilled in all his sons a well-grounded sensibility toward life and relationships with others. While his mother had encouraged his intellectual pursuits, his father had set out to teach him the spiritual value of hard work and the worthwhile physical release to be found in manual labor. As a result, Moneypenny was not entirely above pitching in on a work site, assisting the tradesmen when and where he could. His upbringing and generally casual demeanor made this seem natural, and it seemed so to those who worked with and under him. To say he was respected—indeed, well-liked—was stating the obvious.

The experience Moneypenny had gained working for Beverly had taught him a great many things he could not have learned by staying at an architectural office. He had seen many plans from many different architects; some of a very admirable quality and some which were almost unbuildable. Often, he acted as a liaison between Beverley's office and the architectural firms, suggesting various modifications, or in some cases more realistic alternatives.

Occasionally, this brought him into conflict with bloated egos and temperamental designers—some of whom were idiots and others who demonstrated pure genius.

Having seen the workings of the business from the builder's side, Morris resolved always to remain reasonable and open to suggestion when he should eventually establish his own architectural practice.

Being familiar as he was with the workmen, their habits and their overall capabilities, had given him an invaluable insight into what was possible and practical in terms of building a house. He sensed what effects and embellishments could be included—and at what cost. He knew how intricate or unusual design elements could affect construction schedules. He understood the true nature of materials...the stone, the oak, the clay tiles...the copper and lead metalwork...the plaster and rough cast stucco...how they were worked, joined together, and how they should be correctly installed. The result was a superior ability to make paper building plans become real...and to commit to paper only that which he knew could be successfully and completely achieved.

Yet Morris feared this knowledge had come at some cost. Perhaps it was a miscalculation...an inattention to better judgement in regard to his career; in any case, he had tarried too long at Beverly & Co. What was to be a temporary rounding-out of his work experience at the building firm became a major detour. Six months became a year...then one year, two. After three years, he knew he had been out of the architectural practice too long.

Of course, he worked on some minor projects on his own, but he could not bring himself to leave the secure, though modest income he had secured at Beverly's. He lost touch with his mentor, Earnest George, who had sought to set up for Moneypenny (as was his custom with all his associates when they went out on their own) at least one substantial commission. Through his own fault, Morris had let this opportunity slip away into the hands of another departing associate. Since then, he had not been in communication with George.

That would be remedied now—especially in light of the fact that his former employer had given Aimlinson a scale-tipping vote of confidence. Morris resolved to write a letter of thanks to George right away, after he dealt with his current employer.

As it turned out, the time was well situated for Moneypenny to cut his ties at the building office. He had just completed the supervision of some interior finish work at a large suburban house near Manchester. Currently, Beverly & Co. had several other jobs underway, and some in the negotiating stages; but Moneypenny's absence in any of these projects could conceivably be absorbed without undue hardship to the firm.

This became apparent in Robert Beverly's reaction to Moneypenny's imminent departure. Though it did come as a surprise, it was only a mild one—as though Mr. Beverly had suddenly been reminded of a forgotten birthday. *It was a day I knew would come eventually, Moneypenny*—he had said, firmly shaking Morris' hand. *Quite frankly, I was surprised you've been here this long, my friend.*

No matter. Arrangements were made for the completion and transfer of Moneypenny's assignments, which would take a few days to iron out. As a result, he removed only a few personal items from the office...one or two of his favorite reference

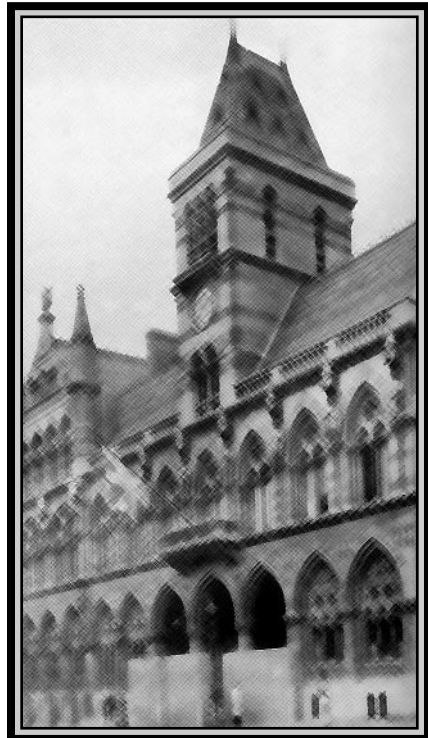
books and stack of recent messages and correspondence that he planned to review at home. A few of the other workers were apprised of his changing situation by Mr. Beverly, and together they all resolved to have a proper “going away” party for him in a few days.

