WILDSIDE PRESS

MYSTERY CLASSIC

ZENITH BROWN

WRITING AS DAVID FROME

HOMICIDE HOUSE

A Mr. Pinkerton Mystery

Table of Contents

HOMICIDE HOUSE

MR. PINKERTON RETURNS

ZENITH BROWN

(writing as David Frome)

COPYRIGHT INFORMATION

Published by Wildside Press LLC.
wildsidepress.com | bcmystery.com

CHAPTER 1

THE fragrance of burning leaves rose in the quiet golden haze that hung over Godolphin Square. It stirred a mute nostalgia in the heart of the little grey Welshman sitting under the plane trees on the dilapidated bench between a pile of forgotten rubble and the soot-grimed rhododendrons straggling out into the ragged unkempt path. Mr. Evan Pinkerton did not really belong in Godolphin Square. It was still the exclusive West End of London, in spite of the sagging wattle fence that had replaced the iron palings, taken for munitions, and the four bombed-out houses that made a broad gap between the chimney pots on the north side. On the south side the houses were as they had always been, simple and elegant, with only a few of them converted into exclusive service flats.

Mr. Pinkerton had come to one of them—No. 4 Godolphin Square—for two quite simple reasons. The first was that his own house in Golders Green had got an incendiary bomb on the roof. The second was that No. 4 Godolphin Square was part of Pinkerton Estates, and so, curiously enough, was Mr. Pinkerton himself. In fact, Mr. Pinkerton was Pinkerton Estates, although he still did not entirely believe it. It was as incredible to him as it was to everybody else, including Miss Myrtle Grimstead, the lady manager of No. 4 Godolphin Square. She would never, of course, have put him in a maid's

room on the third and top story, to share a bath with the chef and the permanent valet, if she had had any idea of who he was. Miss Grimstead had taken a long look at the estate agent's order for a flat and free maintenance, when Mr. Pinkerton had timidly presented it, and a single very brisk one at the little man. Some impoverished hanger-on, Miss Grimstead had decided; a distant relative no doubt.

But Mr. Pinkerton was happy enough on the third floor. It made him a little more confident that the late Mrs. Pinkerton, from whom he had inherited the Pinkerton Estates, would not suddenly rematerialize, wispy-haired and vinegary-cheeked, by the sheer force of the agony of seeing him squander her substance. Never having allowed him more than a sixpence at a time, even out of his own earnings, she would hardly care to see him rioting away her whole property. Mr. Pinkerton knew very well she would never have left it to him at all if she could have brought herself to lay out sixpence for a will form at the corner stationer's.

But on the whole he was happier outside the house than in it. Down in the square, he was at least out of range of Miss Myrtle Grimstead's managerial eye. The straggling rhododendrons also concealed him from the eternal scrutiny of Miss Caroline Winship, who sat all day at the window of her flat on the first floor, brooding over the ruins of her bombed-out house across the Square. He felt reasonably happy there on the dilapidated bench, and reasonably secure; and when it rained, he could go to the cinema.

That it was not raining today was unusual for several reasons. One was that it had rained all through August. Another was that if it had not just stopped, Mr. Pinkerton would not have been in the Square to see Daniel McGrath. That was

something he would not have liked to miss. Daniel McGrath, coming resolutely, was in search of a dream, and no one in all London knew more about dreams than the little Welshman sitting there on the wooden bench behind the rhododendrons in Godolphin Square. He had two of his own. One was Scotland Yard, in the tawny and stolid person of J. Humphrey Bull, his only friend, his wife's former lodger in Golders Green, and now a chief inspector of the Criminal Investigation Division of the Metropolitan Police. The other was the cinema, where, on rainy days and in the least expensive seat available, Mr. Pinkerton sat with breathless enchantment, not untouched with envy, viewing the life and loves of those strange and fascinating people, the Americans. He knew more about them, their habits and their language, than they did themselves.

In the pale golden haze of the late autumn afternoon, Mr. Pinkerton was unaware that his two dreams were poised, in full bud, ready to burst into the most extraordinary fruition.

