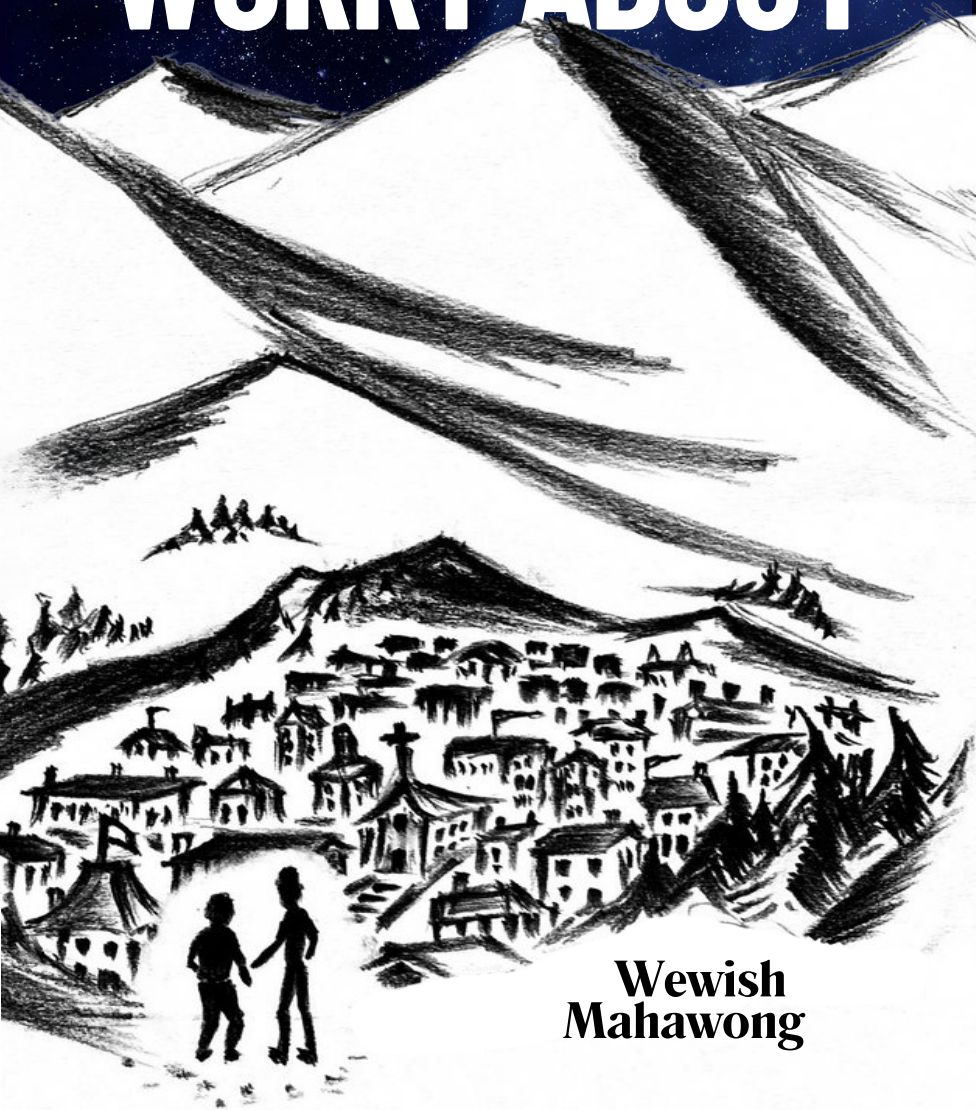


NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT



**Wewish
Mahawong**

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WEWISH MAHAWONG

illustrated by
PHITSANU MAHAWONG

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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To my friend Hashi

*Those stories look great.
When will you publish them?
you asked.*

*This book
is my response.*

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Preface

I was browsing through a bookstore tucked away on Reynard Street when, upon flipping through an old copy of the Encyclopaedia Britannica marked "Property of K.F.V. and J.L.W.", I found that the inside had been hollowed out to make room for a cardboard box.

Intrigued at my discovery, I purchased it and returned to my flat to inspect its contents. I found that the box was filled with a number of loose pages. Some had been typewritten, while others had been written out in a nearly illegible hand. Some papers were bound together or otherwise had markings to indicate how they ought to be ordered, while others were simply notes that were stuffed haphazardly into the box.

There were also a number of newspaper clippings, letters, and telegrams, most of which were all from the year 1949. Through reading and organising them, I came to realise that they formed a very intriguing set of stories, and began transcribing them onto paper.

I have tried to consistently follow the story as told by the author of the documents. At times I have departed from his narrative in order to add sections in the third person that detail what people other than himself were thinking. These sections are reconstructions based on painstaking research, and I can vouch for their general accuracy, if not the specific details in them. I feel that these intriguing stories, having languished in a dusty box for so long, deserve to be brought to the attention of the public.

This is my humble attempt at doing just that.

Part One

THE EVENING STROLL

The People's Detective

The tender rays of the afternoon sun were still playing across my small office, gliding softly over the dusty portraits that lined my wall and illuminating my cheap wooden chair before finally settling upon the plaque atop the desk, giving the letters of "James L. Wilson, MD" a distinctive yellow gleam. The gleam soon faded into a faint one, however, as I slid down the blinds on each of my windows before finally petering out as I turned the key in the lock of my office door. Then, with my hands in my pockets, I made my way out of the hospital into the cold streets of a London covered with the bitter frost of January, 1949.

I knew that a doctor wasn't supposed to leave the hospital as early as I had at three in the afternoon. Rather, if I had been a hardworking doctor with a line at my door, I ought to have left closer to six or even eight. Although I worked hard to properly treat every single one of my patients, the economy was struggling, and the number of chairs filled in my waiting room were dwindling.

The pattern of this week, and in fact every week, was this: I would open my office, stay sitting at my desk staring at my degree, until finally giving up in despair at around three o'clock and returning to my flat. I felt that listening to my landlord's constant threats to evict me for nonpayment of rent was at least more interesting than simply sitting in silence, devoid of any stimulation whatsoever.

But this day as I made my way through the streets and al-

leys of London, my feet cold and my fingers frosty, some unknown force drew me away from my usual path. I was absorbed in my financial situation and did not realise this until a leaf, thin and frozen, crunched under the sole of my tattered shoe. Snapping out of my stupor, I looked down at its remains, then up once more, only to realise that I had unknowingly strolled into the grounds of Hyde Park.

Newly aware of this, but still without any destination in mind, I continued sauntering through the park. The trees were tall, but their leaflessness made them seem harmless. Every so often, I would see a squirrel run across the stone path in front of me or a pair of birds under a bench pecking at the remnants of some workman's lunch. These sights of life were rare and had little effect on the general atmosphere of gloom that permeated the entire area, adding to the dreary cloud that seemed to envelop the whole of London.

I think I had been wandering aimlessly in circles for some time before I heard several faint voices in the distance emanating from the northeast corner of the park. As I approached it, I recognised the familiar layout of Speakers' Corner and, perhaps more importantly, the heated debate that was occurring there. I passed several lesser figures standing on chairs, attempting to make their voices heard over the din. Pushing my way through the crowd, I saw a man in the centre, standing on a soapbox.

The man in question was dressed in an ironed plaid shirt, corduroy trousers, and a distinctively round bowler hat. As the tails of his maroon coat fluttered in the wind, I saw that he was around the same age as me, but his hair was thinner and lighter, his face was extraordinarily pale, and there was something skeletal—even cadaverous—about his physique. As a physician, on these observations alone, I would have dismissed him as suffering from some terrible consumption. As he swung his

head around to face my side of the crowd, however, I saw that his eyes were a brilliant blue, imbued with a fierce determination. With an equally piercing gaze, this paradox of a man addressed the crowd:

“My friends, today, wealth is far too concentrated in the upper classes. In Whitehall, men in starched white shirts feast on juicy pork chops while poor mothers in Stepney struggle to feed their children with their meagre rations. The architects of this rationing, the government, sit in the House of Commons all day and drone on about vague plans for economic growth and cleaning up the streets—but their reforms benefit only the upper class and do not spare even tuppence for the poor! What are we to make of this cold-hearted ignorance?”

