

*Mr William Ladislaw's statement, contd.*

There's no point in being a hypocrite. My first reaction when Dorothea told me about her quarrel with Lydgate was relief, a relief whose intensity surprised me. So Lydgate wasn't the perfect man for my Dorothea, as I had imagined! I wanted to talk to Mrs Lydgate about it – tell her that my wife and her husband were not, after all, two pieces of a puzzle made to fit together – but I was careful not to find myself alone with her, and I could only hope she would draw the same conclusions from the quarrel (which Lydgate was bound to have told her about) as I did. All of a sudden it felt less overwhelming to be suspected of murder and kept at arm's length by half of London, including my former club companions. The latter seemed more inclined to suspect me of having killed their precious Francis than anyone else, and after he'd condescended to propose me as a member, too – the ultimate insult to the club honour. The blacklisting had hurt me more than I wanted my family and my guests to know. To be sure, Dorothea was right that the Epicurean isn't a particularly respectable club, and she (as she couldn't forbear to remind me, being only human) had never liked my joining it. One thing must be said in the Epicurean's defence, though: it's one of the few places in London where there is genuine mourning for Francis Courdroy.

As I said, this and other setbacks became easier to endure when I knew I didn't have a serious rival for Dorothea's admiration. Of course I wasn't more worthy of Dorothea than before; but now, at least, no other man deserved her either, so her love for me remained unthreatened for the present. At the same time, I did feel extremely sorry for Lydgate. What had happened to him was the very last affliction I wanted to befall me: Dorothea's uncompromising disapproval. It was not that she treated him badly in any way; she was still very kind to him. But there was a sadness about her as she looked at him and spoke to him, as if he were an incurable sinner whom she had vainly tried to convert. The realization that this was the kind of treatment I could expect if I ever disappointed her was sufficiently painful for me to stop feeling any kind of gratification at Lydgate's disgrace after the first few days had passed.

There was precious little else to take comfort in. Green summoned us to repeated interrogations where we kept saying the same things about the night when Courdroy died. He squeezed every last detail out of us, but it didn't seem to do much good, and he appeared more and more dejected every time we saw him. Once, looking at a compilation of our meagre alibis, he permitted himself to sigh 'if only it hadn't been for that opiate!' I began to believe that the police weren't making any headway with their investigation – which was partly true – and that nobody would ever be arrested for the Courdroy murder, but in due course I came to see that there were entirely different reasons for Green's melancholy.

As soon as it was possible for a letter to reach an address in the country and for a man to come from that address to London, Sir James Chettam arrived to take our children away to Freshitt Hall. The boys had accepted the Freshitt plan without protest. Fortunately they hadn't had any opportunity to register the cold-shouldering that Dorothea and I were experiencing. They still regarded the murder inquiry as an exciting drama, convinced that *they* would find the real murderer if given enough rope – something that Dorothea, aided and abetted by Lady Chettam and the children's nurse Lily (who has turned out to be touchingly loyal), took very good care they were not. Besides they suspected, not without reason, that their visit to Freshitt Hall would spell the end of carefree days away from their books, and that they would, to cap it all, have to submit to being taught by a governess. But Sir James knew how to distract them from such concerns: he told them that Arthur was home from Eton for a couple of days, full of tales of various school pranks, and that Elinor was adamant – in spite of being 'just a girl' – that these days she was better at climbing trees than her cousins from town. This was enough to make the boys feel they had a mission in the country of no less importance than that of catching a murderer. A grateful Lily was also invited by Sir James, and the house became even more quiet and gloomy than before.

It's through Dorothea and Lady Chettam I know what Sir James said, for he hardly exchanged two words with me. He avoided me consistently throughout his brief visit, and I understood from Lady Chettam's embarrassment that her husband had no doubt of my guilt. I'm perfectly aware that Sir James never liked me, but it did shake me that he could think me guilty of murder. After much pressing, Lady Chettam reluctantly admitted that her James was perhaps 'slightly suspicious' of me, and that he had, when she defended me, brought up my family relationship with Mr Bulstrode. Lady Chettam had pointed out that Bulstrode was just a relation by marriage, so it was not as if I

had ‘killer blood’ in my veins. At that the revered Sir James had looked ‘funny’ and murmured that one didn’t know. Finally, he’d managed to extricate himself by saying he’d only mentioned Bulstrode as an example of the fact that there’s no telling what some people will do. He hadn’t belonged to the banker’s adherents, but he’d had a reluctant respect for him, which was more than he ever had for me, and never did he have the glimmer of an idea of Bulstrode’s criminal past, nor of ‘any other crimes’ of his. Sir James is an excellent man in many ways, but I will say he’s pretty high on the list of persons I *would* be glad to murder if I had that kind of temperament. And he made even more fuss over Dorothea than usual.

