



I spent a week reflecting on what I had learnt. That was unlike me. Normally, if the balance of probabilities said something was true, I acted.

I mean, no-one likes a procrastinator, do they?

Of course, there were sleepless nights when I first began, thinking about the innocents who died and the rosy futures that were extinguished. But that feeling passed. I harbour no illusions about who I am now. This is the path I chose, the person I trained to be. A brave-hearted woman in a man's world that few men are strong enough to bear.

Someone once said that I was the full stop that finished a sentence, a paragraph, a chapter and a book, all at the same time. Now, he was a patronising, sexist prig, for what it's worth, who got his comeuppance soon after. Good riddance too. But in this one particular regard, he turned out to be right.

And today I had found a story in need of an ending.

A very personal story indeed.

α

Blinding white light filled my vision. It tumbled and swirled, incomprehensibly bright in a landscape devoid of feature or horizon. Time passed, then a hazy shape began to form and from that the hunched figure of Oates coalesced. I blinked twice and he was before me. Real, breathing and alive, sitting at the table in my office. Central London was visible behind him through the floor to ceiling windows. The obscenity of the BT Tower drew my eye for an instant, then I returned to Oates. Today, he had on his tortoiseshell glasses and was wearing a dark blue flannel suit.

He shifted awkwardly in his chair as I gazed at him.

My flashback was over.

'Oates,' I said. 'Remind me. Where had we got to?'

'Seventeen point four billion pounds,' he replied. 'We were talking about the capital outlay for the acquisition.'

'Right. And payback is what?'

'Here,' he said.

Oates pointed at a cell in the Excel file open on his tablet. Sunlight streamed through the full height windows to make a sharp yellow triangle on the table beside his hand.

'You're happy with that?' I said.

'I'd rather it was below four.'

'But you can live with it?'

'Of course.' He chewed the inside of his lip meditatively. 'I'd like it lower, but I can definitely live with it.'

'And what about the jobs?'

'The company employs twenty-three thousand people now, in thirty-one sites spread across nineteen countries.'

'After?'

'Eighteen thousand seven hundred.'

'That's good.'

'I thought you'd say that.'

'Four thousand three hundred jobs gone and we still make our margin. That's more than good.'

I stood up and walked over to the world map on the far wall. Pins of different colours were dotted across it. Each had a ribbon of paper attached, on which a number was neatly typed.

'Read out where the four thousand three hundred are,' I said.

'Head office,' Oates read, 'one hundred and ninety people, here in London.'

'A drop in the ocean. After the recession we've had, no-one will notice that amongst the tens of thousands of jobs vanishing each month. Not that those PowerPoint jockeys don't deserve a taste of life on the breadline, but they're a blip on the radar.'

'Then ... four hundred and sixty people at a distribution centre in Corby. Which is ... somewhere between Northampton and Leicester.'

'I know where Corby is. We've been there before. This is more interesting. It'll be a real kick in the stomach for a town like that.' I scrutinised a cluster of red pins on the map. 'You're sure that more aren't possible? Another thirty and we'll be up to an even thousand there all told.'

Oates flicked through a series of documents on his tablet, his face a picture of concentration.

'No,' he said at length. 'Four sixty is tops. Realistically, there might have to be fewer in fact.'

'That's not a problem. The absolute number isn't the point. Just to keep making progress. That's why we do it.' I became briefly absorbed in the pins clustered near Corby, then Rochdale and Middlesbrough, like the needle marks in a junkie's arm. 'Where's next?'

'You'll like this one.'

I turned round to look at Oates' glowing face.

'Yes?'

'Fourteen hundred positions ... one thousand four hundred and ten actually, in the research facility in Sophia-Antipolis.'

I quickly moved a thousand miles south on the map.

'Not a mark!' I exclaimed. 'We've never decommissioned a job within fifty miles of there. This will really piss the Frenchies off.'

'I thought you'd be pleased.'

'Outstanding work, Oates. Really ... *outstanding*. You've surpassed yourself on this one.'

'Thank you, sir.' He paused, as if wrestling with a tough decision. Conflicting emotions scudded across his face. 'If you don't mind me asking, sir, why do you keep the map here?'

'Here?' I said absently, taking in the pin-studded swathes of western Europe and far beyond. 'Where else would I keep it?'