The crowd surrounding the man erupted in jeers and boos.

“Commie sympathiser!”

“Fellow-traveller!”

“Stalin’s useful idiot!”

But these comments only strengthened the resolve of this impressive man, who forged onward:

“I am no communist, my friends—we only know too well the effects of Stalin’s dictatorship and repression of the Russian populace. But, I implore you, we cannot leave everything up to the free market to decide, for who has true power over the markets? The lower classes—the factory workers, the street sweepers, even the clerks and shop attendants—have no say, no opportunities whatsoever. I realise the importance of looking after number one, but surely, we can spare at least a thought, if not a penny or two, for the lower classes who struggle every day and receive but more struggle in return?”

The man said every word in a clear, resolute tone, with the result that the speech was extremely stirring and nearly roused me into stepping forwards and declaring agreement with the man’s cause. The crowd, however, dissuaded me from doing so

with their negative reaction to the man's speech. They heckled him with hollers and hisses before one enterprising young boy began to throw balls of paper at the man. He tried to continue his speech, but finally, he was forced to dismount from his soapbox and disappear into the depths of Hyde Park.

I continued my stroll, this time upon the sidewalk that stretched around the park, and a newsstand caught my attention. It was run by an old, bearded man, who leaned cheerfully on his cane as he arranged the daily papers. I paused to pick up one, and as I read the headline, someone tapped me on the shoulder.

"Good day, sir," said a smug but familiar voice behind me. "Perhaps you have some interest in that paper?"

I whipped around. It ought to have been the old man arranging the newspapers, but—it was not! The cane—gone! The beard—disappeared! The wrinkles and years—completely vanished! Gone was the old man, replaced with the smiling face of the thin but determined man who had just been declaiming on the wretched state of the poor at Speakers' Corner only a few minutes earlier.

I was speechless.

Seeing my reaction, my interlocutor chuckled. "Have I surprised you, perhaps, sir?"

"No, no," I stuttered, attempting to regain my composure. "No, I mean—how did you—"

"Surely it is obvious," the man continued, and I registered a hint of dissatisfaction in his voice, "that it was using disguise—and by shedding that disguise." Suddenly, he straightened and stretched his hand out towards mine. "I must apologise—I have not properly introduced myself. My name is Volker—Professor Karl F. Volker, born in Germany and now a British citizen."

"Dr. James L. Wilson," I replied, slowly shaking Volker's

hand, for I was still dazed by his sudden dramatic appearance.

"Ah—a physician!" Volker smiled. "Clearly, sir, you are—no, don't tell me—a surgeon? No—an anaesthesiologist! There is a scent of ether about you but without the calluses where the surgeon holds his tools." He looked down at his watch. "And it is four o'clock—closing time. Oh, how time flies."

Volker began to lock up his newsstand while I stood there, watching him with interest, my astonishment having morphed into amazement and, finally, curiosity. Once Volker had finished, he took pity on me and offered that I take a walk with him. As we reentered Hyde Park, the sun had begun to set, bathing the trees in a warm orange light which made them seem far more bright and welcoming than the depressing atmosphere of half an hour ago.

"No, the newsstand is only a part-time pastime of mine," he responded when I asked him about his work. "But it calms me, it allows me to be in contact with the masses, and—most importantly—it provides me with some respite from the staid, stifling atmosphere of my university."

"What subject do you teach?" I enquired.

"Political history," Volker replied, pulling back his coat to show me a set of working papers that he had stuffed into his pocket. All written by him, they had such contemplative titles as "Menshevik Ideology: A Reevaluation" or "Reflections on the Yenan Soviet, 1937–1945."

"I always found history to be something of a dry subject," I admitted. "Back in school, I invariably fell asleep in history class because I had to memorise volumes of dull facts—"

"My dear sir," cried Volker. "History is not simply a collection of truths to be memorised. Historians collect evidence—conducting interviews, poring over manuscripts, digging up artefacts—and then make inferences and deduce conclusions from the evidence. These are the same methods I use for in-

vestigation.”

“Do you mean,” I stammered, both amazed and incredulous at Volker’s perceptive and erudite explanation, “do you mean that you always think like this?”

“But of course. These inferences would have taken you several hours to make, and even then, there would be no guarantee that you would have come to the correct conclusion. However, in my mind, the train of thought, so to speak, took the logical route from facts to deductions in under five seconds. Where other people see an old man sitting on a bench and think no more, I can infer his profession, his hobbies, his place of residence, the length of his marriage, his preferred brand of whisky, the number of letters he writes a day, whether he leaves the back door of his home open or not—so on and so forth.”

Volker perceived my doubt and added, “It is no fault of yours, for it took me years to train myself to think like this, and I still make the mistake of jumping to conclusions based on warped or nonexistent evidence. Always remember that theories must be based on evidence, and evidence must not be twisted to fit theories, for what is asserted without evidence can be likewise dismissed without evidence.”

I was beginning to understand his methods, but then a thought occurred to me. “You know, Professor Volker—”

“Volker,” Volker insisted.

“—Volker, that, with your abilities, you could make thousands of pounds a year as a consulting detective for the wealthy, the titled, the people whom you could charge extortionate fees for your services. Have you perhaps considered—”

I had thought that the question was not unreasonable, but I immediately realised that it had been exceedingly naive when Volker’s expression suddenly changed into one of outrage and incensed fury. In a rage, he spit onto the darkening pathway and snarled:

“Capitalists! Exploiters! Parasites of the proletariat!”

He seemed as if he was about to march around in circles, spewing vitriolic attacks against the bourgeoisie and their sickening wealth, when he saw the startled expression on my face. My mouth was hanging open from the malice and virulence of his enraged words. Suddenly, his wrath evaporated as if it were steam that had escaped from an overheating kettle, and he slumped down onto a park bench.

“I must apologise, Dr. Wilson—” he began.

“Wilson,” I corrected as I sat down alongside him. “Just Wilson.”

“—Wilson,” Volker sighed, smiling sadly at me, “for my sudden outburst of anger there. It was unmerited—it was uncalled for.” Then his smile faded. “Time and time again, I have attempted to control my temper, and time and time again, I have failed. It is a lesson that I am still trying to learn.”

“It is understandable,” I replied, trying to soothe Volker. “For every one of us has character defects. My father was occasionally far too indulgent and obliging, while my brother could sometimes be extremely arrogant and snobbish. Likewise, I—”

I paused, too frightened to say it. Luckily, by then, Volker had begun speaking once more.

“What I mean,” he explained in a calmer tone, “is that there are already hundreds of detectives catering to the rich and powerful. The upper class retain their own private detectives, while the business owners, whenever they get into trouble, approach consulting detectives to clean up their messes for them. Nor are the politicians and statesmen of this country immune to the practice, for they have the investigators of the Secret Service to ferret out dissidents and subversives.

“The only class of society that does not have its own detectives is the working class, the proletariat.

“When I started in this field, I knew that I did not want to be a private investigator, a consulting detective, or a secret

agent. No, I wanted to work for the interests of those who had been routinely ignored by high society and detectives of high society.”

Hearing this, I decided to ask Volker a question that had been in my mind for a long time.

“Then what kind of detective are you?”

Volker paused, and as he silently gazed into the distance, I knew that those piercing blue eyes had begun to cloud over with emotion as he searched for his answer to my question. Finally, he turned his face to mine and spoke in a slow but determined voice:

“I am a people’s detective.”