About two weeks after Courdroy’s death Green paid us a visit. There was nothing odd about that, apart from the fact that all interrogations so far – except the first – had taken place at police headquarters, and most of them in Pettifer’s presence. This time Green was alone, and the only person he wanted to see was me. Once again he chose to speak to me in the library, which has the disadvantage of being the only room in the house I’m not entirely comfortable in, especially when doors and windows are shut, as Green insisted they should be. With a strange cooped-up feeling verging on panic, and almost nauseated by the smell of old books which seemed unusually oppressive, I sat down opposite the police inspector and said, in as light a tone as I could muster:

‘Right, here we go again. Where do we start this time?’

Nobody would call Green a cheerful fellow at the best of times, but I’d never seen him look as grave as he did that afternoon.

‘This is not an ordinary interview, Mr Ladislav. I propose to summarize what we know about the case so far. If there is anything I’ve misunderstood or omitted, I’d be grateful if you’d draw my attention to it.’

Though I had no idea what Green was up to, I became seriously frightened for the first time during the inquiry. I nodded and managed to stay calm, but it won’t have escaped Green that I was perspiring as if I’d had a dozen lives on my conscience.

‘At about ten o’clock on the evening of the murder’, began Green in his most official voice, ‘you and your wife, Lady Chettam, Dr and Mrs Lydgate, and Sir Henry and Lady Walford left Covent Garden for Mr Courdroy’s rooms. It took you approximately ten minutes to get there. You, Mr Courdroy, Dr Lydgate, and Sir Henry were transported in a hired vehicle, whereas Mrs Ladislav, Lady Chettam, Mrs Lydgate, and Lady Walford travelled in the Walfords’ carriage. Am I right so far?’

‘Certainly, but what’s the point of ...’

‘Probably nothing, but it helps to visualize the proceedings in their entirety. Mr Courdroy first spoke with you and Dr Lydgate in his study, then with you, Dr Lydgate, and Lady Walford, and then with Sir Henry Walford. He revealed that he was the possessor of various documents which might destroy your political career if they were made public. Why you should assume that a report on your grandfather’s criminal career had the potential of doing you such harm if it became public property I haven’t been able to understand, but that’s by the by. Apparently Mr Courdroy succeeded in convincing you all that Mr Duncan’s statement, and the supplementary information he’d obtained, posed a danger to you, and the fact that you regarded the danger as real is what matters here. Sir Henry attempted – most generously, in my opinion – to buy Mr Courdroy’s silence so as to protect you, but the negotiations foundered on Mr Courdroy’s demands – unreasonable demands, to say the least. Sir Henry dealt Mr Courdroy a blow in the face, which wasn’t perhaps entirely undeserved under the circumstances, and left the building, accompanied by his wife.’

I felt a little ashamed. Maybe we were gullible when we accepted that my grandfather’s fencing business in the early days of the century would cause such a thunderous scandal as Courdroy claimed it would; but then, the Walfords had also been persuaded by his arguments, and they weren’t as personally affected by the matter as I and Lydgate. Indeed, when you thought about it, it was astonishing that they showed such concern over a story that was only of indirect importance to them. Or could a businessman of Sir Henry’s calibre really suffer so badly in consequence of one of his political protégés being made to look suspect in the eyes of the public? After all, my having been accused of murder didn’t seem to have entailed over-much inconvenience to him so far.

‘Thereupon Mr Courdroy exchanged some words with the rest of the party – what did you talk about, by the way?’

There was the true reason for my and Lydgate’s anxiety. It was, of course, the Middlemarch part of the story – Raffles’ attempts at blackmail, Bulstrode’s way of disposing of him, and the banker’s family relationship with me – that threatened to make Courdroy’s scandal really disagreeable, and Courdroy had been close to finding out the truth. Out of consideration for Lydgate, however, I couldn’t say anything about it, so I lied, and not even very convincingly.

‘Oh, he just confirmed that negotiations with Sir Henry had broken down, and asked us to be prepared for him to go to the papers the following day.’

Green’s expression was completely neutral, and with his customary discretion he immediately proceeded with his recapitulation. I felt really annoyed

with Lydgate. Solely because of his oversensitivity, I'd given the Inspector the impression that I was withholding information of importance to the solution of the case.