Daniel McGrath came swinging along into Godolphin Square. Mr. Pinkerton saw him first as he turned to the left, glancing up at the numbers uniformly inscribed on the broad elliptical fanlights over the painted Adam doorways. The first being, as Mr. Pinkerton knew, illegibly dimmed, it was not until he reached the third house that he made a prompt about-face and set back toward the right and the north side of the Square. Having no business of his own and being inveterately curious about other people's, Mr. Pinkerton watched. A devotee of New Scotland Yard, he liked to make deductions about people, their character and intent, in which he was almost invariably and sometimes notably incorrect, as the time he had mistaken the Bermondsey dog poisoner for the curate's wife and would have helped her catch a miserable little terrier if it

had not fortunately bitten him and got away. Now, even at some distance, he recognized that there was something peculiar about the young man in the Square. He was a stranger, obviously, hunting for a particular house. Then, as he came nearer, Mr. Pinkerton straightened up on his bench, his watery grey eyes brightening behind his lozenge-shaped steel-rimmed spectacles. It was no wonder the young man looked peculiar; Mr. Pinkerton recognized the reason for it instantly. He was an American. It stood out all over him. His whole air was quite unmistakable: the free and untrammelled way he swung along, imperturbable and unconcerned, as at ease and at home as if he owned the entire place.

Not that Mr. Pinkerton regarded that as offensive, as some people did. Never having been truly at ease or at home in any part of the constricted universe he had moved in, it was the one thing that could stir a momentary envy in his timorous heart. His childhood had been rigorously regimented by a pair of dour Welsh aunts. The unfortunate interregnum between them and Mrs. Pinkerton had been a nightmare spent as an underfed, underpaid undermaster in a small Welsh school, a nightmare so unforgettable that never without trembling did he see two or more small boys unaccompanied by their parents or keepers. His release from all of it had come too late. Even Mrs. Pinkerton's last and unintended act of grace in leaving him the free and presumably sole arbiter of himself and some £75,000 in cash and property had been too late for him ever to get over what had gone before. Nevertheless, the sight of anybody young and untrod on, serene, calmly sure the world was a friendly and decent place and as much his as anybody else's, had an extraordinary effect on him; it lifted vicariously the colorless load of his inferiority.

He felt it now, watching Daniel McGrath coming along, looking up at the street numbers, and he sat boldly erect, ignoring the fact that the rhododendron branches no longer protected him from Miss Caroline Winship's brooding gaze. The young man had come to an empty hole in the row of houses, two doors from Miss Winship's own. He stopped and looked ahead, then back again, as if shocked; as if a hole where a house had been had not been part of what he had expected to find. Mr. Pinkerton adjusted his spectacles and waited anxiously. The young man went back and looked up again at Number 19, then came on, almost running, it seemed to Mr. Pinkerton, his long legs covered the space so quickly.

"Oh, dear!" Mr. Pinkerton thought suddenly. "The house he's hunting for isn't there any more. It's—it's destroyed. And he didn't know it."

He got up from his bench. The young man had gone back again and was counting up once more, slowly, stopping to look about him, as if in a bewildered daze. If McGrath had been an Englishman—or if he himself had been one—Mr. Pinkerton would never in the world have done what he did do. He scurried across the garden to the flimsy gate in the wattle fence, opened it and hurried along to where the young man was standing, looking over the four-foot wall erected to keep passers-by from plunging down into the ruins of what had been Miss Caroline Winship's basement kitchen area. Ferns and the white silk seed-pods of willow herb grew there now, sprung miraculously out of the brick and rubble of the blast-shredded walls.

Mr. Pinkerton looked over too, glancing anxiously at the young man staring down into the area, his jaw tight, his lean figure motionless as a statue.

"Are—are you—looking for somebody?"

Mr. Pinkerton said it, and then died a sudden trembling agony of apprehension. He was being grossly and inexcusably officious, and maybe by some horrible mischance the man was not an American, but somebody in the disguise of one—or, if he was one, perhaps not a friendly one. He might be different from all the others of his race Mr. Pinkerton had known—there had been two, actually, and in the flesh, not film. He might resent people prying into his personal affairs. Mr. Pinkerton sidled a few steps away along the wall. The young man was turning his head, slowly, like somebody struck a dull blow behind the ear. His frosty blue eyes, curiously light in a lean face suntanned the color of juice from a green walnut, were blank and unseeing. Mr. Pinkerton retreated another step along the wall.

"I—I'm very sorry," he said hastily. "I didn't mean to intrude."

"Intrude? You're not intruding."