For a moment, both of us were silent, he with apprehension and I with admiration. As we looked at each other wordlessly, we heard the faint creak of the trees surrounding us. They bent in the wind, now nearly invisible because the sun had disappeared over the horizon, leaving only a flickering, indistinct glow from electric lighting.

Then, a sudden hoot from an owl shattered the tranquil calm and unease, and Volker jumped up, his typical cheerful demeanour restored.

“How long we have been talking for! That reminds me, Wilson—I have a little consultation that I must attend to, free of charge for my client, naturally. Perhaps—” he nodded as he looked at me, and a broad smile spread across his face “—perhaps you would like to accompany me?”

“Oh,” I responded, nervous and delighted at the same time, “only if I wouldn’t be of any inconvenience—”

“On the contrary,” Volker replied enthusiastically, “your presence would be of the greatest convenience for me.”

But I still wavered, and Volker, recognising this, chuckled.

“Come, my dear Wilson,” he said, seeing my hesitation. “There is nothing to worry about.”



As we made our way down into the Tube and stopped to wait at a grimy platform, Volker handed me a letter. As I unfolded it and read it, I observed that it had been written by an uneducated hand on cheap paper, with low-quality ink that seeped through the paper or abruptly disappeared in random places. There was also a distinct layer of dust on it, I noticed as I squinted at the missive:

Dear Mr. Volker ("I prefer people calling me plain old mister," said Volker),

I have heard that you are a people's detective—that you work for the benefit of the poor, free of charge. I was wondering if I might trouble you with a case that may seem little to you but is very close to my heart. In the mornings, I usually find my dog, Tony, sleeping outside my door. This morning, however, although his bowl was empty, Tony had disappeared. I asked around, but nobody knew where he had gone.

Tony has been my constant companion for the past eight years, and without him, I am lost. I cannot overstate how grateful I would be if you could find him and bring him back to me. Please—I beg you to help me! You may find me on the third floor of 30 Randall Gardens, Flat 32. Tomorrow is my day off, and I will be pleased to answer any questions you might have.

Yours most sincerely,

ANDREAS KINTNER.

The letter was dated with the previous day, and by the time I had finished reading it, I was simultaneously astonished and puzzled.

"Volker," I cried, handing the sheet of paper back to him as the sound of a train reverberated through the underground

platform, "why on earth, out of all the possible cases you must receive in the mail, did you choose this one?"

"Of course," Volker replied testily as the train slowed to a halt at the platform, "if you disagree with my judgement, you may leave whenever you wish."

"Not at all," I assured him hastily as the doors opened and we stepped into a carriage. "But the disappearance of a dog, do you not think it will resolve itself? Surely it is too minor, too unimportant—in summary, too ordinary to waste your immense powers of logic and deduction on?"

My new friend sighed. "My dear Wilson," he replied as the doors of the carriage slid shut and the train began to move, "when you get to know me better—that is, *if* you get to know me better—you will understand that the complicated can sometimes be all too simple, and that the simple is, in most cases, more complex than on first sight. Always remember that the extraordinary is usually ordinary, and it is really the ordinary that is extraordinary."

As I went silent, turning this new philosophy over in my mind, we were rapidly making progress through the Tube. By the time we arrived at Whitechapel, the station clock showed that the time was half past five. London was now pitch black, and as we warily made our way through the grimy streets of the East End, we saw several beggars eye us hungrily before being invariably placated by a few pennies from Volker's purse.

Finally, we reached 30 Randall Gardens, a drab block of flats that seemed all the more ominous in the dim glow of the flickering streetlights. The outside walls were filthy and caked with mud, while murky water dripped from the cracked roof tiles. As we twisted the doorknob and entered, the wallpaper was damp and moulding. A spiral staircase was at the end of the hallway, and after going up three flights of stairs—passing a good-natured janitor on the second floor—we reached the

third floor, where there were two flats crammed together. Volker knocked on the middle door, on which the number "32" had been crudely painted, and it was opened by a thin man in casual attire. His hair was greying, and wrinkles had conquered most of his face, but his eyes still had a boyish look in them, and when he saw Volker, he let out a shriek of delight.

"Mr. Volker! Is it actually you—the famous detective? So you have decided to take my case! I cannot thank you enough. Please, come in—and your companion as well. It must be terribly cold out there."

The inside of Andreas Kintner's flat was not much warmer than the outside, but the cold was lessened by the warm welcome that Kintner gave us. The walls of the flat were bare, and the only furniture consisted of two couches in the centre, along with an armchair and a small table. We sat on a couch while Kintner took the armchair. Opposite us on the second couch was an equally old man with a pronounced nose who looked at us with interest. Kintner introduced him to us as Nathan Miller, who lived in the flat adjacent to his.

"I'm very pleased," Miller chuckled, "that you detectives are finally here to relieve some of Andreas's stress. For the entire day, he has done nothing but pace around his flat and fret over his missing dog to anyone who will listen, and the only person who will listen is me."

"I am agitated because it is stressful," Kintner moaned, sinking deeper into his armchair. "I've been unable to sleep at night, worrying whether poor Tony has been run over by a bus, or drowned in the Thames, or is stuck in some gutter howling grievously for me. You may laugh at it, Nathan, but hopefully, you, Mr. Volker, can understand the misery that I am in."

"I comprehend it fully," murmured Volker, "and I would encourage you to begin telling the story of poor Tony's disappearance to me. Leave no detail out, however minor."

Kintner sighed. "I cannot forget a single detail, for I have agonised over the matter for two days now. But I think, Mr. Volker, that you ought to know a little background about myself first.

"A year or two ago, I was a clerk in one of the large banks in the city. As I was careful with my salary and eventually managed to save a large sum of money, I anticipated that I would be able to retire at least five years ahead of schedule. Those were good times, Mr. Volker—those were good times.

"But then I made a mistaken investment."

"A mistaken investment?" Volker enquired.

"All of us did back then," Miller interjected. "I was a minor manager at a department store in the city, and I remember it well. The advertisements were everywhere—the newspapers all praised the scheme. I speak, of course, of the People's Equity Fund."

I remembered the scheme very clearly, and evidently, Volker did too, for he nodded in comprehension. It had been set up by Martin Helnan, a former mathematician turned investment manager who purported that the fund would bring returns of 20% per annum. Exactly what the fund invested in was never revealed, but Helnan had claimed that it was the perfect investment for the poor and middle class, christening it "The People's Equity Fund," and he had even accepted investments in the form of minor assets such as engagement rings or jewellery.

After a year, the scheme collapsed, and Helnan, along with his associate, Morris Browning, disappeared ten of thousands of pounds richer, leaving many who had invested their life savings impoverished and destitute. The fund was later discovered to have been a Ponzi scheme, with Helnan having skilfully cooked the books with his mathematical expertise.

Kintner continued his story. "And then, there were layoffs

at the bank, and just when I had lost my entire life savings, I lost my job as well! I finally managed to find a position as a ticket agent at Euston station, but it was a difficult time. I only got through it with the help of my dog, Tony."

"Tell me a few facts about Tony," Volker prompted.

"Tony is my dog, brown with white markings, a mixed breed that I found on the streets as a puppy. He has been with me for eight years, and ever since the day I met him, I have loved him like a son. Tony stays in my flat during the day, but at night, he goes out to wander the streets with the other street dogs. When I return from work at midnight, I always leave him a bowl of food for him to eat when he comes back, usually at four or so, though he plays in the hallway for a bit and doesn't eat until five in the morning.

"Yesterday, after I got home a few minutes after midnight, I filled his bowl up for him as usual and placed it outside my door. Then, when I woke up at six the next day and went out, I fully expected to find Tony sleeping in the hall. The bowl of food was empty, but Tony was gone. I ran up and down the stairs searching for him but found no trace of my beloved dog."

"Did you ask the janitor where he had gone?" Volker enquired.