With books and papers slung under one arm, Moneypenny stepped out of the massive plate glass office door and out into the sidewalk, just as one of Beverly's wagons pulled into the warehouse entry next door. The driver nodded hello and brought the empty wagon through the large wooden doors which silently opened before him. Morris stood motionless for a moment, watching as the creaking wagon and the horses' *clop-clop* faded into the back alley, finally muffled by the closing doors which claimed them, sight and sound and all.

He set off down the street, hoping to catch Lubeck at his office in time for lunch. As he made his way past the shop fronts, Morris found that his step grew stronger and more vibrant, as if this new chapter in his career had injected him with increased vigor and sharpened his sensitivity. He actually looked into the faces of the people he passed on the street; gazing into their eyes rather than casually averting his own—as was his usual custom, and the custom of most people. Morris felt certain that he must positively glow with self-confidence, and wondered if it was perceived by those who saw him.

From half a dozen blocks away, Moneypenny could see the looming, high-victorian gothic towers of the Tetkinson & Ballard shipping office. About thirty years old, the building reflected the robust, righteous commercial outlook that drove expansion of the British Empire through the middle decades of the century. Since then, the structure's hard-edged, polychromed exteriors had darkened and mellowed somewhat, much like the economic prospects of the country itself. Indeed, the intervening years had seen the export growth of other countries (specifically, the United States and Germany) dwarf Britain's own. Though this fact had been noted by a few economists and political leaders, the country as a whole remained oblivious to the gradual ebbing of its great mercantile power. This loss remained hidden by military adventures into far away dominions; fully obscured by dreams of far-flung empire and inspired by the most powerful navy afloat.

At times, Moneypenny even wondered if the great days of country house building had already passed. To be sure, many great houses were still being built, and the days of tea on the lawn and weekend house parties were far from over; but



new taxes and changing economic conditions made ownership of land less of a financial advantage. It had become increasingly difficult for the great families to rely on land income and agriculture to sustain their fortunes. In the old days, men made money and bought land to make more.

Now they made money and bought land because—well, because it was expected. Perhaps Aimlinson's modest estate represented the shape of things to come.

Money penny entered the vast tiled lobby of the shipping office, where four levels of open galleries rose above his head, supported by massive, gothic sandstone piers. Ranks of heavy oak doors lined the galleries—some open, some closed—and occasionally clerks could be seen darting from one to the other. Up on the second level, a muffled conversation was taking place, which, though it echoed congestively throughout the lobby, could not be understood in the least except for an occasional burst of laughter.

Morris went around the corner to a darkened stairhall, and went up four flights to Lubeck's office. He poked his head around the doorjamb and smiled.

“Well hello Mr. Money penny.”

“Hello, Catherine.”

Catherine Fellowes was Lubeck's secretary, and a very pretty and efficient one at that. For all his discreet ogling of women and constant flirtations, Lubeck had never made any suggestive comments about her. This was unusual for him. For his own part, Money penny found her quite attractive—in a bright-eyed, cheerful sort of way—easy to talk to, easy to look at...in fact, like a great many other secretaries and receptionists he had met. *I suppose it is important to maintain the professional relationship between...*

“Mr. Lubeck said you would be by soon,” she said, interrupting his thought. “To thank him.”

Money penny laughed as he walked toward her desk. He set his books and papers there for a moment, as his arms were cramping slightly .

“I suppose he's expecting lunch,” he said.

“Oh, I don't know,” she replied. “He's quite busy today. I'd be surprised if he can even leave the office.” She smiled at him warmly and then glanced at the books. He watched her look at them. He knew she would say something. He waited for her comment like a thirsty man waits for a cup of cool water.

“You look as if you're rather busy yourself,” she observed.

“Well, yes,” said Morris. “I am about to be. I just received a substantial building commission.”

