

The Cat's Paw: Blue Death

by mj hollingshead

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dinner with sir winston

to Twineing Along The Lake

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Ah. As usual of course, but then when was he not? Sir Henry Winston was altogether punctual. One thing you could say absolutely and without any doubt or hesitation regarding Lord Henry; the man always and ever was punctual. Dead cert. He was. Steady, dependable reliable, and of course utterly, completely predictable.

And, that unqualified dependable predictability surrounding the dull, boring, colorless chap was precisely the reason why Teddy had been filled with such delight when the lovely opportunity had suddenly presented itself. It was exactly why Teddy had so carefully chosen the chap. Now wasn't it? Well, yes, of course it was. Indeed, whatever other reason could there possibly have been for it then? None, of course. To be sure, Teddy Pryor was many things. However, our Teddy was certain no fool.

Lord Henry Winston was a man who absolutely lived by the clock. Arising exactly at 6 on the dot each morning, he allowed himself 17 specifically measured minutes in which he was to shave, conduct his morning toilette, dress and fully prepare himself for the day. Seventeen scrupulously formulated minutes with the detailed routine followed faithfully in which Winston arose from a sound sleep, arranged and finally seated himself. Seated himself at the exact left hand center of the massive eating board there in the dining room, first storey. Precisely one minute later Mrs. Matthews appeared promptly each day with eggs and soldiers. The two eggs delicately poached, never buttered. Poached exactly two minutes, thirty one seconds each they

were. One thin slice dry toast, cut carefully into four nearly equal strips, never more, never less, and a single cup of aromatic, hot herbal tea accompanied the eggs.

True to form, every day, Sir Winston munched his eggs and soldiers quite in silence he did. Ringing for the dishes and cutlery to be carried away, Lord Henry nodded his fleeting, silent thanks to Mrs. Matthews before picking up the morning newspaper laying just there near the top of his breakfast plate. The thick periodical was every time placed with the fold facing away from himself.

Winston slowly sipped his tea as he immediately read through the day's events. At ten to the hour, exactly, Sir Henry carefully folded the paper once, lay it upon the board, and, touched his heavy linen napkin daintily to his thin lips before placing the monogrammed white linen square atop The Daily Telegraph. Winston then arose, and moved himself to the entryway where donned his hat, gloves and coat before picking up both his broly and carved ash. Without speaking again to Hilda Matthews Henry Winston silently exited his magnificent home's stately front door way. He walked, a bit briskly to be sure, the three blocks from his house, straight on to Marylebone Station where without fail he entered car number seven.

Save for a short-lived interval spent in fulfilling his military service requirement many years before, without deviation then, it was always thus. The daily routine, Winston's methodical schedule, was the same. That transitory stint in the royal navy and the most exceedingly rare holiday, were the only temporary, sparse departure from Henry's careful, precisely constructed timetable.

Sir Winston's routine had truly varied but little for the entirety of each of the thirty two years the man had now served as medical director of the Hospital of St. John and St.

Elizabeth, Grove Street, St. John's Wood. One might even say, Lord Henry Winston rather thrived on routine.

Sir Winston, the only son of a minor earl, an appellation he shunned preferring simply to be noted as Sir Henry, unmarried, nearly sixty four years old, was in all truth pretty generally satisfied with his life. True, he had no direct heir upon whom he might convey the family title, however he considered there were worse situations than that to be sure. In time Winston's nephew Cyril would receive the designation. Clear grey eyes set below straight dark brows in a somewhat patrician, finely chiseled countenance mostly unmarked by time, gazed intelligently, and with great interest, at the world stretched out there before him. A tall, well formed, handsome man given to the wearing of tailored spats and costly, hand done charcoal fedoras, Lord Winston presented a picture of a rather somber, taciturn man who was totally dedicated to his work.

That there might have been another side to this picture of Lord Henry Winston rarely, most probably never, entered into the thinking of those who thought they knew the chap. Lord Henry Winston, physician, medical director, was to all who believed they knew him a dull, colorless, completely predictable fellow.