The young man spoke like a bewildered automaton as his gaze turned back to the ruins of the house in front of him. His eyes travelled slowly up the graceful curve of the stone staircase that swept, fantastically supporting one weather-stained pale grey plastered wall rather than being supported by it, up to the transverse hall on the first floor, curving there at the end of the hall and sweeping on up, its delicate ornamental brass railing still intact, to the open sky. Over the transverse hall a portion of attic roof still remained to make it all look like some forgotten stage set, left standing when the play was ended. A central chimney column stood solidly intact behind it, the fireplaces with their carved roses and baskets of fruit and flowers pro-

tected from the weather, the faded peach damask still paneling the overmantel.

The young man turned his head slowly back to the little Welshman standing uncertainly and at a discreet distance from him.

"Is this Number Twenty-two Godolphin Square?"

His voice had a lost, unbelieving tone in it, as if he was awed and stricken, and thoroughly sunk, as Mr. Pinkerton imagined he might put it.

"Yes. This is Number Twenty-two."

The American still spoke out of a bewildered fog. "What happened? Do you know what happened?"

Living at Number 4 Godolphin Square, Mr. Pinkerton knew only too well what had happened. A comparative latecomer, he had been what he believed the Americans would call a natural, to hear the story long after everybody else, each with his own major or minor catastrophe to tell, had heard it, *ad infinitum, ad nauseam,* from both Miss Caroline Winship and her sister Mrs. Scott Winship. If their accounts differed from Miss Myrtle Grimstead's, it was not unreasonable, as they had been there and Miss Grimstead had been safely on the opposite side of the Square, where the bombs did not hit; and if the story improved with the telling and retelling, that was natural enough, as Mr. Pinkerton knew from trying to improve his own sorry tale. There was nothing particularly dramatic, basically, about an incendiary bomb in the attic, especially as he was at Inspector Bull's house in Hampstead that night. But the Winships' story was different, and having heard it so often from the two sisters, and everyone else, he could tell it almost as vividly as he had been there at the top of the hanging staircase himself.

"Miss Caroline Winship's a very determined woman," he ended breathlessly. "She said no Germans would drive her out of the house into a shelter to catch pneumonia. Some people think she ought to have let her sister Mrs. Scott Winship go, even if she didn't care to herself, because Mrs. Winship isn't as strong a character as Miss Caroline. (She married a cousin, that's why the name's the same.) Some people say that sitting up there in that hall all night, with the whole front of the house blasted in, made her even less strong-minded than she was. They didn't get out till morning, and even then Miss Caroline refused to go. She hung on to the bannister, and fought like a harpy, Miss Grimstead says, before the police came and dragged her bodily down and out into the street. Oh, she's a one. She's— really a one."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked his eyes and adjusted his spectacles.

"Of course it was quite extraordinary. The other three houses you can see went completely down. Miss Winship's would have done too, only her father had it shored up with those iron girders when he put central heat in before the last war, Miss Caroline says. They used the hall chimney for the flue, and discovered the back part of the house was sagging, so that's when he had the supports put in."

He paused and looked up anxiously at the young man, whose mind and gaze seemed to have wandered back to the ruined walls, instead of focussing respectfully on the broad iron transverse support that was what had held up the hanging staircase.

"It was—sort of ironical," Mr. Pinkerton ended lamely. "I mean, to have escaped the blitz, and everything, and then get it in 1944, when things were—were almost over."

The young man turned and looked at him then.

"What happened to the—the girl? There was a girl here, wasn't there?"

He did not seem too sure, but Mr. Pinkerton brightened up at once. Of course, he thought. This was it. The films should have taught him.

"Oh, you mean *Mary* Winship!" he said. "Oh, she's all right. She wasn't here. She—"

"She's—married, I suppose?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Pinkerton said hastily. "She's not married. I don't think her aunt would ever let—"

He stopped instantly, realizing that that might be hardly a tactful thing for him to be saying.

"I mean, I think her aunt and her mother sort of depend on her—perhaps more than they should, as a matter of fact," he finished hurriedly. But the young man did not seem much concerned with the two elder Winship ladies. A light had kindled somewhere in the depths of his blue eyes, making him seem a little less remote and slightly more tractable.

"You don't happen to know where they are now, do you?" he inquired casually.

"Certainly," Mr. Pinkerton said. "They live just over the Square. At Number Four. They have the first-floor flats. Indeed, if you'll look over, you'll see her aunt, Miss Caroline Winship. She's always at the window. She's supposed to have bribed the gardener to cut off some of the branches so she could see across. It annoyed the other residents of the Square. It's a service flat. I live there too."

