

Chapter 37

Scotland Yard

London

Roger Holland watched a slip of boats moored at Westminster Pier bob in the waves made from a hop-on, hop-off river cruise on tour down the Thames. He had just finished dinner, having abandoned his latest attempt at unpacking file cartons at the new office in the Curtis Green Building. The Central London venue had housed Scotland Yard a half-century earlier, until the Met outgrew the space and relocated to Victoria Street. Now, a billion pounds in government cuts had forced the iconic police force back to the municipal structure on the embankment overlooking the river. The recent downsizing had also necessitated Holland's move to superintendent quicker than he expected. In less than one week, he had improved both his position, and view.

He had just launched back into the job at hand when he heard a knock on his door. "Come."

Sam Anderton breezed into the office, nearly tripping over a stack of sealed containers. "Still boxed in I see," she joked.

"Thirty years ago there would have been a pretty, young secretary to bring me coffee and organize everything."

"Thirty years ago that comment would have been considered appropriate." Anderton gave Holland a sideways glance.

"I only meant that your lot have always been better at things like that," Holland replied, and then added, "at most things, actually."

“Do you need some assistance?”

Holland laughed. “With this office, or the Ahmad case?”

“Perhaps I can help with one of those.” Anderton held up a large envelope.

“You found something.”

“That depends on what we are looking for.”

Holland took the file and walked it back to his desk, which had been pushed against the window. The only thing on it, other than a dried stain from spilled coffee, was a handful of documents taken from Ahmad’s office, and several letters from a flat the professor kept in Notting Hill. Typically, the majority of victims Holland investigated left something behind that appeared incriminating on the surface, but which was almost always dismissed as circumstantial under deeper scrutiny. With Ahmad, there was nothing out of the ordinary, at all, and nothing usually meant something to hide.

Holland emptied the contents of the A4 envelope onto his desk, which included the key Anderton had found in Ahmad’s shoe, and a small spiral bound notebook, which was filled with dates and amounts.

“Ahmad kept a safety deposit box at HSBC.”

“Is that so.” Holland hadn’t failed to notice that his sergeant was clearly pleased with herself. She was an exceptional investigator, and as superintendent, he would miss working with her on a regular basis. “Wasn’t that service phased out at most institutions?”

“Most banks discontinued safety deposit boxes several years ago. HSBC stopped their service just this spring, and gave customers sixty days to clear out the contents.”

“And this ledger?”

Anderton said nothing, but turned to shut the door.

“Uh-oh—” Holland said, as Anderton turned back to face him and crossed her arms.

“Let’s hear it,” he said, crossing his own.

“It came from an assistant manager at the HSBC in Cambridge.”

“Ahmad kept a safety box there?”

Anderton shook her head. “His was actually at the branch on Queen Victoria Street, in London. I found a receipt hidden among a collection of old papers in his flat, which led me to a box he rented out eight years ago.”

“And?” he asked, looking over the contents of the ledger.

“And I couldn’t make any headway with the two higher-ups who did little but deflect my questions. I was told the inquiry needed to be official, and even then, there was the suggestion it wouldn’t get far. Privacy issues and client confidentiality, they said.”

“I’m surprised they bothered at all. It wasn’t too long ago that HSBC were caught up in a tax evasion and money laundering scandal. Very public and very bad for business. They have been closing branches and rebranding ever since, and will tread carefully as a result.”

“The same can’t be said for some of their smaller offices.” Anderton gestured toward the book. “On a hunch, I visited the branch nearest Ahmad’s flat in Cambridge. I had no sooner mentioned him to an assistant manager, a very old, very sweet lady, when she offered her condolences and brought me that ledger. I think she assumed I was a family friend. She said she had known the professor for thirty years, and when Ahmad hadn’t emptied his box in the allotted time at Queen Victoria Street, someone over there sent the contents to his local branch as a courtesy.”

“Let me guess, when she brought you the book, you hadn’t officially identified yourself.”

Anderton shook her head. "And I didn't afterward, either."

"Well, sergeant," Holland replied as he sat down in his chair. "That was either very stupid, or very clever."

"To be determined by?"

"Where this goes, and who finds out."

Anderton frowned, but Holland held up his hand. "We'll deal with that at the appropriate time. As for the ledger, what do you make of it?"

"Lots of money going somewhere. Deposits, I assume, but nothing to distinguish what they might pertain to."

"Which begs the question—"

"Why Ahmad kept it in a safety deposit box."

Holland nodded.

"And Healey? How much has the Security Service cut us out of the investigation?"

"To the extent that I'm getting little more than scraps from MI5's table. Just enough to maintain the appearance of a joint effort."

"So your assumption was correct," Anderton replied. "What is going on?"

"I don't know. I am usually kept in Healey's loop, primarily because he just can't help himself. The man relishes providing me details if for no other reason than to show how clever he is." Holland stood and walked over to the window. "But with the Ahmad case, he's given me the shove off."

"Sounds like you're officially off the case"

"I am officially in this office, earlier than expected, which might as well be the same thing." Holland moved back to his desk, and placed the ledger beside a stack of files he had

been organizing earlier. "You're being reassigned to Billy Barclay, by the way. Until then, I need you to keep on the paper trail from the bank. Quietly, mind you. You will report only to me."

"There is something else, sir. Ahmad's last call was to his housemaid. She said he rang at just after 7:00 p.m. to remind her he would be in London for supper. Apparently, someone knocked on the office door during the call. She said she heard Ahmad bid the person entry, and then say, '*you're late, I presume.*'"

"What do you make of it?"

"Ahmad had a dinner reservation for 8:30 p.m. at Simpsons, in London. His satchel was packed and he had already wrapped his scarf, which means he was on the way out. And what did his housemaid overhear? 'You're late, I presume.' *I presume.* Ahmad wasn't certain if the person at his door, whom he didn't know or recognize, was the one with whom he was to meet. I think it was the assassin who set the meeting, for after hours, and was then intentionally late, to ensure the professor would be alone at the end of the workday. Once Ahmad realized he was in danger, he threw his shoe in self-defense, which shattered the window. The unexpected move, and attention, hurried the killer into action before he intended, which may also explain why he was caught on camera exiting the Lodge."

"Very good, sergeant."

"Something still doesn't add up."

"No, it doesn't." Holland handed Anderton back the notebook. "Which means you have your work cut out for you."

"A term I've never understood."

“It originated with the business of tailoring in the nineteenth century. The easiest step was cutting the cloth. Putting the garment together afterward was the difficult part.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning,” Holland replied, “I think Ahmad reaped what he sowed. Find out what he was into that got him killed.”