"Ah, Sir Henry." Teddy's rather plump, flushed cheeks glistened nastily with moisture. Filled with speculation Pryor squinted those piggish, small, dark eyes set in a round overblown face toward Winton's direction. Lustily smacking his full pouty lips once or twice, the fleshy man breathed noisy distasteful wheezes past the bits of gravy dotting the edges of his ample mouth, "Well now, Lord Henry you **are** looking rather," he paused, "fit and all then," Teddy's unmelodious voice held just that barest fraction of mockery. "Aren't you now? Yes indeed, I should certainly say that you are." Eyeing Sir Winston in his always unpolished, most offensive manner, Teddy Pryor simply leered in that rather

disconcerting, to some extent lewd, fashion he employed when speaking with those to whom he felt more than a little inferior.

"Splendid," the fleshy man grunted. Swiping ineffectually at his fleshy, rounded chin with the high-priced linen napkin, the coarse gesture was heightened when a broad greasy smear appeared on the pale blue cloth. Pryor glanced without regard at the unsightly mess he had made upon the expensive fabric ahead of tossing the fabric to the side of his plate. Continuing to chew with enthusiastic abandon, the younger man said, "Splendid of you to come then. Come along old man, do sit down won't you?" Momentarily closing his eyes, Lord Henry winced a small, almost imperceptible twitch as the younger man's unrefined voice grated loudly against the quiet dignity surrounding hushed conversations employed by other diners. Only the tall refined fellow standing half hidden behind a screen across the room noticed the trifling movement. Teddy Pryor remained quite that unaware of anything save his copious meal. Waving a laden, dripping fork toward an empty chair, Pryor announced, "The lamb is really quite excellent this evening."

Masking the complete, utter distaste he harbored for Teddy Pryor, Lord Winston eyed the corpulent man with a bland gaze for a long moment before responding. Gingerly the stately man lowered himself upon the chair Teddy had indicated. Pryor continued his present task of sending overloaded forkful after forkful of the last of his lavish meal toward his yawning mouth. Chomping noisily, the man smacked his lips in delighted satisfaction.

Teddy Pryor that great barmy blighter was, Sir Henry noted really quite a gigantic fellow. Standing well above 6'4" in his stocking feet and weighing nearly 450 pounds, Teddy's bulk had remained constant during the past several months of their acquaintance. That the great fleshy cove enjoyed food was obvious. As a matter of fact, Lord Winston reflected,

never have I come face to face with the fatuous man when he was not putting something into his mouth. Still and all, Winston mused in pensive silence; Teddy's weight did not seem to be increasing at all.

"How is it Teddy," Sir Henry said at length, "that you can eat so and never seem to gain an ounce?"

"Right living, Sir Henry, right living." Pryor proclaimed noisily in that too loud, too hearty voice. The sneer settling upon his great fleshy countenance was not pleasing to behold. Abruptly the noisome cove chortled, as though he had just uttered some great terribly funny comment, he sniggered and guffawed. Wiping a vast hammy hand over his eyes, his shoulders shook as Teddy giggled his loud offensive tittering. He continued after a small pause, "Yes indeed Sir Henry. Right living it is," the plump man babbled between loud sniggers, "Nothing like it to keep a man fit and enjoying life and all, then is it?" Peering directly at Lord Winston he was quiet for a moment. At length a fresh spasm of chortles swept over him, "Not at all," he said meaningfully.

The ill-mannered bloke sat cackling and tittering, enjoying immensely his own crude joke as he gazed speculatively at Lord Henry. After a few moments the tone in his voice took on a mocking, taunting timbre, "You had ought to try it for yourself sometime then you know." At that Pryor's impertinent laughter became even more prolonged, even more boisterous. And, it was to Winston's way of thinking, an altogether disgusting, entirely unpleasant, vacuous, sniggering bleat.

At last, gasping between wheezing snickers, Teddy said, "We shall be joined in a short time by one of my associates." His tone was arrogant, odious, "You do remember George, then don't you?" Again came a series of those loud sniggling bleats. Hoping to cause some chink in the serenity exhibited

by the older man, Pryor leered suggestively, "Of course you do then, **Lord** Henry." And at that utterance the offensive man fell back against his seat where he continued giggling hysterically for several rather long moments. Very long moments they were for Winston. The discomfited chap was more than a little aware of the several small, questioning, covert glances cast in their direction. It was very apparent that Pryor truly believed he held the upper hand in this rather odd relationship between himself and the cultured, refined, well known medical specialist.