He was aware that he could have sounded a little pettish, as if he had a record of omniscience that he did not care to have questioned, which could not have been further from the truth. It was simply that he had been disappointed at the offhand

fashion the inquiry had been put in. It was as impersonal and disinterested as if the young American had got an unpaid bill in his pocket and was instituting a routine inquiry as to the debtor's whereabouts. A sudden chill struck Mr. Pinkerton. He swallowed painfully, his heart lurching into the pit of his stomach.

"Oh, dear!" he thought. What if that was the case? What if he was just there to make trouble for everybody? He glanced quickly at the American. He was standing there, fishing about in his pocket. To Mr. Pinkerton's relief it was his pipe he brought out. He looked at it for a moment as if it was something he hadn't himself expected to find there, and put it in his mouth. He was smiling a little, but not very much, as he turned and glanced across the garden in the direction Mr. Pinkerton had pointed when he said the Winships were at Number 4. Then he looked at Mr. Pinkerton again.

"Thanks," he said. He added slowly, "Mary Winship. It's a pretty name. I never knew what it was. All I knew was she lived at Twenty-two Godolphin Square. I came to see her here, a couple of times, but I got cold feet just outside the door. I hung around hoping she'd come out, but she never did. Then my outfit shoved off and I never got back to England again. I guess I'd have gotten up nerve enough if we'd stuck around a little longer, but just an ordinary G. I. punk ringing the bell and asking Can I see the girl with dreamy lashes and curly hair —I guess I figured I'd get booted out on my impertinent behind."

He gave Mr. Pinkerton a quietly amused smile. "So, thanks a lot, pal. I'll shove along now, but I'll be seeing you. McGrath's my name, Dan McGrath."

"Pinkerton's mine," said Mr. Pinkerton.

Dan McGrath turned to go, and turned back. "By the way, Mr. Pinkerton—do you know if her father ever came back?"

"Her *father*?"

Mr. Pinkerton looked at him blankly.

"I—I didn't know she had a father. I mean, I thought her mother was a—a widow. I thought her father had been dead a great many years. In fact, I'm quite sure of it—Miss Caroline Winship told me so herself. You're sure—I mean, we're talking about the same girl, aren't we?"

"I don't know, Mr. Pinkerton." Dan McGrath was pleasant and imperturbable. "All I know is she lived at Twenty-two Godolphin Square. I met her in an air raid shelter. That was in forty-three. She was with her cousin and they'd gotten separated. She wasn't the maid—I know that darn well, because I held her hand all night."

"Oh," Mr. Pinkerton said. His shattered illusions quickly annealled themselves. Dan McGrath was human after all. He could hold a girl's hand. He could also grin. The one he gave Mr. Pinkerton as he set off up the road again was proof of that.

Mr. Pinkerton stood blinking after him for a moment before he turned and scurried happily across the Square, his heart fluttering with excitement like the dun-coloured wings of a moth miller rising from a dusty floor.

CHAPTER 2

INSIDE the door and halfway up the first flight of green-carpeted stairs, Mr. Pinkerton remembered Miss Caroline Winship. Eternally watching from her window, she must have seen him talking to the American in front of her ruined house. He started hastily down again. His impulse had been to hurry back where he could examine and enjoy the romantic potentials of Dan McGrath's return to London over a nice hot cup of weak tea in the privacy of his own room. Halfway up the stairs he realized how mistaken he was. He could not see Miss Winship's door open, or her standing in it like a virulent spider, her web already spun to catch his unsuspecting feet, but he was mortally certain that was the case. He hurried back down again. It was too late. Pegott, the permanent valet, materialized from the shadowy recesses of the lower hall, was blocking his way, his customary insolence more thinly veiled than usual.

"Miss Winship would like to speak to you."

He had dropped the "sir" a few days after he came to Number 4 Godolphin Square and had had an opportunity to inspect Mr. Pinkerton's belongings, which were as meagre and unimpressive as their owner. When he did use it occasionally, it had the effect of cocking a thumb and making a nose, so that Mr. Pinkerton was rather happier when he didn't bother. He had small close-set green-blue eyes that seldom met anybody's di-

rectly, but he was able to stare down the little grey man with a superciliousness that Mr. Pinkerton had no defence against.