"Old Franz knew nothing about it. He just said that Tony had probably gone out the back gate, as he usually does. The gate is always locked, but there's enough space under it for a dog to slip through."

Volker turned to Miller. "Did you see anything, Mr. Miller?"

Miller shook his head. "I now work as a milkman—I got laid off from the department store as well—so I have to wake up early in the mornings. When I left my flat at three yesterday, there was still food in the bowl. That's all I know."

"Hmm," Volker mused, and I saw that his expression was becoming as contemplative as his working papers. "That must

mean... Tony came up here some time between three and six to eat his food, but after that... he disappeared. Where, we do not know.”

All of a sudden, he leapt up and strode over to the wall. Then, to our surprise, he leaned against it and closed his eyes as if he were taking a moment of rest. After hitting the wall a few times as he swung his cane thoughtfully, deliberating over the case in his mind, Volker opened his eyes and proceeded to the next wall, repeating the process for all four sides of the room. Kintner and Miller watched him doubtfully, and I could see that they were becoming sceptical about his supposed investigative prowess. I, too, was beginning to wonder the same.

At last, Volker opened his eyes and smiled at the three dubious pairs of eyes staring at him.

“You must forgive me,” he chuckled, rising from his position against the wall and returning to the couch. “My methods can sometimes seem bizarre to some, but I assure you that the results will be more than satisfactory.”

“Yes, well—oh, please, it is I you must forgive,” Kintner cried, rising from his armchair and walking to his pantry. “I have not offered you anything to drink. Tea? Drat! It seems that I am out of leaves. Nathan, do you—”

“Indeed I do,” Miller replied, beckoning for Volker and I to rise and follow him out of Kintner’s flat and into his. Miller’s flat was just as sparsely decorated as Kintner’s, though the wall between them was completely covered with bookshelves on Miller’s side. I glanced at his books while Miller poured hot water into three cups, dipped a tea bag into each, and spooned sugar into them from a large box. While he did so, Volker engaged the old milkman in small talk:

“You know, I would like to go to Kinney’s bookshop one day, but it’s rather a far walk from here—seven blocks north and twenty-four blocks west. Of course, there’s a diagonal

path, but I'm not sure how much shorter it is—"

"Six blocks shorter, sir—the diagonal would be the equivalent of twenty-five blocks long," Miller replied.

"Oh, have you been there before?"

"No, I've never heard of the place—but from what you say about it, it sounds good." Suddenly, Miller clutched his back. "Oh!" he cried. "My back pain has returned."

"There is a chemist," said Volker, "who makes ointments that work wonders for such aches and sores. I met..."

To me, the conversation seemed trivial and pointless. When the tea was done, we returned to Kintner's flat, where Volker asked Kintner another question.

"Did any of Tony's actions in the past few weeks strike you as strange?"

Kintner scratched his chin, thinking. "Well, several months ago, I heard Tony barking in the hallway at around four o'clock in the morning. This went on for a few days, but the barks eventually subsided. I thought this was strange because Tony usually only barks at strangers."

"Thank you," Volker responded, rising from the couch and pulling me up with him. "I think that we have inconvenienced you enough. I shall now pursue other lines of inquiry."

"Do you think you will be able to find Tony?" Kintner asked worriedly.

"I have every hope that you will see him soon, for there are a number of promising indications."

Kintner leapt up and clasped Volker's left hand in both of his. "Thank you, thank you so much, Mr. Volker!" he cried, shaking it profusely and with great enthusiasm. "You are one of the few people in the world who would take the time to care about a poor man's lost dog, and because of that, you are also one of the most generous and caring."

"Thank you," Volker replied with a smile. "I just have one

more question, this time for Mr. Miller. You are a milkman, yes?”

“That’s right,” Miller replied.

“May I ask what your customers’ preferences for milk are?”

“Well, some of them like whole milk, some prefer skimmed, and some want it semi-skimmed. I don’t think I can give you much insight—I just deliver the milk without thinking about it.”

“Ah,” said Volker enigmatically. “And yet, that is a very insightful answer. Incidentally, I prefer semi-skimmed milk.”

And with this inscrutable comment, Volker departed the flat alongside me, leaving two puzzled men behind him.



When we reached the ground floor of the building, Volker stopped and turned to me with a grave expression.

“The plot,” he said in a grim voice, “continues to thicken. There is some devilish force afoot in this case, spinning a dark, ominous web of mystery, of malevolent intrigue, of the most sinister corruption.”

“In the case of a missing dog?” I exclaimed incredulously.

Volker looked carefully from side to side at the walls of the dilapidated hallway before leaning in and whispering to me, “My dear Wilson, I beg that you not view the disappearance of the dog as one isolated incident, but rather an occurrence—a minor one, true, but an occurrence all the same—that plays a part in a larger network of similarly minor occurrences, which will eventually build up into a major incident. It is this one major incident that most people will fixate on, ignoring or undermining the minor occurrences that contributed to it.”

“Assuming, of course, that Tony’s disappearance was indeed a crime,” I retorted dryly, feeling that it was necessary to emphasise this caveat. “If he simply ran away on a whim—”

“Then my entire theory would be disproven. But no!” Volk-

er shook his head tenaciously. "It is impossible. To you, the odds of the disappearance being an accident are ten to one. For me, they are one to a thousand, a million—for my instincts refuse to back down!"

He began frantically pacing the hallway. "There is something about this case, Wilson, some minor indications which I cannot yet identify, that make me suspect that this case might be more complicated than a missing dog. But I need concrete facts—more data—more evidence!"

"You might always find them at the back gate," I offered, pointing at the back door which led out to said gate. Although not a psychologist by training, I had a few friends who were, and I felt it was best to humour Volker in his current frenetic state.

"Your words are always wise, Wilson. Come!" Volker cried, and he dashed the door. Luckily, I managed to twist the doorknob before he slammed into it, and we made our way into the building's small backyard.

The backyard had been completely paved over, but small, stunted flowers had managed to grow through several cracks in the stones. Separating the yard from the road behind it was a rusting metal gate a few inches taller than me. Although it was locked, there was a small opening at the bottom which a dog could fit through, but not a human. Volker took one look at the gate and immediately began to scale it.

"Volker!" I cried as numerous patches of dried paint came loose as flakes every time he swung his hand at the gate, trying to get a grip.

"Simmer, Wilson," Volker grunted, attempting to find a foothold on the brittle iron as he hauled himself up to the top of the gate, which was covered in metal spikes. "I know what I am doing, and I know what I am looking—" He let out a sudden cry of triumph. "Now, that's what I'm looking for!"

“What is it?” I asked, nervously watching Volker’s tenuous grip on the rails. He seemed to be taking something off the spikes.

“What is it? Two extremely crucial pieces of evidence that both increase my confidence in my theory by a thousand—*Verdammt!*”

Suddenly, the rail that Volker was standing on snapped, and he tumbled to the ground, screaming all the way down. However, when I ran over to him, he had already gotten up and was dusting himself off.

“I must apologise, Wilson,” he said, smiling calmly as if nothing had happened. “It was very uncouth of me. In any case, I have obtained two important pieces of evidence, and I would like to know what you make of them.”

He opened his hand, and in the dim light of a nearby lamp, I saw that he was holding two things. The first was a small piece of woven, durable black fabric, somewhat covered by mud. The second was a tuft of brown and white fur.

“It is Tony’s fur!” I cried. “But how did it get up there?”

“Look at the fabric,” Volker pointed out. “It is woollen and durable. Where do you think it came from?”

“A pair of trousers,” I replied. “There is no doubt about its provenance. But if it is up there along with Tony’s fur, then—blimey! There can only be one explanation.”

“Exactly. Somebody must have snuck in, kidnapped Tony, and, with the struggling dog under his arm, somehow managed to scale the gate and get away.” Volker nodded and put the pieces of fur and fabric in his pocket for safekeeping.