The petty criminal felt absolutely certain that Lord Henry Winston was his, perhaps not so willing, but completely subjugated dupe. Why George had unearthed all that awfully momentous material and all there in the high and mighty doctor's offices there at St. Luke and St. Elizabeth's. Now hadn't he? Yes indeed. Of course he had. Good old George. And Sir Henry Winston had just better toe the line if he don't want the whole bloody world to know of it then. They wouldn't think him so fine and all if they was to know, now would they?

Willing his countenance to betray no hint of emotion, no sign of loathing or concern, the older man continued his silent appraisal of the overweight, coarse fellow sitting across the table from him. 'The cheek of it then. Odious lout is our Teddy.' Sir Henry noiselessly sipped from his glass of perry. "George Hawley. How in the world could anyone forget George?"

Sir Winston thought somewhat bitterly. If it were not for George and his noisome, meddlesome ways. Not for the man's irrational, and completely unwarranted behavior. His irritating, most tiring penchant for the delving into locked cupboards and drawers, rootling about in the trash bin and such, ... well.

Sir Henry's calm grey eyes remained affable belying the turmoil going on behind them. In truth if it were not for that proper bit of foolishness on George's part, I really should not be here just now, I suppose. Should not now have to deal with Teddy Pryor and his foolishness. That barmy idiot. He smiled pleasantly, again took a dainty sip of the amber hued perry. George, always playing the spy where he has no business. Stumbling about, ever meddling into things that do not concern him. Delving into more danger than he can imagine and all.

Sir Henry might have wished he had developed this relationship with George under different circumstances. George's emotions have gotten such a hold over reason; rarely if at all as yet does George come to the proper deductions as to what he has stumbled upon and all. And the foolish lout just blunders on completely unaware as to the significance, or dangers even to himself in what he 'uncover.' Lord Winston knew full well that George Hawley was not a criminal type actually. The lonely, tormented chap was simply a distraught angry fellow with a heavy load of sorrow which had lead him into his dangerous, foolish, and reckless revenge motivated behavior. Not a good combination.

Still and all, a small rueful smile crossed Lord Winston's lips, thoughts continued hurtling through his mind, in spite of it all, quite by accident of course, that very silly meddling carried out by George has actually led to a rather needed discovery. Needed by me, to be sure and not by George or for that matter this simple rotter Pryor. The ephemeral smile was soon replaced with a more nondescript mien. Now what has the fool been up to I wonder? Well, he considered, not really so much fool as angry, misguided, umm, well, yes, fool I suppose. What is it going to cost this time?

Aloud, Sir Henry's tranquil cultivated voice rang with assumed sincerity, "Lovely that Teddy." If Pryor had hoped

to send a wedge into the man's calm demeanor he was disappointed, "I haven't actually seen George himself in quite some time." Winston's grey eyes continued gazing steadily into Pryor's, "How is George then? Ah," he spoke with a significantly more pleasant tone. With a slight turning of his head Sir Henry faced the newcomer to the table. "And there you are then, Liam." Genuine warmth filled Sir Henry's voice as he smiled a warm greeting to the tall, courtly Maitre d'. "Awfully glad to see you this evening."

And, that last, directed as it was to the establishment's pleasant steward, one Liam Adammson, was accompanied by a gracious authentic smile. Winston was happy indeed to turn his full attention to the personable, trim fellow who had come to stand quietly attentive just there at his elbow. In his hand Liam carried a small, delicate, peach hued porcelain dish upon which he had placed a thin slice of the angel cake Sir Henry liked so well.

From across the room the resounding, and totally unanticipated clamor caused by the breaking of crockery, a chair's sudden overturning and a woman's shrill, stricken "Oh my God," was accompanied by the sounds of several pairs of feet moving rapidly across the deep pile carpet. The uproar quite caught the attention of everyone present. Lord Winston heard a sharp intake of breath as Liam gasped.

Winston's eyes followed Liam's dismayed stare. The handsome younger fellow, absolute horrified disbelief etched upon his countenance, was gazing across the room to where an attractive, dark haired woman was presently standing beside one of the cafe's many dining consoles. The rather tallish lady was clad in a vivid green, quite good-looking, very high-priced, stylish evening frock. She was quite that ashen faced. Holding a small pale hand to her trembling lips the woman was staring with huge dark eyes at the table before her.