"I'll see Miss Winship later." It took unusual courage for Mr. Pinkerton to say it, but say it he did. "I'm going out now," he added stoutly. He adjusted his steel-rimmed spectacles and tried to sound as adamant as possible.

"Miss Winship saw you come in," Pegott said carelessly. "I'm going off, and I wouldn't want Miss Winship to think I'd not given you her message. She's ordered up tea especially for you. I'm sure she wouldn't want it wasted."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked. Faced with a personal responsibility for the waste of food when it was so difficult to get, he felt himself weakening miserably.

"Well," he said. "… Well, I expect I can go out later."

He turned and trudged unhappily back up the stairs. The permanent valet stood where he was, not attempting to disguise the smirk on his face. And Miss Caroline Winship was waiting in her doorway—determined, imperious, her heavy cheeks raddled with bitterness.

"Come in here." She crooked a bony finger in a peremptory summons. "Close the door. Put your hat on the chair—don't stand there fiddling with it. Who was that man over there at my house? What does he want? Don't try any tricks with me. If he's another of those Town and Country planning people, I'll call my solicitor. Answer me immediately. *Don't* stand there gaping. *Answer* me!"

Mr. Pinkerton was indeed standing there gaping, but his mind was busily at work.

"Oh, dear—she's dreadful," he was thinking rapidly. "She's *really* dreadful." He had never thought of her as particularly pleasant, but she'd always been polite, and if a little conde-

scending, no more than Mr. Pinkerton knew was warranted, considering she was born to wealth and Godolphin Square and he had only accidentally inherited both—which accidental happening, furthermore, Miss Caroline Winship had no conceivable way of knowing about. Whenever she had summoned him into her flat before it had been when she was bored with looking out of the window and irritable with her invalid sister, and wanted someone else to listen to her without interrupting. Mr. Pinkerton had listened. He had listened patiently and interminably, to her reminiscences of the past and her bitterness about the present, to Things in General and her income tax and the socialists in particular. But she had always covered up the corrosive vitriol that was working now like an evil ferment in her thick lips and quivering nostrils. She was frightening. The rouge on her cheeks stood out in dull purple splotches, and her brown eyes flashed under their heavy twitching lids. A heavy-set, largeboned, dominant woman, she always made Mr. Pinkerton feel even smaller and scrawnier than he was. He felt now that he could have stood erect under the oriental carpet on the floor.

"Answer me!" Miss Caroline Winship said.

"He's—he's not. He wasn't at all," Mr. Pinkerton stammered. His hands were trembling. A mild flush of adrenalin, diluted at best, was all that enabled him to answer her without his voice trembling too. "He's not from the Town and Country planning people at all. He's from America. He's just over here on—on a visit."

"A visit? What for? Is he another of their antique dealers trying to buy my staircase and mantel? If he is tell him they're not—"

"No, no," Mr. Pinkerton said hastily. "He's not trying to buy anything. He was—he was just *looking.*"

For some reason that he had not put into words, he would rather have cut his tongue out than tell her what Dan McGrath was really looking for. He hadn't the remotest doubt, born of his previous observation of her relationships with Mary Winship, Mary Winship's mother Mrs. Scott Winship, and her nephew Eric Dalrymple-Hughes, and crystallized by the violence of her present emotion, that she would spoil everything if she knew Dan McGrath had come all the way from America to see Mary again.

"He's really not trying to buy anything at all, Miss Winship."

"I don't believe it." Miss Caroline Winship's heavy lids drooped ominously over her brilliant angry eyes. "He wants something. What is it?"

"—Oh, Caroline…"

Mr. Pinkerton started and turned quickly around. Mrs. Scott Winship, frail and wan, had come from the adjoining room and was there in the doorway, her worn quilted dressing gown huddled about her. Her nostrils were pinched with cold, and the drooping querulous lines of the perpetual invalid robbed her of all the delicate beauty that she may once have had. Looking at her was like looking at an image of her daughter reflected in a tarnished mildewed mirror in a darkened hallway, all the vitality and youthful loveliness faded and withered by the killing frost of years and dependence.

"Please don't be so cross, Caroline. Perhaps Mr. Pinkerton doesn't know. You really mustn't let yourself get so worked up and irritable."

Caroline Winship had never had her sister's beauty, but she had all the concentrated passion and vitality the other lacked.

"I'll deal with this in my own way, Louise," she said shortly. "Go back to your fire. You'll catch cold in here."