'Sorry,' Oates said, flushing. 'I didn't mean why do you keep it *here*? I meant why do you keep it *at all*?'

'Ah. I see your point.' I turned to look at him again. Through the panoramic window behind where he sat I could see all the way from the London Eye on the left round to the arch of Wembley Stadium on the right. 'This really is a magnificent eagle's nest,' I said, 'perched eight hundred feet above the city. I forget sometimes what a commanding height it is we view the world from.'

'Yes, it is,' Oates said, twisting to look over his shoulder and out the window.

'I keep the map to remind myself how far we've come,' I said. 'When I was growing up, in the early Eighties, the television news would finish with a list of all the jobs lost that day. They would show them on a map of the country, with a running total for jobs lost to date in the year.' Oates stared at me blankly, like a goldfish in a bag you win at the fair. 'That was Britain's nadir, the lowest point we fell to.'

'So why celebrate the same thing now?'

'This?' I said, waving my hand over the map. 'Oh, this is different. This is the opposite.'

'I don't see it.'

'Every one of the forty-two thousand five hundred and seventeen eliminated jobs here has been converted into money. Each was inefficiency sustained on a failing company's balance sheet. We have recycled that waste into cash. These firms still produce what they did, only better. Less profligately. With more

money created per person employed on each and every day, come rain or shine.’ I walked across and looked out the north window at London. My eyes alighted on Alexandra Palace. ‘It’s like rewriting the laws of physics. $E=MC^2$ and all that. We put the same money in and thirty per cent more profit appears at the other end. In the Middle Ages they would have called it alchemy.’

‘They have a few words for it now, sir.’

I glanced at his earnest face.

‘Yes, they do,’ I said with a laugh. ‘And some of them are even true.’ I held his gaze. ‘That doesn’t change the fact that productivity is what keeps our planet turning.’

‘But what about the people?’

‘The ones who did the useless jobs? What about them?’

‘Well, they have families, and dependents. An engineer in Sophia-Antipolis might get another job soon enough’ – I shrugged – ‘but a fifty year old foreman in Corby, he might never work again.’

‘So what if he doesn’t? No-one forced him to live in Corby.’

‘Still, they are real people. These are real towns.’

‘What an interesting definition of “real” you have!’ I said. ‘The sooner they stop dragging UK plc down, the better.’

A cough at the doorway told me that Celine had entered. She was wearing her black Chanel dress and an air of serene calm.

‘Sophie Padmore is here without an appointment,’ Celine said. ‘She says it’s urgent—’

‘If Sophie says it’s urgent, then it’s urgent.’ I turned back to Oates. ‘We have finished, haven’t we.’

It wasn’t a question.

‘Yes, I have everything I need,’ he said, rising to his feet.

‘Seventeen point four billion pounds,’ I mused, ‘and payback inside four years?’

‘*Comfortably* inside four years.’

‘Excellent,’ I said. ‘Updated financials on my desk by noon.’

Oates nodded and left.

‘Sophie says that Bob Kenway is on his way too,’ Celine continued.

‘Bob? I haven’t seen him in, ooh ... eighteen months. Not since the Marathon des Sables, in fact.’ Brilliant sunlight and a red *keffiyeh* flashed through my mind. A knife out of its sheath. The smell of fresh blood. ‘Sophie and Bob together isn’t urgent. It’s a crisis I don’t know about yet.’

α

A moment later Celine had gone and Sophie was sweeping into my office. She was sporting a charcoal grey suit from Kathryn Sargent. Trousers, with a sharp cut, but still acutely feminine. Her strawberry blonde hair was perfectly tousled. She carried a black lacquer tray in her left hand. A cream envelope and several small beads lay on it.

‘Hello stranger,’ I said, crossing the room and leaning forward to air-kiss her. ‘Have they got you bringing the mail now?’ I said, pointing at the tray.

‘Greetings too,’ she replied. ‘You got it in one. I’m the new mail girl. For the really special deliveries. So, look, there’s a thing we need to discuss.’

‘I gather.’

‘It may just be nothing and I’m over-reacting.’

‘I doubt it, or you wouldn’t be here. Not that I don’t enjoy the odd impromptu visit—’

‘Yes, it *has* been too long. And we’re on the same page. Because this may just be something. Let’s sit down and I’ll explain.’

I sank down on to the Poltrona Frau Kennedee sofa. It absorbed my weight luxuriantly, effortlessly. Sophie positioned herself diagonally opposite me and placed the tray on the table between us.