The words came out awkwardly. He did not want to sound as if he were boasting. He looked at nothing as he spoke. Then he looked towards Lubeck's office door, which opened slowly. Lubeck became visible just as his conversation was fading away.

“Yes,” Lubeck said quietly, “I'll do what I can. I believe there is a good opportunity...”

He caught sight of Money penny and smiled quickly at him. Then he ushered the visitor out of his office, hand on shoulder. It was Oveertshoen.

“Ahh, Morris! You remember Paul.”

“Yes, of course,” replied Moneypenny. “I am sorry we didn't get to speak earlier.”

Morris had difficulty remembering the little man's last name. He was terrible with the names of people he had met only briefly. Sometimes he would be introduced to someone at a party and forget their name in the course of a few minutes' conversation. Understandably, however—he did not usually experience this problem with women.

“Hello.”

That was all that came from the little man. He almost whispered it, as if he was out of breath. Moneypenny saw that the top of his forehead was glistening with perspiration in the bright sunlight of the office. Before anything else could be said, Lubeck broke in.

“Mr. Moneypenny is here to celebrate,” he said, grinning at Morris, “but I'm afraid it will be a short celebration today.”

Lubeck patted Overtshoen on the back as they walked out the office doorway. Morris glanced at Catherine, who raised her eyebrows in puzzlement. He heard Lubeck mutter something else to the little man, then watched him nod goodbye and turn back into the office.

“How about the company room today?” Lubeck asked. “I really can't leave.”

“That would be fine,” said Moneypenny. “I have little time myself.”

Together they stepped out the office door into the gallery. The lobby was almost silent now, except for the *snap-snap* echo of a someone's footsteps on the tiled floor below. Moneypenny wondered if the footsteps were Overtshoen's.

“So—tell me about the little man, Willie.”

“Oh, there's not really much to tell, Morris,” said Lubeck, “...just a friend of a friend. Been in the country about 6 months, I believe. He came by to see me last week with a letter of introduction.”

“So what does he want? A position?”

“Here?” asked Lubeck. He shook his head and chuckled gently. “No. We really don't have anything that would suit him. But I told him I would speak to Aimlinson.”

“You think Aimlinson would have anything?”

“Assuming you are a capable architect,” replied Lubeck, “it's safe to say he'll have a new house before too long. That will certainly help.”

Moneypenny was perplexed.

“What? He's in the trades then?”

“Morris, Morris, Morris...” sighed Lubeck. “He's a domestic.”

“Oh yes—of course,” noted Moneypenny. A Gardener? Butler?”

“The latter,” said Lubeck. “Well experienced too, I might add, according to my friend's letter. Very good references.”

They entered the company dining room, sat down and ordered sandwiches and tea. The room was slowly emptying now. Morris noticed three of the servers huddled together in a corner near the kitchen, all in deep discussion.

“Well, even if you can convince Aimlinson to extend your friend a job—the new

house won't be ready for some time," observed Moneypenny. "What will he do till then? Aimlinson already has help. I've been to the house."

Lubeck grimaced.

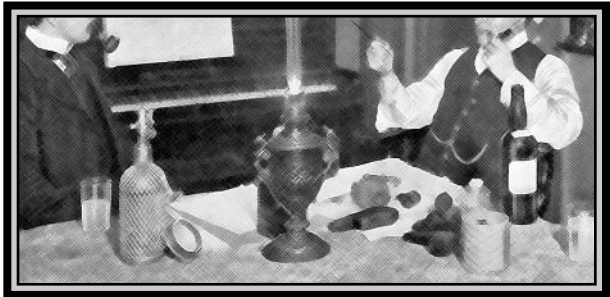
"I see you've met Parker," he said. "He won't be making the trip north. I think George means to sack him sooner or later. Not really working out as he had hoped. You know—personalities and all. He's only been there a few months, in any case."

"I see," said Moneypenny. He hoped his situation with Aimlinson would have a more satisfactory end.

Their meal continued on with a general discussion about the house commission. Morris told Lubeck of the notes Aimlinson had given him, and offered his initial observations of how the work would proceed.

"So, you knew he was setting up in the North, then?" asked Morris.

Moneypenny wondered if there was anything else Lubeck had neglected to tell him about the job.