'According to previous interviews, you estimate that the time was approximately a quarter to midnight when you left Mr Courdroy's apartment.'

'It felt as if we'd been there forever, but I dare say that's correct. I looked at the clock in my study after we'd come home and the rest of the household had retired, and it was only a quarter past twelve then.'

'And the last persons in your party to see Mr Courdroy alive were your sister-in-law and Dr Lydgate?'

'I hope you don't want to imply that Lady Chettam and Dr Lydgate are in some sort of murderous collusion?'

Green smiled ruefully.

'No, I think we can exclude the possibility that the poisoning took place during Lady Chettam's and Dr Lydgate's last conversation with the murder victim. About a quarter past twelve – something of a coincidence, don't you think? – Mr Courdroy's housekeeper Mrs Thompson saw him for the last time, and he had not developed any symptoms of poisoning at that point. On the contrary, he seemed full of life, and he asked Mrs Thompson to make new coffee and put out an extra cup before she went to bed.'

This was news to me.

'Was he expecting a visitor?'

'Well, it's not entirely clear. When Mrs Thompson asked the same thing, he smiled and answered, "Yes, I'm hoping Lord Londonberry will come to call." Lord Londonberry', explained Green, 'is, I understand, a fantasy figure who was Mr Courdroy's playfellow when he was a little boy.'

It was just like a police inspector to try to give one a bad conscience for being glad a man was dead. What was more, he succeeded quite well.

'According to the housekeeper's testimony', Green pursued, 'her master was not actually in very good spirits, although he tried to act in his customary light-hearted manner. She, incidentally, is positive he took his own life. I expect she doesn't want to believe that a murderer could steal into the apartment and out again while she slept. "Master Francis was always regarded as the black sheep of the family, and it preyed on his mind, poor lamb. But he was a good boy at heart."'

'These family retainers!' I grunted. 'Not even a squadron of imaginary playmates can make Courdroy anything like a lamb or a good boy. I don't suppose it could be an act? She had by far the best opportunity to murder her master,

and she just might have heard something of our talks with him – enough to make her see that she could pin the murder on me by burning the statement. Well, not *all* of it, of course.’

Green shook his head.

‘I’m prepared to pledge my career that we can dismiss Mrs Thompson from our inquiries, though I’ll admit I have no evidence for my conviction. Well. Mrs Thompson got up at six the following morning and began to do the rooms, but didn’t dare disturb her master who had, she suspected, “had a long night”. But she saw that he hadn’t gone to bed, and when it was gone eight and she still hadn’t heard a sound from the locked study, she became anxious and got a neighbour to help her break down the door. They found Courdroy, and as you’ll appreciate he was not a pretty sight. According to the medical evidence he’ll have died at some point during the small hours, but it’s impossible to get a doctor to swear to anything. Which brings us back to the matter of the alibis.’

This obviously wasn’t Green’s favourite topic. He picked up some well-thumbed notes and recapitulated in a sombre tone:

‘From a quarter past twelve to six o’clock, you were in your study, alone. Uncorroborated statement. Mrs Ladislaw was alone in your bedroom, and Lady Chettam was alone in her room. Naturally, these statements are also uncorroborated. Dr and Mrs Lydgate were sleeping in the same room, but both claim they’d taken a sleeping draught. Hence, it’s not impossible for either of them to have left and returned to their room while the other lay drugged by the Doctor’s opiate. Sir Henry began by saying he’d gone to bed at the same time as his wife, but later changed his statement, after Lady Walford had testified that he’d gone off – on his own, of course – to write letters in his study. Sir Henry even lied about the nature of his sleep in his eagerness to give his wife an alibi, supposing that was what he wanted. He maintains he’s a light sleeper and Lady Walford a heavy one, but according to the gossip Pettifer has managed to extract from their staff it’s the other way round: Sir Henry sleeps like a log and has to be shaken into life in the morning, and most mornings his wife is awake in time to perform the shaking, which saves his manservant a good deal of trouble. In short: there isn’t a single tenable alibi among all of you who knew about Mr Duncan’s statement. Not one!’

‘So the Walfords’ servants couldn’t confirm their statements?’