“But why climb over the back gate?” I asked. “Why not simply walk out through the front door?”

Volker did not reply. Instead, he beckoned me to follow him, and we made our way back into the building. As we approached the front entrance, I saw that the janitor, old Franz,

was sitting in a small recess next to it, watching the entrance carefully. He cheerfully raised his cap to us, and Volker returned the farewell by raising his bowler.

"Excuse me, sir," Volker enquired respectfully, "over the past few weeks, has anyone who does not live in this block of flats come in during the early morning?"

"What a strange question," the janitor chuckled. "Well, I can say that nobody of that sort has come in during the morning, at least through the front door, for I'm awake all night here watching it. I can't say the same for the back gate, but it's locked, and who in their right mind would climb over it?"

"Who in their right mind, indeed," murmured Volker. With that, he thanked the janitor, and together, we made our way into the cold night air. We strolled some distance along the pavement in silence before Volker spoke.

"Clearly," he said, "our mysterious kidnapper came in through—that is, over—the back gate in order to not attract the janitor's attention. This is very promising—very promising, Wilson!"

Volker looked upward into the dim, flickering street light, and as the yellow glow illuminated his face, I could see that he was thinking, pondering, and ratiocinating over both things that I could and could not discern. His expression embodied the very acme of deep consideration, with his furrowed brow, deep, brooding eyes, and stern, unmoving mouth. His hands were clasped behind his back, and as he stood there with the deportment of a master logician, absorbed in his thoughts, the cool winter breeze flapped his coattails and attempted to blow his bowler away. But the bowler stayed put, and by the time Volker had emerged from his state of deep concentration, he saw me watching him attentively—not in amusement, but in admiration—and chuckled lightly.

"Well, Wilson," he queried, "will you be free at six o'clock

tomorrow evening?"

"I can be free at any time you wish," I answered.

"Then it is decided. Tomorrow, at six, you may find me in Hyde Park."

Fitting his bowler firmly on his head, Volker began to walk away. However, he had scarcely gone five yards when his pace slowed and, turning around once more, walked back towards me and smiled.

"You are a good man, Dr. Wilson," said he, in a tone both appreciative and adoring.

And with those kind and comforting words, my new friend clapped me on the back and walked away once more. Even after he was long gone, I stood there, staring at the spot where he had stood with a mixture of gratification and wonder at how my life had changed so dramatically ever since I had left my office in the most dejected state barely four hours previously.



I do not remember how I found my way back to my flat in Central London—I might have taken the Tube, a bus, or simply walked back. What I do remember, however, is that when I finally arrived at my place of residence, simultaneously exhausted and exhilarated at the day's events, I twisted the doorknob, opened the door, and found my landlord, W. Charles Spencer, standing in the foyer and regarding me sidely.

"Dr. Wilson," he chastised, ominously pacing in a slow motion from one side of the foyer to the other, "I am very sorry for having to accost you like this at this late hour—" something in his mocking tone told me that he was not sorry at all—"but I am necessitated to inform you that you are ten pounds behind on your monthly rent." "I am not," I disputed firmly, making sure to shut the door behind me. "I left thirty pounds on your desk last week. The matter is settled."

I made to step onto the staircase, but Spencer was quicker, and blocked my approach with his great bulk.

“Not at all, Dr. Wilson,” the corpulent capitalist purred, pointing to a sign on the wall the size of an index card. “I suggest that you read this.”

I had not taken any notice of the sign the previous week—indeed, I could have sworn that it had not been there when I paid my rent—but now, upon examining it, I saw that it read, “NOTICE: Rent to be raised by £10 to £40 per month. EFFECTIVE 3rd January, 1949.”

“As I am a kind man,” Spencer continued smugly, “I will graciously bestow upon you a one-week extension so that you may scrape up what miserable funds you have left to pay my rent. However, if you cannot raise ten pounds by next Wednesday, I will have no choice—” he sighed dramatically “—but to evict you. Ah, it is a shame—” I briefly considered thundering “Exploiters of the proletariat!” at the repulsive landlord, but, after weighing it against the threat of homelessness, I decided to simply make my way up the stairs in silence as Spencer continued his monologue. I could still hear his professions of “A shame—a true shame!” as I entered my flat, closed the door, and immediately collapsed against it, overwhelmed by my predicament.

My meagre income—which was irregular at best and nonexistent at worst—had already been barely enough to cover my rent, and some days, I had been forced to abstain from breakfast, lunch, or dinner—and it was usually a combination of them. It was becoming more and more common for me to not eat a bite of food for the entire day. My stomach would growl hungrily as I trudged home from my useless job, passing restaurants and pubs and outdoor stands, but I would push my gloved, bony hands deeper into my coat and try to ignore them. Apart from my official payments, my salary from a

menial part-time job, and checks I occasionally received from my brother, I had no other income, and this unexpected rise in my rent would push me to the very edge.

For the rest of that day, I ate nothing at all, and the situation was the same for the next day. As I sat in my office, staring blankly at the clock, with no patients or doctors calling on me, I attempted to think up schemes through which I could earn at least a pound or two more a week. But as the hours wore on, my thought processes slowed, my mind became more fatigued from hunger, and eventually my eyes drooped and I fell asleep, exhausted.

I was only awoken from my slumber when the cuckoo clock chimed five o'clock. At first, my instincts attempted to make me fall asleep once more. However, my still-blurry mind recalled that I had an appointment with Volker at six in Hyde Park. It was this thought of my new friend that gave me the newfound strength to raise myself up from the doctor's chair, gradually push the door open, and shuffle down the hallways of the hospital. I then walked slowly through the frosty streets of London and, eventually, through the gate into Hyde Park. Throughout all of this I gave no thought to the bitter, freezing cold wind that threatened to blow my scarf and hat away, nor did I pay attention to the increasingly aching soles of my feet. My only thought, as I blundered along the pathways and stumbled past the trees of Hyde Park, was to find Volker.

Eventually, after half an hour of wandering aimlessly around the park, I began to see a figure approaching me, illuminated only by the weak, flickering electric lights. It was Professor Karl Volker, whom I had been searching for, and as I staggered towards him, the expression on his face changed from a searching to an astonished one.

"My dear Wilson!" he cried, rushing forwards to get a better look at me. "Why on earth are you wandering around a

darkened Hyde Park in this dishevelled state? You need some rejuvenation.”

And disregarding my half-hearted protests for him to ignore my appearance, lest it interfere with his important work, Volker half-led and half-dragged me over to his closed newspaper stand, where he rummaged through a wooden crate that emanated warmth before finally extracting a thermos of black coffee and a wrapped sandwich. He handed them to me, and as I devoured them gratefully, he stood there watching to make sure that I consumed them to the very last crumb.

“It is terrible,” he said at last, when I had finished eating and was about to thank him, “that honest, hard working people like you should be used and weakened in such a way by an unscrupulous landlord.” Volker sighed. “It is a shame. It is truly a shame.”

In these words I detected no arrogance or disdain, but only the most sincere compassion and sympathy.

After my strength had been restored, Volker and I made our way into the Tube, where we boarded the earliest train to Whitechapel. We arrived at the station at seven, and from there it was a brisk walk to the block of dilapidated flats where Kintner lived. Entering the foyer and passing Franz, the janitor, once more with a raise of his bowler, Volker strode purposefully towards the spiral staircase, and I followed closely behind. Three flights of stairs later, we were standing in front of the door to the ticket agent's flat. At first, as Volker rapped his knuckles on the crumbling wood, I thought that there would be no response, for Kintner had told us he was at work during that time of day. Unexpectedly, the door opened, and out stepped Andreas Kintner.