"Well, perhaps he did mention it," admitted Lubeck, "But he was never very specific. Said he'd have Sir William Armstrong for a neighbor—but he's not that close by. Is he?"

Moneypenny thought of Armstrong's big house, Cragside—well named, since it overlooked a rugged and beautiful landscape from a high, pine covered hilltop. It was very picturesque. And very private, too—since Northumberland was the most sparsely populated area of Britain.

"No, he's not that close," said Morris. "But close enough, I suppose."

"Yes, well—I've never been to that part of the country," said Lubeck, "But from what I hear, anything in a day's ride is close. Seems strange, too. Aimlinson is really quite a social fellow. Likes gatherings, parties, discourse and all. He has his reasons, I suppose. God help his wife—it's a far cry from London."

Ah, yes—*the mystery woman*. Moneypenny was looking forward to meeting her.

Morris saw Lubeck look up, as if someone was approaching. He turned to see a young lad of about twenty years of age standing behind him.

"Mr. Lubeck?" the boy said, looking at both of them, as if waiting for a cue.

"Yes?"

"Telegram for you, sir. Young lady in the office said you'd be here."

Lubeck thanked the young man and quickly glanced at the paper.

"It's really for you, Morris," he said. "From Aimlinson. Seems he's up in Newcastle."

He handed the cable over to Moneypenny, who snatched it out of his hands and flattened it out on the table in front of him.

TO: W. LUBECK PLEASE INFORM MR. MONEYPENNY  
ARRANGEMENTS MADE (STOP) TRAIN FOR LONDON  
LEAVING IN TWO DAYS (STOP) TICKETS ETC. AT YOUR  
OFFICE TOMORROW (STOP) CAPT. NORVILLE TO MEET  
AT STATION (STOP) WEEKEND SHOULD BE SUFFICIENT.  
(STOP) WILL TALK LATER (STOP)

“He did say he would make arrangements,” muttered Morris. “I suppose I had better start packing my bags.”

“Ah...London. I wouldn't mind going myself,” said Lubeck. He sighed heavily. “But this is simply not a good time. Much too busy here. Fun for you, though, eh?”

At once, they rose from the table. Moneypenny remembered he had left his books up in Lubeck's office. As they started upstairs, his mind returned to the discussion he'd had with Manderston a few nights before.

“Willie...” inquired Morris, “I was wondering...what exactly is Aimlinson's situation? I mean, well—in terms of business and all...”

Lubeck's face tightened a little, as he seemed uncertain how to respond. But then the question *was* vague and rather unclear.

“He sells bat poop, Morris,” Lubeck eventually replied. “He is very rich. And business is quite good.”

“I understand that, Willie—but...”

“But *what*, Morris?” asked Lubeck. “Have you heard something?” Willie smiled at him and raised his palms upward. “I'll tell you everything I know.”

Moneypenny cleared his throat.

“I know he has sold a great deal of guano,” Morris said in a low tone of voice. “But I heard that much of it has been worked out. Shrinking supply—you know. I've heard he has expanded into...”

“Nitrates, yes.” Lubeck interjected. He shrugged his shoulders. “Of course. Everyone knows it. Far cheaper to mine. More plentiful, too. Not really as high quality a product, however...”

“So—all in all—you would say his prospects remain quite good?”

“Yes. Very good,” said Lubeck, sensing his friend's mild apprehension.

“Listen, Morris,” Lubeck continued, almost whispering, “I'll admit, shipments did slack off for a brief period, but he's rebounded rather well. I suppose the family's not making quite the money it was in the past...but he's adjusted smartly, so I expect the fertilizer markets will provide him with an enviable income for some time. Why do you ask? Certainly you don't think he'll leave you high and dry...”

Oh no—not at all,” replied Moneypenny. “I was merely curious. You understand, Willie. I like to have a clear picture in my mind of the client. Details, circumstances...that sort of thing. It all seems to help, somehow.”

“Mrs. Aimlinson can help you fill in some of the details, I am sure,” Lubeck said as

they approached the door to his office. "Please give her my regards while you're in London."

Lubeck stopped for a moment and put his hand on Morris' shoulder.

"I have to go speak with Mr. Ballard now," he said. "I'll see you when you return."

With that, he turned and casually walked away.