‘No, though they’d have liked to. They all went to bed on Sir Henry’s orders as soon as their master and mistress returned, with the exception of Kenworthy, who took a glass of water to his master around midnight but

otherwise sat in the pantry for the rest of the night reading the paper, without once being summoned to the study. And even if the entire staff had volunteered to corroborate the Walfords' statements, I don't know that I'd have believed them. Sir Henry is as able a manager of his servants as he is of everything else, and they'd probably have been prepared to lie to protect both him and his wife, who "takes such good care of him". If any one of them saw Sir Henry or Lady Walford leave the house that night, we're not likely to find out. The same applies to your own Mr and Mrs Pratt. Where', concluded Green glumly, 'are all the disloyal Mr Duncans of this world when you need them?'

'And you haven't got any witnesses who could bind any one of us to the scene of the crime?'

I hesitated before using the expression 'any one of us', but how else could I have put it? It was a definition which included the Walfords as well. After everything we had been through together, I couldn't regard them as strangers on whom it would be convenient to dump all suspicions. Frankly, it would upset me if I were to see evidence which unambiguously pointed to Sir Henry, or his darling wife, as the murderer. But what other explanation could there possibly be?

Green didn't react to my choice of words; he was preoccupied with his own troubles.

'We've been searching all London for a cab that took anyone – man or woman – to Mr Courdroy's address, but in vain. Which may not be so strange after all. Anyone prepared for a good long walk can make his or her way from your residence to Courdroy's on foot. And where the Walfords are concerned, one of them could have got there in their own carriage or on Sir Henry's horse. I don't think they'd have got Hunt mixed up in it, but if he observed anything suspect in the stables the following morning, he hasn't chosen to tell us about it.'

'Can Lady Walford ride?' I wondered, remembering that her husband had found it hard to procure a horse for her, partly because she hadn't wanted one to begin with.

'Certainly, and she admitted the fact without hesitation. She learnt to ride as a child, because her parents considered the exercise good for her health. In addition, she personally showed me the Walford household's arsenic supply, which was quite considerable: "there's no better way of getting rid of rats, Inspector". None of the servants had noticed if the store had been depleted of late, and I do believe they're telling the truth. If you regard arsenic as rat

poison and nothing else, there's no reason to keep tabs on how much you have of it until you're running out, and there was quite enough of it still there.'

I shuddered and Green looked at me with understanding.

'I'm beginning to comprehend Dr Lydgate's nervousness as regards Lady Walford. And yet ...'

He shook his head impatiently and continued:

'As far as you, your family, and your guests are concerned, you all had access to the arsenic in Dr Lydgate's bag in the course of the night. The following morning, Sir Henry and Lady Walford were alone in the room with the bag for some time and thus able to appropriate the poison so as to create a false trail. Incidentally, Dr Lydgate's missing arsenic tells against your theory that Mrs Thompson, or, indeed, any other person than your own household and the Walfords, might be involved in the murder.'

I'd almost managed to forget the wretched arsenic and pleaded, but without much hope:

'You haven't considered the possibility that the murderer and the arsenic thief might be two different persons?'

To my surprise, Green nodded gravely.

'Yes, it isn't impossible. Someone could have made use of the murder to harm your reputation. I'm afraid it's not very likely, though. In the police force, we tend to believe there's a connection if arsenic goes missing in one place and an arsenic murder is committed somewhere else. In nine cases out of ten, you see, the simplest explanation turns out to be the right one. That's the trouble with this case.'

Green's methodical recapitulation had made me forget my fear for a moment; but at this point it returned with a vengeance, even before I realized what it was he wanted to tell me. With great effort, I managed to utter the question:

'What do you mean by that?'

Green looked at me so sadly you'd have thought I was swinging from the gallows already.

'But don't you see, Mr Ladislaw, *you* could be the simple explanation of this case? For days on end we've been labouring to find conclusive evidence linking you or some other person to the murder, but we haven't found so much as a hair. Consequently we have to fall back on circumstantial evidence, and all of it speaks against you. You were the person who had a quarrel with Mr Courdroy. It was your family that was reviled in the statement which was – I think we may take it – burnt by the killer. It was in your house, in the room



outside the study where you spent the night of the murder, that Dr Lydgate's arsenic vanished, without your hearing anything – or so you say. Other scenarios are conceivable, certainly. The burning of the statement might be either a clumsy attempt to protect you or a cunning attempt to cast suspicion on you. But it's far less likely. You see, we're compelled to fall back on motive after all. I don't like it, but when all is said and done it was your career that Courdroy was threatening, nobody else's.'

'But ... what about Sir Henry?'

Sir Henry happens to be the person I myself suspect most, but even so I felt a cad for making such an objection. Green's tone was amiable, but his answer was a rebuff.