But his demeanour had changed greatly from the day before. I remembered the depressed, defeated man whom we had witnessed yesterday, with sunken eyes, a dejected slump, and

miserably greying hair. Today, the figure standing before us stood straight, with a delighted smile and exhilarated eyes. When he saw us, Kintner began to exclaim happily: "Mr. Volker—Mr. Wilson! I am sorry, but your investigation is at an end—for a miracle has occurred! Please—come in and observe!"

Without waiting for either of us to assent, Kintner pulled Volker and I into his flat, which was still as shabby and unfurnished as ever. There were the same couches, armchair, and small table in the centre of the room—but wait! I suddenly perceived a small ball of brown and white fur crouching under the table.

It was Kintner's missing dog, Tony!

Tony, as Kintner had said, was a small mixed-breed dog, small enough to fit through the narrow opening under the back gate. His fur was smoother than the fur of other street dogs I had seen, but it was still reasonably ruffled in places, with some patches being utterly dishevelled. However, Tony was silent and withdrawn, staying curled up under the table and only occasionally raising his head, revealing fatigued eyes, before lowering it once more. This was a stark contrast to his owner's obvious happiness in having him back, the circumstances of which he expressed to us in a tone of the utmost pleasure.

"Yesterday, after seeing you and Mr. Miller off, I went to sleep, preparing myself for a return to work the next day. But when I woke up early in the morning, at six o'clock, I heard a whimpering noise outside my door and went to see what it was. Imagine my surprise, Mr. Volker, when I found Tony lying right outside my door, somewhat shaken, but with no physical injuries whatsoever! I immediately called Euston and requested another day off, for I wanted to be with my beloved dog."

But Kintner's smile then faded, and he turned his head to look sadly at Tony's pitiful figure under the table.

"After I found Tony outside my door, I brought him into my flat, and tried to give him something to eat. However, I soon found that he would not touch the dog food that I usually left in his bowl for him to eat. I have been more successful with ham and bones, but Tony still refuses to go outside, and for twelve hours now, he has stayed curled up under that table. I have no idea what has gotten into him."

"Hmm," murmured Volker, staring contemplatively at Tony. "Well... this is an unexpected development... but, as reason would have it, it fits perfectly with my theory!" The last few words were said in an exultant tone, surprising Kintner.

"What is your theory, Mr. Volker?" he asked, perplexed.

Volker did not answer him. Instead, he began to nod, musing simultaneously, "Indeed... it all makes sense now... yes, it would have been done using those..." He began to pace across the carpet of the flat, all the while muttering to himself, making his words fade in and out of earshot and only allowing me to catch snatches of his sentences. "But if that is so, that means... there would have to be others... work yet unfinished... therefore... yes!"

This last affirmative word was uttered in a tone of excitement, ecstasy, and shrewdness, all rolled into one great gust of joy originating from Volker. Then, he dashed over and accosted Kintner.

"Mr. Kintner," he exclaimed, rapidly gesturing with his hands, "tonight, leave the bowl of dog food outside as usual, but keep Tony inside. Go to sleep, and do not leave this flat until I enter and tell you it is safe too. It is imperative that you follow these instructions—may I have your assurance that you will adhere to them by the letter?"

"Of course, if you insist," replied Volker's astonished interlocutor.

"Excellent!" cried Volker, grasping Kintner's hand and

shaking it enthusiastically. "Rest assured, Mr. Kintner, that by the time you wake up, this entire sordid affair will have been concluded—resolved, disentangled, deciphered, and brought into the full light of day for all to see!"



After we left the block of flats, Volker paced up and down the steps for a few more minutes before, in a sudden spurt of energy, dashing up the road towards the nearest telephone booth. After he dialled a number and spent some time talking hurriedly into the mouthpiece as I stood outside, he finally hung up and emerged.

"My requests have gone well," he said in response to my questioning expression. "I doubt that the truth of this matter will remain nebulous for long. However, Wilson, the hour of dinner approaches, and I beg that you do not bring this case up in any further conversations, at least until our reinforcements arrive."

I was thus barred from enquiring as to the identity of these reinforcements, and instead followed Volker as he led me to a nearby restaurant, insisting that he treat me to a meal. I was in no state to refuse, and as the courses arrived at the table and were promptly consumed, we fell into conversation.

Volker skipped from subject to subject like a water strider frisking across the vitreous surface of a pond. One minute he would be speaking reverentially of the ingenious Korean writing system ("It is called Hangul... each syllable is a beautiful block composed of letters and vowels") or the innovations of the Mayans ("Using zeolites... they built sophisticated water filtration systems that drained into underground deposits"). The next, his expression would darken and his eyes would become grim as he raged over British colonial atrocities in India ("In Amritsar... peaceful protesters were slaughtered in their hundreds... and Dyer stopped the wounded from being re-

moved!") or war crimes of the Japanese in Manchuria and the subsequent cover-up by the Americans ("In Unit 731, thousands of prisoners were purposely infected, ravished, and vivisectioned... and MacArthur gave all the perpetrators immunity!"). As I listened to him rave about one subject and rant about the next, I grew more and more impressed at his wide-ranging knowledge of historical events. But I was even more struck by his ability to untangle their facts and pigeonhole them, understanding which ones were important and which ones were not.

After an hour, the door to the restaurant opened and a man entered. He was short and stout but surprisingly agile, with a square face that perfectly complemented his circular, wire-rimmed glasses. He was dressed in a brown coat and black trousers, immaculately ironed, and as he approached our table, Volker remarked, "Ah, Fenworth! You have arrived at the perfect time.

"Wilson," he continued, turning to me and gesturing to the man, "This is Inspector Fenworth, whose singular reputation among the numerous policemen of Scotland Yard has assisted me in countless cases. In previous investigations, I had found myself lacking the official warrants to enter buildings or the necessary reinforcements to arrest criminals. Fenworth assists me in these areas, and in return I aid him in dilemmas that the good men of the Yard cannot make head nor tail of. Inspector, this is Dr. Wilson, a recent acquaintance of mine."

"Pleased to meet you," Fenworth chuckled good-naturedly, shaking my hand with firm dignity. "Of course, I could not resist the chance to come when I heard that Volker needed someone to arrest one of the greatest criminals of the century, Mr—"

"Shh!" Volker cried, putting a finger to his lips. "The information must be kept confidential—absolutely confidential. This far into the game, any single misstep that we make now

could alert our criminal and lead to him fleeing. I trust, Fenworth, that the requisite inquiries and inspections have been made?"

"They have, and they have yielded results just as you predicted."

Volker nodded in a satisfied manner and beckoned the inspector to take a seat. "Then I suggest you join us in our supper, for we have a long night ahead of us."

Once everyone had partaken of the final course (which was, incidentally, a delectable Eton mess containing a delightfully crunchy meringue), we retraced our steps to 30 Randall Gardens. Passing through the entrance without trouble (and raising our hats to Franz a third time), we proceeded to climb the stairs to the third floor, stopping in front of Kintner's flat. Here, Volker used a key that Kintner had given him earlier out of his pocket to open a door, revealing a darkened parlour where the only light emanated from a small candle in the corner that Kintner had evidently left on for us.

After closing the door, Volker retrieved three electric torches from his pocket and gave one to each of us. I settled down upon a couch while Fenworth sank into the overstuffed armchair and made his great bulk comfortable. Volker, on the other hand, strode over to the corner and switched off the electric light, plunging the room into complete darkness.

I heard my friend's footsteps as he softly padded over the carpet, returning to take a seat on the couch opposite me. For a moment, there was absolute silence in the flat.

Then Volker quietly spoke up. "I must warn you not to make any movement or sound until I explicitly tell you to, and that will not be for quite a few hours."

The speaking subsided as suddenly as it had begun, and the silence resumed.

The night was long, and the only noises that made their way

into the room during our vigil were the faint growls and honks of automobiles making their way through the darkened streets three stories below. The only sound that could be heard from within the room, on the other hand, was the breathing of three men, faceless to each other in the eerie blackness.