Laying there prone on the board in front of the distraught lady was the inert form of a rather large, well dressed fellow. At first sight it seemed that the chap just slumped right over onto the mahogany where the two had been sitting and enjoying both their conversation and their meal only moments before.

Broken bits of the several dishes now lay scattered on the deep carpeted floor near the table where they were intermingling with the spilt food they had carried. The rich burgundy was now spotted and stained. No one could say, with any certainty at all of course, just how it had all happened.

A short, stocky, dark haired chap waiting at table quite suddenly found himself apparently to come under attack. The serving person, one Terrence Willets, now stood pale and horrorstruck. He was a bit unsure of just what it was he should do first off. Out of work for months now, living hand to mouth, and sponging from his friends. He had been eking out the last of his meager savings. One of the youngest, latest servers hired, Willets had been concentrating on his careful conveying of a cumbersome, fully laden, heavy tray of dinners to a table just there. His destination was the table there immediately beyond the one where the now unconscious cove and his very distracted companion were quite the center of all attention.

Dead Cert, Terrence Willets was most keenly aware he had not been long in work. Surveying the awful mess Terry wondered in dismay if, after this little fiasco, he would even continue having the job. Shaking his head in silent answer to the question quietly voiced by a fellow employee, Willets could not say with assurance what or even how the incident had come about.

Absorbed in one another the two diners had been laughing quietly, talking companionably and enjoying their own meal. With an abrupt gulp then, the supping man had simply gasped. Had anyone happened to notice, his eyes had clouded and become somewhat glassy. The stricken chap appeared to his companion as though he were perhaps trying to arise. Unfortunately, he began to rise at the very moment Terrence Willets, intent upon maneuvering his burden, stepped behind the fellow's chair.

To Terry's enormous dismay, suddenly then, a well formed left hand came with violence to where it quite simply struck the chock-full tray. As a consequence of the attack, or his illness, or whatever it was, the besieged diner collapsed heavily, unaware, onto the table itself, just as the laden tray and the heavy burden it bore crashed amidst much hullabaloo and noise to the floor.

The uneasy, dumfounded young waiter now stood rooted with his eyes fair popping from his head. Terrence was, or so it seemed to those who noticed him, quite unable to move at all.

Sir Winston, sat shaking his own head in disbelief. He stared hard in the direction of the discord. "My Word ..." He muttered quietly as he rose quickly to his feet. "I say." Instantly both Lord Henry and Liam began moving toward the site at the same moment.

"This is becoming rather annoying and all you know." Sir Winston murmured softly to himself. "Quite unbelievable this. I really shall have..." Frowning, Winston pondered what in the world might be at the bottom of all of the present furor. "Two incidents now," he mumbled in a quiet voice. "Two, although." Winston's trained eyes took in the pallor of the man laying on the table. "And taking place so close in time of happening to the other. Quite unbelievable. Two collapses." Winston's rambling discourse continued

even as the physician hurried to the spot where the stricken man lay unmoving upon the table. "And in this same restaurant." Not the food. No one else is stricken. And not illness either had dropped the first one. Blimey."

Continuing to murmur privately to himself, Henry Winston soon reached the table where the unconscious man lay prone, inert. To the table where the seemingly anguished woman continued her quiet sobbing. He stood close-mouthed, eyes narrowed, gazing at the scene before him for a long moment. Liam, waiting, eyed the tall man speculatively.

After a moment Winston roused himself. Having made his decision and taking charge of the situation and all, Sir Henry's movements became brisk and determined. He soon directed Liam to telephone for ambulance before turning to help the openly distraught woman to a nearby chair. That accomplished Sir Henry immediately turned his full attention toward the pallid, unconscious man. Not a good situation.

First, Winston checked the man's airway. No, nothing lodged in the throat. The fellow was not choking. Accurate, professional as always, Sir Henry made careful mental note, yes, his breathing is somewhat labored, his breath short and fetching but, the man definitely has not suffered from choking. Proceed carefully now, eliminate the obvious before continuing...'

Next, Winston checked the man's pulse. Frowning, he found, the heart rhythm was thready and somewhat unsteady. A hurried, visual appraisal of the cove came next. No, there did not appear to be any particular undue trauma. Winston found no eminent signs of bleeding, cuts, gashes and the like owing to the fall he had just experienced. 'Wait, ummmm.' Winston found present a faint trickle of blood slowly coming from between the man's slightly parted lips.