She turned to Mr. Pinkerton. "*What* did that man want?"

"He—he wanted to know if Mr. Winship had ever come back."

Mr. Pinkerton had not intended to say it; it had just popped out of his mouth, somehow, as he saw Mrs. Winship draw her robe more tightly around her frail body and start to obey her sister's command to go back to her room. It had just popped out, and in some terrible and inexplicable fashion remained, undissipated, the words as tangible as if they were solidly created objects, visibly formed and frozen.

"Oh, dear!" Mr. Pinkerton thought with a mute and horrified gasp. "What have I done now!"

As well he might. It was as if he had by chance stumbled onto a magic formula that turned everything in the room into stone or lifeless clay. The two women stood motionless, petrified into speechless silence, life suspended. There was something so ghastly about the whole atmosphere of the room and the unutterable quiet of both of the women there, that small beads of icy pricking perspiration broke out all over him.

"He—just asked. That's all," he managed to say. "He just asked me if I knew."

His voice sounded hollow and very loud, as if he was screaming in an empty room.

Then Miss Caroline spoke. "Go to your room, Louise." Her voice was so low and so deathly quiet that Mr. Pinkerton took an involuntary step backward and put his hand out, trying to reach the door.

"Stay where you are, Mr. Pilkington. Don't go. Come over here. Come over and sit down."

Mr. Pinkerton was not sure how he did it. He was aware of Louise Winship somehow fading away and the solid white door filling the place she had stood in. He was aware of himself sitting bolt upright on the extreme edge of the chair that Miss Caroline's thick knotted hand had indicated. And of her hooded brown eyes level with his own, veiled and intent, fixed steadily on him.

"Mr. Pinkerton…" Her voice was still low, hardly above a whisper, with none of a whisper's forced or sibilant quality. "Mr. Pinkerton—Scott Winship has not come back. He can't ever come back. Scott Winship is dead. Do you understand that? He's dead. He's been dead for a great many years. He is dead— and his name is never mentioned in this house."

Mr. Pinkerton swallowed. He nodded his head mutely. He was shaking so that he couldn't have spoken if he had wanted to. He nodded again. Miss Winship was rising. He rose too.

"You understand, Mr. Pinkerton?"

Mr. Pinkerton nodded again, hastily. "I do. I—I understand, perfectly." He managed to get control of his voice. "And I'm terribly sorry. I—I didn't mean to upset everybody. And it's—it's none of my business anyway, Miss Winship."

Miss Caroline Winship was moving with him toward the door. He retrieved his hat and clutched it tightly in his trembling hands.

"How very correct you are in saying so." She reached out and opened the door for him. "It is no business of yours whatsoever. I hope you'll remember and not forget it. My sister is an invalid. I have no intention of allowing her to be disturbed. I'd

be happy if you'd remember that too. Good afternoon, Mr. Pinkerton. Thank you for coming."

She closed the door. Mr. Pinkerton's knees were as weak as tepid water. He leaned against the wall and pulled at his narrow celluloid collar that was like a constricting iron band round his throat.

"Oh, dear me!" he whispered. "Dear, dear, how dreadful."

He started to close his eyes, and blinked them abruptly open. As he leaned against the wall the angle of his vision brought into view a small segment of the staircase that otherwise he could not have seen—nor would he in all probability have noticed it then if his ears had not caught the clink of a heel on one of the brass rods securing the thick carpet at the base of each riser. It was a stealthy clink, and as Mr. Pinkerton looked quickly he saw the brush of white across the narrow segment of staircase—Arthur Pegott's white shoulder, his head bent forward to conceal his presence as he slipped down the stairs.

Mr. Pinkerton straightened up, his heart curiously still. Pegott had been listening at the door. He knew it as perfectly as if he had seen him there, or seen the imprint of his pointed shoes on the figured carpet. But why? What had he hoped to hear that would make him, after waiting in the lower hall, insolently watching Mr. Pinkerton come up the stairs, nip up behind him and risk his job to listen to? Unless… Mr. Pinkerton steadied himself and glanced at the solid ivory-painted door panel. How much had he heard? He listened now himself, to see if Pegott could have heard at all. The sisters would certainly be talking, whether Scott Winship's name was ever mentioned in the house or not.

Miss Caroline Winship's voice was muted but quite distinct. "… American must have seen him. That's all I know. You'd better come at once, Sidney. I think he's here. In London."