‘What is it?’ I said.

‘Well, short version, it’s an envelope and five discoloured orange pips.’

‘That doesn’t sound overly troubling.’

‘Nope. It doesn’t. Forensics were about to throw it in the bin with all the other garbage mail when they looked more closely.’

‘And saw what?’

‘Here, use my phone to zoom in on it.’ She handed me her iPhone, set to my maximum magnification. ‘See it now?’

I was looking at a pale yellow seed, on which was a neatly drawn caricature

of my own face, executed in what seemed to be henna. A thin wash of reddish-brown colour, whatever. The distorted version of my face looked huge on the phone's screen.

'You can see that each pip has a face on it.'

Sophie indicated the other pips beside the envelope. I turned one over with a pen and examined the likeness.

'If I didn't know better, I would say that was Tom Crean,' I said.

'It is. Or so we think. This one here' – she had picked up a pen as well and turned another pip face up – 'is Ted Atkinson. Next to it is Bob Kenway' – our eyes met – 'and here at the end, that one is me.'

We looked at each other for a long moment. Sophie raised an eyebrow and pursed her lips, holding my gaze.

'Can you send me pictures of these,' I said. 'As in now.'

'Already done.' Sophie looked over my shoulder. 'Ah, Kenway's here.'

I turned to see the doorway filled by Bob Kenway. Standing there, in the tailored black clothes that I always thought of as *business combat*, he seemed as wide as he was tall. His short dark hair and Action Man beard matched the colour of his clothes. Both contrasted with his intense blue eyes. They were eyes that had seen terrible things in his time with the Special Forces Support Group in Afghanistan, Yemen and Somalia. Eyes that told you that the assassinations or beatings or whatever hadn't stopped the day he left Mogadishu. He was just working off the meter now.

'Bob,' I said. 'Good to see you. Take a seat.'

'Sorry I'm late, Jack,' he said. 'XR have blocked up London Bridge station.'

'Why London Bridge?' I asked, puzzled.

'Because there are so many people like us here.'

He glanced around the room.

'Ah, that makes sense.'

'Not really. But it does make we wonder what the point of driving is these days. I mean, it's getting like I should feel bad for sitting behind the wheel of a car.'

'You should,' I said. 'It's killing the planet.'

Bob's eyes flicked to Sophie and back to me.

'I suppose it is. But you drive?'

'Me?' I said. 'No, I gave it up eight years ago. Disgusting habit.'

'That's easier to say when you have a personal chauffeur,' Sophie said quietly.

'I suppose.' I wasn't really listening to what they said, but was absorbed looking at the faces on the pips. 'These are really meant to represent the three of us?'

Bob seated himself on the other end of the sofa to Sophie and leaned towards the tray carrying the pips.

'Yes, they are quite well done,' he said, 'but it takes a little imagination for someone to recognise what they are.'

'The three of us have been tattooed on to orange pips. For fuck's sake.'

'Us and Atkinson and Crean,' Sophie said.

'That's exactly who they are,' I said. 'Where are the other two right now?'

'Tom Crean is heading back from Dundee. You know, where the video games and augmented reality unit is.'

'And it took us a little time to pin Atkinson down,' Bob said. 'He's in Pondicherry. In India.'

'It's called Puducherry now,' Sophie added. 'He was seeing the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu.'

'Oh, that.'

'I just spoke with Atkinson,' Bob went on. 'He will head back as soon as he is able.'

'Good. What do these orange pips mean?'

'The obvious reference is the Sherlock Holmes story,' Sophie said. 'Although it sounds ridiculous saying that.'

'What Sherlock Holmes story?'

'It's literally called "The Five Orange Pips",' she said. 'Members of a conspiracy each get envelopes with five orange pips in. They either leave town or are murdered.'

'Charming. Have we five been involved in a conspiracy and it's just slipped my mind?'

'We've certainly done some ... *unusual* things together,' Bob said with a smile.

'True. But *unusual* doesn't prompt literary death threats in most weeks of my life. Why are we taking this seriously?'

'Because Atkinson is coming home in an air ambulance,' Bob continued. 'When I say he's coming home as soon as he is able, I mean physically able.'

Silence filled the room. My eyes met Sophie's, then Bob's, and found uncertainty where I wasn't used to seeing it.