One man's breaths were rapid inhales and exhales of small amounts of air, quick in pattern but minuscule in volume.

Another man's breaths were slow and laboured, gradually taking air in, pausing, and cautiously pushing it out.

And the last man seemed to not be breathing at all.

As we sat there in that atmosphere of near-transcendental stillness, my grasp of time and its passing progressively weakened before finally fading away in the pervasive nothingness that suffused everything and everyone around me. Two hours had passed—or was it four? I tried to count the seconds, but each of them began to stretch and disappear into the perpetual, eternal void. As my mind began to descend into the incessant vacuity of my surroundings, I began to wonder if I was still sitting there motionless on the couch, or if I was dreaming, or if my soul had left my body and was now approaching—

Footsteps sounded in the hallway outside the flat.

I tensed, and I heard the stuffing of the armchair shifting, but Volker only whispered:

“Take no notice. It is only Nathan Miller, off to his early-morning milk deliveries.”

That means it is three in the morning, I thought, relieved to regain some grasp on time. Although the quietness resumed, I was less absorbed in it than before, especially due to my newfound anticipation of the footsteps.

An hour later, footsteps sounded once more in the hallway. However, instead of Miller's heavy thuds, these were light taps, akin to when Volker had softly padded over the carpet, sig-

nalling the start of our vigil.

But these footsteps were now signalling the end.

We heard them grow louder and louder, approaching the flat's door. Then they stopped, and a quiet grunt sounded as the unknown passerby bent down towards—I suddenly remembered what was placed at the foot of the door—Tony's food bowl.

While they did so, I heard another low noise, this time from the couch opposite me. Slowly, Volker rose from his couch, turned on his torch to its lowest setting, and beckoned in the dim light for us to do as well. As the mysterious person continued to inspect the bowl of dog food, Volker crept towards the door, followed by Fenworth and I.

What happened next seemed to occur in an instant. All of a sudden, Volker dashed at the door and threw it open, knocking the identified figure to the ground. Switching on our torches,



Fenworth and I saw in the light of them that he was a small, agile, but dishevelled man. As he attempted to get up, we

rushed to him and pinned him to the floor. While the man futilely struggled in our grip, Volker dashed to the food bowl and dug through it with his bare hands. Tucked in it was a rolled-up sheet of paper.

He pulled it out and was about to say something when we were interrupted by the sound of footsteps on the stairs. A pair of plainclothes police officers entered the hallway, and handcuffed between them was—

—the milkman, Nathan Miller!

“So, they’ve got you as well!” the man in our hands cried,

astonished.

"In a very fine manner, too!" laughed Miller, looking at Volker.

"I think," replied Volker grimly, "that you two had better come into this flat. There are many questions that I still must ask."



At first, there was a reasonable amount of resistance, especially from the man whom we had pinned down. Eventually, both of them realised that resistance was useless, and when Fenworth was finally able to handcuff them both to chairs in Miller's room, Miller began to speak.

"Well played, Mr. Volker," he chuckled. "I thought that no one would be able to comprehend my deception—but it seems that I misjudged you. As such—"

"Stop!" the other man cried. "Say nothing. Keep hidden the facts that they could use against us."

For a moment, this gave Miller pause until Volker's solemn voice punctured the silence.

"Facts," my friend remarked sternly, "the majority of which I already possess. Therefore, I should think it futile for you to attempt to hide anything from me, *Mr. Helnan*."

"Helnan!" I cried, shocked to hear the name of the trickster who had cheated so many innocent people out of their life savings.

"Indeed. This supposed milkman, Mr. Nathan Miller, is, in fact, none other than Mr. Martin Helnan, founder of the fraudulent People's Equity Fund, and the man next to him is his associate, Mr. Morris Browning."

Volker's demonstration of his knowledge of the case was effective, and Miller—or rather Helnan, though I shall continue to refer to him by his false name—began to speak once more despite Browning's pleas for him to stop. In recording the

following statements, I have elected to edit out these entreaties; otherwise, I would have been forced to break off the narrative every two lines with such cries as “Don’t say it, Martin!” or “Think of your old friend Morris!”

“Two years ago,” Miller began, “I was a poor mathematics professor working for long hours and little pay at a university. My specialty was accounting, and it happened that one day, I happened to run into Morris Browning, an old friend of mine. He was working in a financial institution in the City and told me stories of entrepreneurs who set up fraudulent funds to get rich but who were also eventually caught. I told him that, due to my mathematical expertise, I believed that if I were managing such a fund, I could cook the books in such a way that the duplicity could never be found. At the time, both of us were short on money, and after talking it over, we decided to establish such a fund as a little experiment.

“Well, the People’s Equity Fund, or so we called it, became much more popular than we had originally envisioned. A good first run of investments gave us the cash to run advertisements in the papers, which gave us a second, larger run, leading to a third, and so our success continued. As we wanted to raise as much money as possible from this scheme, we allowed people to give us their assets—usually small things, like jewellery or rings—to convert to cash and invest. The People’s Equity Fund became the most talked-about thing in the financial world, and all the officials who came to our headquarters to investigate left with the greatest confidence in us, for I had, through a process of mathematical obfuscating, made it seem as if our assets were all real and the money was being put to good use.

“But then came a day when I found the books stretched to breaking point, and no matter how many rounds of mathematical trickery I performed on them, we were bound to be found out soon. Therefore, Browning and I began preparing to es-

cape. Within a few weeks, everything was set, and we decamped with more than a hundred thousand pounds, a fair number of assets, and quite a few security certificates.

"I found a small flat in the poorer end of London, for I anticipated that no police officers would look for me there and pretended to be a milkman. In fact, what I was doing was—" Miller stopped speaking and turned to me. "Dr. Wilson, would you be so kind as to pull on the bookshelves behind you?"

I turned around and tugged on one of the bookshelves situated against Miller's wall. To my surprise, it swung towards me with ease, revealing a large hole that had been drilled into the wall. Hidden in the cavity were a number of valuable objects, from diamond engagement rings and pearl necklaces to gold pocket watches and silver medallions.

"In that hole," Miller continued, "I stored the valuable objects which I had received as investments and had not yet sold. I would put them in milk bottles, sneak them into my milk float, and send them to the houses of fences. The next day, when I picked up the bottles, I would find money in them, as payment for the objects. That way, I easily got rid of my stash of assets.

"I had also received securities in the form of certificates as investments, and these were harder to figure out what to do with. At first, Browning would sneak over the back gates into the block in the early morning, and I would give him several security certificates for him to sell and redeem as cash. However, this soon became suspicious, and I was worried that the janitor would shortly start asking me questions.

"Then, I hit upon a different method of getting the securities into Browning's hands. My next-door neighbour, Mr. Kintner, left a bowl of dog food out at midnight for his dog to eat at five in the morning. I discovered that if I hid several certificates in this bowl when I left to supposedly deliver milk at three in

the morning, Browning could pick them up when he sneaked in at four without me having to be there. At first, there was some difficulty with the dog barking when he saw Browning, but it eventually stopped, and I continued to hide the certificates in its bowl. It was more convenient—and less suspicious, as well.

“However, there was a little spot of trouble three days ago. Browning had informed me some days previously that the window for redeeming a particularly valuable security worth around ten thousand pounds was about to close. As usual, I placed the certificate in the bowl at three and went off, expecting it to be gone by the time I returned.

“It was—but not in the usual manner. Later, Browning told me that he had overslept. When he arrived late at the block at five o’clock, to his horror, he discovered that the dog had already eaten the food—and with it, the ten-thousand-pound certificate!

“In a panic, Browning picked up the dog and, with it struggling under his arm, scaled the gate and escaped. Then he remembered that the certificate was laminated. If he could get the dog’s stomach pumped, he could retrieve the certificate and redeem it in time. I met up with him not long after this happened and recommended a veterinarian friend of mine whom I trusted not to reveal what had happened.