Moving quickly, Sir Henry leaned over the unconscious fellow. 'Not cyanide then, or...' he found no unexpected odors were emitting from the man's partially opened mouth. Using a thumb and forefinger Winston carefully, gently, prised open one of the man's closed eyelids. Leaning closer Sir Henry grunted. Frowning, for a long moment, Winston peered fixedly at the widely dilated pupil he noted there.

"Here," Lord Henry said suddenly in a firm no nonsense voice, he looked up, "someone ... hurry now. I need a torch." He glanced round the room. "Yes, just so, that will do fine, Thank You." At once, flicking the button, Winston directed a steady beam into the eye. "Ummm. Pupil fixed. Does not respond to light." Watching closely Sir Henry moved the small light back and forth near the man's eyes. Lord Henry's quiet muttered appraisal continued. He repeated the flicking of the button several more times before releasing the eyelid and directing his attention elsewhere.

The clammy pallor seen upon the unconscious fellow's appearance accompanied as it was by that jerky, shallow breathing clearly indicated steps must be undertaken at once to prevent a greater furtherance of shock. The bloke was definitely in want of a bit of a warm, Winston decided. That and soon. Moving quickly now, Winston soon had the unconscious man removed to the foyer where he was soon covered by as many extra table cloths as the restaurant had available.

"Excellent. Right you are." Sir Winston spoke firmly, his voice was filled with calming authority. "Just so. Just so. We must elevate his feet as well as keeping him warm then." Someone hurried to roll a coat and place it under the man's shiny black casuals. The man's companion had been helped to chair there in the vestibule. Her eyes, huge, anxious, watched Winston and her companion without wavering. At the present she sat dabbing at her face with a

muslin as tears continued to course down her cheeks. Now and again a small, quiet sob escaped her lips.

Everyone there in the lobby felt a proper bit of relief as the shrill blare of a siren approaching the site at last could be heard. Conscientious medical man that he was, Sir Winston stayed with the unconscious fellow until the chap had been loaded into the ambulance with a brief summary of Lord Henry's examination voiced carefully to the attendant. Lowering his voice, Sir Henry also sent along instructions given for the presiding physician at hospital to contact himself straight away in the morning. Winston did not turn away at all until the whole lot had begun on their short journey to Casualty where the cove was to be added to the danger list there at nearby St. Luke's Hospital.

Throughout the undiminished duration of the strained, stressful affair, Teddy Pryor had remained exactly, predictably, where he was. Pryor had continued to devour his ample dinner with the placid dedication of a hog to a trough all the while ignoring the tension filled commotion around him.

Other diners had without hesitation abandoned their meals to come and hover close to the stricken man and his companion. Anxious to help, talking in small clots here and there throughout the room, men and women alike tried their hand at comforting the weeping women, gathering tablecloths for helping warm the fallen and the like. Not so our lad Teddy. **His** eyes never strayed from his dinner. **His** thoughts were completely centered around the important task at hand.

At last with the cacophony of the receding siren growing ever fainter there in the distance, Lord Winston at last, slowly, returned to the table he had vacated less than an hour before. With the disgust he now harbored showing

plainly on his countenance, Winston once again seated himself across from the younger man.

Sir Henry smiled sympathetically, a gentle gesture meant to ease the tension upon his accepting a fresh cup of steaming tea from a badly shaken, pallid faced waiter. Noiselessly Winston sipped his tea. He gazed across the room to where the distressing tableau had just taken place. With a thoughtful frown Sir Henry sat motionless, silent, watching as Liam efficiently busied himself across the room. Competent, quietly directing the last of the cleanup, clamping Terry once upon the shoulder in a gesture of sympathy, sending waiters round the chamber with cups of tea and such, the skilled young man soon had the entire chamber back to order.

To Twineing Along The Lake

Far away from the turmoil experienced by those in the restaurant there in the heart of London, on board a swaying train directly speeding northward over the winding railway line toward Scotland, Alec Strand's broad grin matched and the wide smile planted on Will Blackwell's countenance. The pair gazed in contentment at the deepening twilight. Far ahead of the carriage in which the pair were sitting the sound of the engine whistle sounded faintly. It was barely heard by the two ebullient young fellows sitting alone in jubilant contentment just there in their own private sleeping compartment of the trains first sleeping carriage. Satisfaction filled them both as the two peered at the scenery passing by from outside the window.