'Sir Henry has been decent enough to confess to us how much he disliked the murder victim, and what fears Mr Courdroy planted in his mind during their discussion. But we mustn't forget that the murder happened later, after Sir Henry had had a long conversation with his wife. I don't know what you think, Mr Ladislaw, but Lady Walford managed to convince me that Sir Henry never had the slightest reason to be jealous, and I'm not even her loving husband. True, he may be said to have good reason not to mourn for Mr Courdroy; but he really didn't have a motive for disposing of him. Mr Courdroy didn't constitute anything that might be called a danger to Sir Henry, or to his lady. As matters stand, Mr Ladislaw, it's only natural that you should be suspicious of the Walfords, but consider how little they actually have to do with it all. And they couldn't know about Dr Lydgate's arsenic. To start by committing a murder by poison and then happen to have an opportunity to steal the very same poison from a doctor's bag in the house of a suspect – I'm sure you'll agree that that would be a rather fantastic coincidence.'

I thought of Dorothea and the boys and of all the shame and suffering they would have to undergo if I were hanged as a murderer. But more than that, I admit, I was haunted by the thought that I didn't want to die. I never knew that the instinct for survival is so strong. I was prepared to do anything, forgetting all that morality and decency could ever demand of me, so as not to have to die. There I sat, more like a frightened animal than anything else, while Green was struggling to think of something to say next. I was just about to tell him the whole Raffles story just to invest some other person with more of a motive when my otherwise so troublesome temperament came to my rescue. Why was I so worried? I was an innocent man! I hadn't killed Courdroy, and I was determined to make sure I wasn't convicted of something I hadn't done.

My anger helped me pluck up some courage, but I still sounded less than cocksure when I finally asked Green:

‘Are you here to arrest me?’

‘No, but I must ask you not to leave the city in the next few days. My superiors wonder what I’m waiting for, and I’m not entirely sure myself. But if nothing new transpires in the immediate future, I’m afraid an arrest may be on the cards.’

We sat in silence for some time before Green began to talk again, visibly annoyed with himself.

‘And I was so sure I’d be able to solve this case solely by looking for tangible evidence. I didn’t want to delve into feelings and private matters, and now it’s too late. Unless you have anything to tell me, just one small thing, which might help us?’

‘I ... I’m not quite sure.’

Green got up to leave.

‘Think about it, and consider what’s at stake for you. I wish I’d never had this murder assigned to me! Who could have known it would turn out to be a Bucket case?’

‘A what?’

‘Inspector Bucket’, explained Green, ‘was one of our best-known crime solvers in the Metropolitan Police Force, but I’m afraid he retired early. I had the privilege of assisting him on a couple of occasions before he left, and I admired the man and felt great sympathy for him, but I knew I’d never adopt his methods. He was extremely interested in “the human drama” and felt his way to solutions by dint of pure intuition and knowledge of human nature. Maybe you’ve heard of the Tulkinghorn case? Bucket formed his first suspicions of the murderess when she pretended to grief she didn’t feel on the death of the victim and then showed signs of triumph and satisfaction at his funeral. I wouldn’t have dreamt of pursuing such a vague clue, insofar as it can even be called that, but Bucket went along with his instinct and found conclusive evidence against the woman in question – he even caught her in the act of disposing of the murder weapon. I’m sorry, anecdotes of this sort can hardly interest you after what I’ve been obliged to say to you.’

‘It does interest me. I believe you’re trying to tell me something.’

‘What I’m trying to say’, Green sighed, ‘which is not much help to you, is that I’m not sure I could solve this case even if I did have access to all the facts – which you and some of your fellow suspects have ensured I don’t. Something tells me it can only be solved by means of analysing the suspects and their

emotional reactions, something I was never very good at. One doesn't want to be subjective and prejudiced – there may be hundreds of comparatively innocent reasons why, for instance, a woman behaves oddly at a funeral. But Bucket had no inhibitions in such a situation. He'd throw a glance at someone and say to himself "there's something wrong about this person", and most of the time he was dead right. This murder would have suited him.'

It should perhaps have seemed strange to offer consolation to the man who had just threatened to arrest me for murder, but as I sensed the cause of the Inspector's uneasiness, I couldn't be angry with him.

'Oh, I don't know. You seem a pretty astute psychologist to me, but that may be because you don't think I did it.'

Green just smiled, in the same rueful way as before, and said goodbye. His despondent bearing as he left the room gave me reason to think I was right: here was such a rare thing as a police inspector who was downhearted because he *did* have sufficient evidence to secure a conviction.