'Go on, Bob,' I said. 'You aren't known for reticence.'

'Atkinson was visiting St Andrew's Church in Pondicherry with the Chief Minister. They were discussing the new project together on the balcony at the front of the church. Then Atkinson somehow fell to the ground, thirty feet below. He swears blind that he was pushed in the back as he leaned over the edge. No-one has verified his account yet, but he is adamant.'

'Is he alright?'

'Left leg broken in three places, torn ligaments in his right ankle. Otherwise just cuts and scrapes. He's remarkably lucky, really. The doctors advise against him flying right now, DVT and all that. So we have him under guard.'

'And when did this happen?'

Bob's eyes went to his Breitling Aviator watch.

'Four hours ago,' he said. 'Four hours twelve minutes and eighteen seconds ago.'

'Which was exactly when the envelope with the orange pips was opened,' Sophie added.

'To the minute,' Bob said.

'All of which is coincidence,' I said. 'The timing is strange, I grant you. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. Give me something concrete. What about fingerprints, DNA or anything else traceable on the envelope or pips?'

'Forensics are undertaking deep investigation,' said Sophie. 'Initial tests found nothing.'

'Literally nothing?'

'Absolutely nothing, not a speck.' Sophie looked at me flatly. 'As if they were packed by a robot working in a zero gravity vacuum.'

'And that for me is the ball game,' Bob added. 'An accident and a crank letter with an unusually artistic approach, perfectly synchronised, that I can discount

as improbable. Possible, but improbable. But add in the fact that the letter has been processed by someone with a very high standard of fieldcraft and I am prepared to call this as malign activity by an actor with sophisticated capabilities.'

'You mean that? The whole thing sounds so ludicrous.'

'This is real.'

'Okay,' I said. 'What level of risk are we talking about?'

'Protocol Five,' Bob said simply.

My eyebrows lifted involuntarily.

'You're sure?' I said.

'Sure. I have authorised the team that lethal force is justified until further notice.'

'Right, Bob. This is your area. I trust you.'

'It is my area, yes. And this a Protocol Five situation.'

'Anything I need to know or do differently?'

'No, Jack. Not at the moment. The team are briefed. We will work around you, as per usual. Keep doing what you need to and we will accommodate.'

'Fine. So, back to these orange pips' – I pointed at the tray on the table – 'what links the five of us together?' I looked at Sophie and then Bob. 'Us three plus Crean and Atkinson? I'm getting nothing. Just blank expanses of empty memory.'

'Us too,' Sophie said. 'We are cross-referencing projects and postings exhaustively, as you might imagine.'

'Fine. Is that everything we know about the situation now?' I glanced at my Patek Philippe watch. 'It's just that I am about to be late for something.'

'Yes, you're fully briefed,' Sophie said.

'There is one more thing,' Bob said. 'A detail really.'

'What?'

'They aren't orange pips.'

'That messes up the Sherlock Holmes story thing.'

'Yes, and it's a loose end. And you know how much I dislike loose ends.'

'I do,' I said. 'So what are they?'

'They're pips, that is true. But they come from a lime which is native to south-

east Africa.'

'South Africa?'

'Actually, our current understanding is that the varietal is from Zimbabwe.'

'An unlikely source. '

'Agreed.'

'We should assume that is meaningful until we have proof otherwise. Is that it?' I looked from one to the other and got blank expressions. 'Good. Thanks both for catching this so quickly. Let's circle round again tomorrow morning, and if anything breaks in between interrupt me, whatever I may be doing, whoever I'm with.'

Ω

I am no lawyer. Good thing too, as I would be terrible at the job. I have no patience for the vanity of judges or the strutting of court room litigators. No discipline to build a flawless case, brick by tedious brick. The witterings of a self-pitying client would drive me insane.

Action is my metier.

The thing at which I excel.

Assess the situation, decide, expedite.

Try that in an English court of law and you'll be back a fortnight later, this time standing in the dock with plasticuffs on.

Fortunately, that only happens if they catch you. And I am very good at leaving no traces of where I have been. You might even say it was my calling card.

α

I had played three games of speed chess online since the conversation with Bob and Sophie. That usually calmed my thoughts, however bleak a situation might be. But not today. True, my regular opponent, OlegD241, seemed to be cheating in some undefinable way and it had taken brutal improvisation in the final game to come out the 2-1 winner.