Mr. Pinkerton heard the faint click of the bell as the telephone was replaced, and the scrape of a chair being pushed back and stopping sharply, as if Miss Caroline Winship had become aware of something. Of him, possibly—of his heart pounding against his ribs. For a paralyzed fraction of an instant Mr. Pinkerton stood rooted there, unable to move. Then an indefinable terror gave his feet a sudden power of speed and silence he did not know they could possess, and he was down the stairs and out the front door into the twilit security of the Square with an almost fantastic sense of relief. It died as quickly as it had come as he looked up at the first-floor window and saw Miss Caroline's solid figure looming darkly against the light behind her.

She was holding the curtain to one side, looking down at him, heavy and motionless. She knew he had been listening to her. The same intuitive awareness that had spoken to him from Pegott's stealthy movements on the stairway told him that. He quickened his steps until at the end of the road he found he was almost running and quite out of breath.

There was something frightening about the whole thing that was more frightening because it seemed to have an intensity entirely out of rational bounds. Mr. Pinkerton stopped to get his breath and his bearings. Scott Winship was not dead, of course; Miss Caroline Winship knew he was not. But it was more than that. Mr. Pinkerton had not believed he was dead, for the simple reason that she had been so determined to force him to believe it. At least, Scott Winship was not physically dead. Mr. Pinkerton had started to take off his brown bowler

to wipe the perspiration off his meagre forehead. He set it down on his head again, blinking. Miss Winship had not said he was physically dead. All she had said was that he was dead, had been dead a long time, and that his name was never mentioned in that house.

As Mr. Pinkerton examined it now, in the cool and peaceful quiet of the evening Square, he breathed a little more freely. There might be nothing so terribly frightening about it, now that he had thought it over. Miss Winship belonged, as he himself did, to a generation that could and frequently did regard its black sheep kinsmen as metaphorically dead. He thought back to her short telephone conversation. "… American must have seen him. That's all I know. You'd better come at once, Sidney. I think he's here. In London."

The name Sidney seemed familiar to him, and he remembered, suddenly, the initials on the small car that had frequently stood in front of Number 22 Godolphin Square, and of Number 4, and the quiet and rather austere middle-aged man they belonged to. Mr. Sidney Copeland. And Mr. Pinkerton had heard about him, from Betty the little Welsh chambermaid, when he first came to the flat.

"They have the most frightful rows, the sisters I mean. Miss Caroline wants Mrs. Winship to marry him."

Mr. Pinkerton blinked again. If Scott Winship really was not dead… But it was all coming back to him now, and very clearly: the little Welsh girl, her soiled apron torn and pinned together, leaning on the vacuum telling him about the romance of the shadowy invalid on the first floor.

"Mr. Copeland's a very nice gentleman, sir. He's been after her ever so long, and I know she likes him. I've heard her laugh when he's there, and she doesn't laugh very often. You'd think

she'd marry him, just to get away from her sister. Miss Caroline's got a cruel and wicked tongue, sir. I'd marry if it was me. Then maybe she wouldn't be sick all the time like she is now. And Miss Caroline Winship's always at her about it. He's her medical man, so it isn't like he was a stranger or a foreigner, is it, sir?"

And now Caroline Winship was telling Mr. Sidney Copeland, whom she had been trying to get her sister to marry, to come at once because she thought her sister's husband was back in London. Mr. Pinkerton blinked again, in the deepest perplexity—and all because an American back in London to find a girl he had met on one single occasion had asked Mr. Pinkerton a civil and quite simple question.

As he sat at a cramped table in a crowded tea shop eating his compote of game—the seven shillings sixpence it cost failing signally to disguise the fact that it was either rook or starling, call it what they would—he wished very much that he had kept his mouth shut. That not having been effected, he wished very much he had asked Dan McGrath where he was stopping. He would have liked to explain his own part in the unfortunate turn of events, and as quickly as possible. He also wanted to warn the young American. Plainly, for one reason or another, the situation ruled out any polite inquiries about Mary Winship's father. And on the other hand…

Mr. Pinkerton was not entirely without some portion of the native Welsh caution, and as he sat there thinking it all over, he came to two sound conclusions. The first was that Dan McGrath was undoubtedly far more capable of managing his own affairs than Mr. Evan Pinkerton was of doing it for him. The second was that whatever family skeleton Mr. Scott Winship, dead or alive, represented, it was clearly the Winships' busi-