Will's Aunt Caroline and Uncle Tony Blackwell had phoned through that young man in London. And only three days past it was too. Had telephoned a bit troubled and all they were. Rang right through to Will with the report that the older couple had just found they had compelling and rather urgent business matters to conduct for themselves in France.

And, Aunt Carrie told Will she and Uncle Tony were now needing to be away from their rural estate north of Achnasheen for a little more than a week. Will heard the alarmed disquiet in Aunt Carrie's voice as she somewhat hesitantly asked whether Will might be able to get free and come up and help them out.

Why, it was all Will could do to keep from just laughing, shouting and hollering and jumping right up and down quite as a four year old might do. Would it be all right? Be all right? Bang on. It was the best suggestion he had heard in a good long while, the very best. A holiday. Out to the country for over a week and not have to pay heaps and heaps for the undertaking. Trying hard to keep his voice calm; Will assured the older woman he would absolutely do his best, and would it be okay if he brought along two of his chums, make a regular holiday of it and all.

The day following Aunt Carrie's worried late night call, Uncle Tony was just that pleased to hear that not only Will but, Tom and Alec as well, had been able to arrange to take the time off from their own work. The three were already making full plans there in the city in order to be able to come up on such short notice. Will told Uncle Tony that the two other young men had quite willingly promised to travel north with him, feed the animals, sludge them out and all, and in general see to the place while the senior couple were to be away.

Not one of the three chaps ever had much extra spending money. The offer of a holiday venture near the northern tip of Scotland, a right lovely holiday costing the lads little more than a small bit of work twice a day, was warmly welcomed by the trio.

Why, most amazing of all too, Uncle Tony even sent round a messenger carrying the advance booking with day return

tickets the threesome would be needing for the train and all. Excellent, just excellent. Tickets for the sleeping carriage too they were. A bedroom with bath ensuite. Crack on. What a pleasant surprise that was, the fellows had thought to carry along a bit of bread and cheese to munch on during their trip. No need for that now, their cushy reservations provided full access to the pullman restaurant car, sleeping quarters and all.

The tickets arrived just in time, my word the packet was hand delivered by a special messenger. Will just gaped at the fellow while he stood and thrust the parcel at Will. In the envelope were the tickets, along with a small, pleasant note telling the three that Aunt Carrie was ever so busy stocking the pantry with masses and masses of the things she knew young men enjoyed having round to snack on. The day after the messenger arrived; Will was ever so pleased to learn upon his telephoning through with the just learned information that Tom had had to cancel at the last minute that he need not return Tom's ticket. Uncle Tony just chuckled and said for Will to simply cash in Tom's ticket and share the refund money with Alec. "Make a wee bit of extra for you laddies to spend then, won't it our Willie Boy?" The proper old crock was right for that.

Will's family had spent so many happy hours there in the northern most tip of Scotland visiting with Caroline and Tony Blackwell when Will was just a lad. Even now his parents continued to trek north frequently. Aunt Carrie and Uncle Tony made several trips into London each year as well. Cor, Tony, his dad's oldest brother, was one of Will's very favorites. Young Blackwell looked forward to the present upcoming visit to Twineing Along The Lake with the enthusiasm of a giggly school boy.

Slipping into the oft used childhood name for the area where his

relatives lived, Will's voice filled the compartment. "Too bad our Old Tom could not have come along with us to Twine Etc. then, Alec," Will's voice was tinged with more than a bit of regret as he turned from the window. Facing his friend for a moment Will gazed thoughtfully at Alec before Will turned to again peering at the countryside moving at a good bat past the window.

"We shall miss our laddie Tom on this enterprise of ours, shan't we now Alec?" Will's face clouded, "too bad he had to beg off. So sudden too." After a moment his expression cleared. Will went on with a happy nod, "It would have been a right bit of fun for us three mates to spend this time together in Scotland and all."

"And," Will continued in a thoughtful voice, "it is probably the last we should have been to have for a chums only outing and all, then isn't it?" Alec's fleeting questioning glance propelled Will into finishing up quickly then. "What with him and the lovely, sweet Vickie getting married at the end of the month then and all," Will said by way of explanation. Understanding swept over Alec. He nodded. Yes, it was too bad.