Even accounting for that, I was unsettled. Bob Kenway calling Protocol Five over a few dried orange pips and a Sherlock Holmes story. It was madness. Perhaps this is what it looked like when Bob lost his edge. I had always assumed that he would sign up for a reality television show when that happened or, more likely, head off to the Brecon Beacons with a commando knife between his teeth and a bivvy bag in his pack, never to be seen again. The facts were turning out to be more mundane. Bob was just making bad calls, same as ordinary mortals did.

I stood up and walked across to the table by the west window. The table was big enough to play ping-pong on. Of course, you wouldn't get very far if you *tried* to play ping-pong on it, as the table housed the model for the redeveloped Craven Cottage football stadium that the architects had sent over last week. They had made the model from polished alabaster, instead of the usual acrylic or extruded plastic, so that it soared above the blue resin line of the Thames like the white cliffs of Dover.

It was, I found myself thinking, magnificent. The stadium when finished would seat 62,000 people, all coming to watch Champions League football in incomparable luxury alongside the world's glitterati. Best of all, we would buy the Barn Elms rowing club across the river and build a grand new bridge for fans to enter by, on the middle of which would stand the finest Michelin-starred restaurant in Europe. The stadium would be envied across the Continent, and would be the perfect place for a country's Prime Minister to entertain the most prestigious guests.

That Prime Minister being me, naturally.

Yes, after Thursday's election I would be in Parliament and my political ascent would begin. If I couldn't make a better fist of running the country than the freakshow who had done the job in recent years, then I might as well give up and establish a think tank. The Hyde Institute for Creativity in Public Ethics. The Centre for Libertarian Regulation. Or perhaps the Entropy and Altruism Foundation. It would be all I deserved.

A tap at the door broke my train of thought. Celine was there, holding a pose straight off a 1940s *Vogue* front cover.

'Sir Gerard Soames has arrived to see you,' she said. 'And he doesn't have an appointment. He said you wouldn't mind.'

'No-one seems to have an appointment today,' I said.

'No, they don't,' she said with some heat. 'Your diary is becoming like a study in Brownian Motion.' I raised a questioning eyebrow. She reciprocated. 'Plus the Americans confirmed for dinner at seven-thirty,' she continued.

'That's good, thanks.' My gaze went out the window, looking eight hundred feet down on to Borough Market and west along the river as it snaked toward the centre of London. Sunshine danced on the water. 'Why would the Chairman of the party come here unannounced?' I said aloud, to the room in general more than to Celine. 'Sir Gerard Soames in person, and without even so much as a phone call first. He must have better places to be than my office.' I turned back to face Celine. 'Very well, then. Show him in.'

Celine stayed where she was.

'Also, a Kirsten Lockhart called,' she said.

'Who's she?'

'Not on my radar. Apparently Gordon King gave her your private number.'

'Well, if she's a friend of Gordon's, you know what you can do with her.'

Celine nodded assent. Then her back started disappearing through the door.

'Oh, Celine,' I said.

She paused mid-stride and her face re-appeared in the doorway.

'Yes.'

'Call up Peter Harrington's shop and get them to bike over a copy of whichever book "The Five Orange Pips" is in.'

'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.'

'If that's the collection.'

'It is. Any particular edition?'

'No preference.' I reflected for a moment. 'Actually, something original. A first edition. I want to get the story from the horse's mouth, as it were.'

'On it. Now I'll bring Sir Gerard through.'

She disappeared through the door. In moments Gerard Soames' trademark black pin-stripe suit was heading the other way. The suit cost more than a month-long family holiday in Tahiti and came from the tailors who made the uniform that his great-grandfather marched off to the First World War in. He crossed the room with hand outstretched and a smile on his face.

'Jack,' he said, 'so good to see you'.

'And you too, Gerard.'

Our hands met and held together for several long seconds. I searched his eyes for clues, but found nothing there. I let his hand go.

'A football stadium?' he asked, his gaze running over the model of New Craven Cottage. 'Perhaps you are a man of the people after all.'

'More of a dream than a stadium,' I said.

'You dream bigger than most men, Jack.'

'Perhaps I do. But I'm guessing that you didn't come here to talk about football.'

'I didn't.'

'Then let's sit down and you can tell me why you did come.'

We sank into place on the sofa suite facing each other. Gerard crossed his legs and unbuttoned his suit jacket.