“Luckily, the procedure was successful, and after a day of convalescing, Browning returned the dog to Kintner’s flat. Although, in my opinion, the dog still looked a bit worse for wear, I decided not to take any action and believed that the matter had ended there. As you gentlemen,” he gestured to Volker, Fenworth, and I, “have so magnificently proved tonight, my assumption was wrong. That is the conclusion of my story.”

As I listened to Miller’s callous tone as he finished his tale, I

was suddenly struck with a sense of the most complete and utter disgust towards this vile, uncaring mountebank. He had swindled thousands of innocent, hardworking people out of their life savings and sent hundreds more to suicide—and yet here he was, speaking unrepentantly and obdurately in front of us as if the fortunes he had fleeced had been mere, unimportant specks of dust floating in the wind. Did the fraud not feel the least bit guilty—was he not sorry or ashamed for what he had done?

Volker clearly felt the same way as me. When Miller finished speaking, Volker said nothing. He simply stared into Miller's eyes with his blue, piercing eyes. His bravado fading rapidly into abject fear, Miller tried to duck, but with one swift motion, Volker stepped forwards and grabbed his face with two hands. For several minutes, as Miller squirmed and attempted to flee Volker's firm grip, Volker stared silently into the depths of Miller's eyes, not speaking a single word or blinking even once.

I tried to read what Volker was thinking. He made no sound, but in his eyes, I perceived an immense revulsion and loathing towards the corrupt, depraved charlatan. Volker, who as a people's detective had fought against the exploitation of the working class for his entire career, was now face-to-face with a man whose only achievement in life was to become wealthy through using and manipulating others—and who did not feel a hint of remorse for the astronomical pain and suffering he had inflicted upon the less fortunate.

And as Volker continued to stare, unblinking, and Miller continued to shrink in fright, it was clear whose will had triumphed.

At long last, after what seemed to me like an eternity, Volker simply released Miller's head and rose, turning towards Fenworth.

“Take these two away, Inspector,” he instructed, not even deigning to call them by name or even look at them as he declared their fate. “There is nothing more I would care to learn from them. I shall be personally present at their trial.”

He shook his head and left the flat. I followed him without glancing behind me, leaving Inspector Fenworth to deal with the two wrongdoers who were silent in our wake.



A few days later, Fenworth joined us for tea in Volker's office at his university. As he gratefully warmed himself up in front of the fire, he informed us that Nathan Miller had attempted to commit suicide by hanging himself from the rafters of his jail cell. He had been prevented from doing so in the nick of time, however, and had now been placed under strict, twenty-four-hour supervision. When he heard this, Volker nodded approvingly.

“Better a long punishment than a quick death,” he remarked, striding over to the opposite side of the room and opening a cabinet. “Miller stands to get twenty years to life, and who knows? Perhaps, if his decades in prison are spent properly, he might return as a useful, working member of society.”

Volker's mood had improved over the past few days, and now, as he returned to the couch, a bottle of red wine in his hand, I enquired, “How on earth, Volker, did you figure out that Mr. Miller was in fact Martin Helnan, and, even more perplexingly, that Tony's disappearance was somehow connected to it all?”

“Indeed!” Fenworth seconded, taking out three wine glasses from a shelf underneath the table. “I was quite surprised to hear that you had found the elusive Helnan, whom the police had been trying to trace for months. How did you do it?”

Smiling, with two people eager to listen to him, Volker

poured some wine into a glass, sipped delicately, and began his tale.

“My suspicions were first aroused,” he began, “when Mr. Kintner informed me that, several months ago, he had heard Tony barking in the hallway in the early morning. When I was told that Tony typically only barked at strangers, I rapidly began the process of deduction. My conclusion was that some mysterious person had come up to the third floor at four o'clock in the morning, and the first few times that Tony saw him, he barked at the strange face. However, as the nocturnal visits continued, the visitor had gradually become more familiar, and Tony ceased to bark.

“From this starting point, I began to investigate *why* that stranger had gone up there. I had previously been interested in the case of the People's Equity Fund, and Miller's face reminded me of Helnan's. It was a long shot—but one worth pursuing. Thus, I began leaning against each wall of the flat, knocking it with my cane.”

“I saw you doing that,” I exclaimed, bewildered. “What possessed you to perform such a peculiar act?”

“I knew, my dear Wilson, that Miller—if he was Helnan—was bound to be hiding his ill-gotten goods somewhere, and my hunch was that he was hiding them within his room. Clearly, they could not be out in the open, so my next supposition was that the goods were hidden in his wall. When I knocked against each wall with the cane, I observed to my satisfaction that the wall shared with Miller's flat sounded extraordinarily hollow. Then, when I entered Miller's parlour, his side of the wall was completely covered with bookshelves. From these facts, I inferred that Miller's stolen goods were indeed situated within his wall, hidden from view by the bookshelves.

“Two other important indications that gave Miller's true

wealth away were his tea and sugar. If he were truly poor, would he not buy loose tea leaves instead of the more expensive tea bags? And in these times of rationing, Wilson, how could he have obtained a large box of sugar if not through paying large sums for it? No, Wilson, I was led to the inevitable conclusion that Miller was in fact a wealthy man and was simply hiding it.

“By now, I nearly had all the proof in my hands, but before acting on it, I decided to test my theories. First, remembering that Helnan had been a skilled mathematician, I posed Miller a maths problem in disguise—I made up a bookshop seven blocks north and twenty-four blocks west and expressed my curiosity about the diagonal distance. Calculating the answer would have required the use of the Pythagorean theorem, and Miller did so within moments.

“This, coupled with his back pain—from which I inferred that he had been carrying heavy things up and down the stairs—and his inability to remember his customers’ milk preferences—something that every good milkman should know—I concluded that Miller was indeed none other than Martin Helnan, the swindler, in disguise, and that he had been using the job of a milkman as a cover to deliver valuable items from the hiding spot in his room to fences by filling up milk bottles with them.

“From there, we investigated the back gate, for I suspected that the mysterious visitor had come into the block that way. My theory was vindicated by the fur and trouser fabric on the gate, which implied that he had climbed over it, carrying Tony with him.

“However, the final clue did not come until the next day, when I discovered that Tony had returned and was refusing to touch his usual food. With these facts, I deduced that Tony had had a bad experience after eating his food and being taken

away two days previously. There had been something hidden in the food, I surmised, and it had been removed forcibly from Tony's stomach.

"At long last, all the facts fell into order. Miller had been leaving messages or something of that sort in the bowl, and the mysterious visitor had been picking them up. Tony had disappeared because he had eaten a message, and the mysterious visitor had taken him to get his stomach pumped, the cause of Tony's apparent discomfort when we saw him.

"I thus called Inspector Fenworth and told him to send his men to inspect the bottles in Miller's milk float and, furthermore, to track Miller on his milk run and arrest him immediately if anything suspicious was witnessed. As I had suspected, the bottles were filled to bursting with valuable objects. When Miller brought them to the homes of several fences who were well-known to the police, he was immediately arrested and brought back to the block of flats, where we were detaining his associate, Browning. That was the entirety of my chain of deductions."

"Wonderful!" Fenworth cried.

"It is a work of genius," I marvelled, still in awe at Volker's logical prowess. "I would never be able to solve such complex and abstruse problems."

Taking another sip of wine, Volker turned to me. "Then let me solve those problems for you, my dear Wilson," he remarked before abruptly querying, "How are your problems with your landlord?"

I never found out how he knew of my problems, but I told him the entire story of my troubles with my corpulent landlord, W. Charles Spencer, including my possible upcoming eviction and my struggle to find funds to pay the increased rent. Once I had finished my tale, Volker smiled.

"I think, Wilson," he commented, "that the answer to your