To be sure, Will and Alec did enjoy Vickie's company too. But, when it is holiday for the lads, then lads is what the lads wanted it to be. Not that Will, Alec and Tom had been mates for such a long time mind you. But the camaraderie between the three that had begun during those awful days following the kidnapping of Chief Inspector Edwards' wife had become a very warm fellowship for the three. Vickie understood that as well of course. That sweetheart had only nodded when Tom told her his plans. Smiling, Vickie said that she was quite that madly keen to spend the week for herself while the fellows were gone. Spend her 'last week of freedom' Vickie giggled, then with one last bit of fun with her girl friends and all. There were just ever so many things to do and heaps and heaps, at least a zillion million last

minute preparations and all for her to take care of before the big day.

Before, that was, that Tom had rang through to Alec to say he was not to be able to come along with them after all that is. Moreover, the reasons, as to Tom's abrupt change of plans, as yet remaining a mystery to Will had nothing at all to do with Vickie. She was quite a girl. Dead Cert, old Tom was one lucky lad, yes, he was that. A lucky lad to have found such a girl as Vickie to share his life.

Not one of them, neither Vickie herself, nor either of the three young men ever came to realize how awfully close the petite long haired Vickie had come to becoming another in the growing list of young women victims who had that suddenly gone missing from London. Gone missing following their involvement with the Dulwitch philanderer Duncan Melsome. Young women whose bodies had only recently begun to pop up here and there in the many parks and such in the whole of the city.

"What was the reason Tom had to change his plans and remain in the city?" Will asked finally. Gone was the previous jocundity; his voice had now taken on a serious, even a bit puzzled tone. Young Blackwell turned his gaze from the window to face Alec. "I had thought sure," Will said, his voice slightly muffled as he rootled about in his sponge bag, "thought that our Tom would be able to get away. But." With a small smile of satisfaction Will located his toothbrush, waving it in the air he continued, "Tom mentioned that he had told you the details regarding it when I rang through to him directly before our leaving."

With a curious grin slapped on his face, Alec too turned from the window. "Well," Alec's eyes were merry, "as a matter of fact, yes, he did, Will." Alec's smile of happy anticipation, now bordering on the serious quite matched that of his friend. "Tom the old top got short notice that he is to be

attending a seminar this week end and on into the first part of next week, he is." Alec's broad grin deepened. More to this thought Will than you are stating so far mate. He waited. Expectation shown plain on his face.

"Indeed," Alec went on. A smile tugged at the corner's of his lips, "Tom sure hated to miss our trip, but he said this particular meeting won't be offered again for months. 'The powers that be' all thought he really might benefit from it, and 'old married person' that he is soon to be, wife, responsibility and all, what could he do?" Alec peered at Will, with laughter raging just below the surface. "So he quite agreed, and ... no trip." Alec's explanation was presented in his quiet, husky voice. The note of humor creeping throughout his tone threatened to break free as the young man continued, "I expect the old fellow is to be a real proper expert on drugs and the like when you and I do get back to the city London."

The train suddenly jolted on the rails causing the unbolted door to slide open. Both young men turned appreciative, albeit somewhat questioning, eyes upon a small, dark haired girl who had stopped to clutch the wall just outside the doorway to their compartment. Without speaking, she glanced round and seemed almost ready to speak before she smiled hesitantly at them both for a small moment. After an instant she continued her journey to the far end of the carriage.

"By the by, Old Crock," Alec said next speaking in very his best 'English talk cant.' He grinned broadly, "What a hoot it is and all Will. You'll love it, simply love it, I expect." He paused smiling as Will's puzzled glance deepened. "Old Tom's so important drug seminar police meeting is to take place on ... where else then, but...," Alec paused dramatically. "Baker Street?" His blue eyes were fair dancing with hilarity; Alec chuckled as he related Tom's whole message to Will.

"At the Sherlock Holmes Museum, to be sure." Alec's jumper clad shoulders shook. A huge mirth filled chortle broke through the long haired youngster's attempt at solemnity. "Seems rather an appropriate spot for it don't you think?"

"Indeed. Bang on." Will hooted. As his own eyes also filled with amused hilarity he asked between chortles, "And exactly what was decided upon that one, do you suppose?" A broad grin brightened Will's whole expression as the two young men's merry, prolonged laughter filled the compartment.