'Coffee?' I asked.

'Thanks, no. Your delightful assistant has already covered all that.' He adjusted his tie minutely. 'I am here on the instructions of the Prime Minister, but I should make clear that I am acting in a private capacity.'

'Understood. How is Robert?'

'Oh, you know. Skittish, frightened that his own shadow might be polling more strongly than he is himself and still trying to figure out whether his right profile *really* does photograph better than his left. The usual.' A thin smile formed

on Gerard's lips. 'Downing Street does strange things to even the most level-headed person. And Robert ... well, level-headed wouldn't be my first thought of how to describe him.'

'I couldn't possibly comment.'

'So, look, Jack,' he went on. 'I won't beat around the bush. I know you're busy.'

'I always have time for you, Gerard,' I said.

'That's appreciated.' He cleared his throat inaudibly and adjusted his tie again. 'Robert has looked ahead at the composition of his Cabinet for the remainder of the administration. Short version, Jack. There isn't a berth for you in it. I know you had hopes that there might be an opening. Well, Robert has asked me to explain that there won't be one.'

'I'll have to bide my time until the next sex scandal claims its victim and take my chance then.'

'And the situation will be exactly the same.'

He held my gaze.

'It's like that, is it?' I said.

'Yes, it is.'

'I had understood that if I put in the hours, pumped enough hands, was accessible to the media, then an *opportunity* might be possible.'

'It would appear that is no longer the case.'

Gerard ran his hand backwards through his thick black hair.

'This is coming directly from Robert?' I said.

'Yes.'

'I can't help noticing that he has changed his tune.'

'He has, Jack, indeed.'

'And changed it since the donation I made to the party.'

'Indeed. Donations are, I always say, like birthday presents. Gloriously appreciated while the wrapping paper is shiny and new, then before you know it the months have flown by and it's time for another one. Yes, you're right. Robert's tune has changed since your very generous donation.'

'Well, now I know where I stand.'

'I was hoping you would take it like that. Politics can be a fickle mistress.' A

warm smile flickered across Gerard's face and light came into his eyes. This was the Gerard who sparkled over lunch at Franco's or the Wolseley, or dinner at Scott's. 'So, now we've covered that unpleasantness,' he continued, 'I wanted to talk about something else. I won't call it good news, because it isn't, but you will want to hear anyway. Take it as a gesture of goodwill.'

'Go on. Good news which is actually bad news is my favourite type.'

'A bird tells me that your deal with the Americans won't get off the blocks.'

For some reason the game of speed chess I lost to OlegD241 popped into my head.

'I think you will find that you have been misinformed, Gerard,' I said evenly. 'We have the funding. Charlie Erskine has got our backs covered. The French and Chinese dropped out in the last round. And I heard some very offkey noises about Naqâru Capital just this morning. We are in pole position.'

'Oh, I am sure you are all over the deal, Jack, and will sweet talk Charlie's board round. Strong men are putty in your hands. What I hear is that once you sort all those elements out, the acquisition will fail to get approval.'

'You'll need to give me more than that.'

'The FCA have received information that has ... *disturbed* them to an unusual degree.'

I leaned forward in my chair.

'What information?' I said. 'Is this from Robert too?' Gerard shook his head. 'Then who *is* it from?'

'It's a little hazy to me. I should say that between you, me and the bedpost, you have upset some highly influential people.'

'I always upset influential people. That's how I do business.'

'There I go slipping into British understatement, and with you of all people, Jack. When I say "upset", I mean that you could measure their anger on the Richter Scale.'

'Names, Gerard,' I said slowly. 'Give me names.'

'Don't rush me, Jack. I am simply passing on what I have heard from an extremely well-placed source.' He gazed at me with the eyes of a kindly uncle. 'Look, are you coming to the Downing Street reception tomorrow?'

'You know that I am.'

‘Then let me ask around, and we can talk again then. You will make your own enquiries, naturally, so we will be able to compare notes. Now that’s settled’ – Gerard rose from his chair and glanced at his watch – ‘I am due at Clarence House in ten minutes’ time and you know how they hate to be kept waiting. Thank you so much for your time, Jack.’

With that, he was gone.

I stared at the doorway he had exited through and reflected that the world had been an altogether simpler place when I woke up this morning.

END OF SAMPLE CHAPTERS

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