

CHAPTER THE FIRST

The Newbury was named after Inspector Beauregard Pilkington's maternal grandfather, Admiral Horatio Newbury, and has been in his family for two generations. The three-storey manor was well-known as the retired Scotland Yard detective's residence and was situated just north-east of London, in Redbridge. The area was renowned for the brick bridge over River Roding that bore its name and the Inspector was crestfallen when it would be torn down two years later. Inspector Pilkington had once been told by an acquaintance that the Newbury was built in the Georgian style and he made a point of dropping this fact casually into the conversation whenever he had a visitor.

It had been six months since the Great War had ended, and since his retirement from Scotland Yard the distinguished detective found himself within the confines of his mansion more than out of it. This idle Thursday in May of 1919 was no different and the Inspector was seated in front of the fireplace of his study pretending to read the newspaper. He was, in fact, asleep and in such a deep slumber that he failed to hear his manservant Marmaduke enter the room with his ritual cup of tea. The Inspector liked Earl Grey tea best — two lumps of sugar and a splash of milk.

'Anything special in today's paper, sir?' asked Marmaduke as he turned to stoke the fire, pretending not to see that his employer was sleeping. There was no need for a roaring fire in May, but Inspector

Pilkington liked the atmosphere it gave his study. Marmaduke was in his mid-forties and despite a stomach that betrayed his age, he was in good physical shape with broad shoulders and muscular arms. His curly brown hair was thinning at the top and greying slightly at the temples, which gave him a rather regal look, despite his status as a manservant. Inspector Pilkington's eyes popped open, and without missing a beat he proceeded to answer the question as if he had been awake the whole time.

'They say the Prime Minister is going over to Kathmandu and that the price of beets is going up.'

None of these facts appeared in the newspaper. Marmaduke knew this because he had read it earlier that day.

'And what has Scotland Yard been up to?' asked Marmaduke, knowing how to stroke the Inspector's ego since his retirement.

'Seems like nothing at all, old chap. Every time I pick up the paper I see another unsolved case! I tell you, Marmaduke, the newspaper used to be a lot more exhilarating when I was making the headlines!'

'Indeed, sir.'

The Inspector sat up in his chair and straightened his purple smoking jacket. He preened his grey whiskers and made sure his thinning, grey hair was not too lopsided from his secret nap. Inspector Pilkington was nearly a head taller than Marmaduke and almost fifteen years older. Unlike his manservant, years of hedonistic living had rendered the Inspector terribly unfit and quite pear-shaped. The Inspector, however, was blissfully unaware of this.

'Criminals everywhere and no one to put them firmly behind bars. Remember when I caught those French jewel thieves?' he asked nostalgically.

'I remember, sir. You were electric in apprehending them,' replied Marmaduke. 'Like a gazelle on the plains of the Serengeti.'

Marmaduke handed the Inspector his tea as he nodded in agreement. He knew what was coming next — firstly because he heard the tale so often, and secondly because he was there all those years ago.

'Thought they could escape through the sewers! But they were quick to surrender when I caught up with them. Gave them a solid thrashing with my cane, I did!'

'Their combined strength, even with that pistol, was no match for you, sir,' said Marmaduke, egging the Inspector on in a tale that deviated from the facts quite dramatically.

The truth was that they were jewel thieves. They were French. They did try to escape through the sewers. However, Inspector Pilkington was pacing the streets above with Marmaduke, looking for them. He was about to give up when fortunately for law and justice, he fell through an open grate and landed literally on top of the two criminals. One thief was armed and managed to free his revolver. That is when the Inspector inadvertently whacked him on the head with his cane as he scrambled to regain his balance and dignity. The thief tumbled over unconscious and a shot rang out, wounding his accomplice in the shoulder. With the thieves incapacitated, Inspector Pilkington made the arrest and was heaped with praise.

After recounting his version of the story, the Inspector looked quite happy with himself and rewarded his tale with a sip of tea.

'Mmm, good tea Marmaduke. You can really taste the Earl.'

Marmaduke shook his head as he always did when his master said something absurd, and smiled to himself.

'This came for you in the post this afternoon, sir,' said Marmaduke remembering the letter in the breast pocket of his brown suit. He reached in and retrieved the neatly written cream envelope.

'Hmm, let's see who it's from,' said Inspector Pilkington, lifting his glasses to his nose and turning the envelope around to read the return address.

'Ah, it's from my old school chum, Sir Cecil Mountbatton! Remember him, Marmaduke? We were at university together.'

'How could I forget, sir?' retorted Marmaduke, knowing quite well who the Inspector's oldest friend was. Inspector Pilkington proceeded to open the letter much like a child at Christmas and scanned over the neatly written text. Sir Cecil was known for his exquisite penmanship,

for which Inspector Pilkington was grateful during his university days because it made copying his friend's notes so much easier.

'How delightful! Isn't that nice, Marmaduke?' exclaimed the Inspector, looking up at Marmaduke for a response.

'You haven't told me what the letter says, sir.'

'I haven't?'

'No.'

'Oh. We're being invited away for the weekend,' stated the Inspector excitedly.

'Where to?' enquired Marmaduke.

'To Cecil's family retreat: Mount Mountbatton. I hear it's quite lovely at this time of year.' The Inspector had never been to Mount Mountbatton and had no idea what the weather was like there at any time of the year.

'Shall we be leaving tomorrow, sir?' asked Marmaduke. He was quite sure he knew the answer and was already taking a mental inventory of what to pack.

'Yes, old chap. It's this weekend, so we leave first thing in the morning.'

'Very well, sir,' replied Marmaduke. 'How many trunks shall I pack for you?'

'Three, I should think...,' Inspector Pilkington said very slowly as he tried to avoid making the decision too hastily. 'No, wait!'

He paused as if the decision had global impact.

'Yes, three,' he continued. 'I want to take my weekend suits.' The Inspector was very proud of his array of suits and didn't want to be seen wearing the same one twice while on a holiday.

Despite the Inspector seemingly having made the decision Marmaduke still lingered in case there was a sudden change of mind. Inspector Pilkington was quite prone to changing his mind unexpectedly, which often led to Marmaduke having to do things two or three times. The most Marmaduke had to repeat a task was eleven times. It was moving the sideboard in the dining room and the result

was Marmaduke hurting his back and spending two days lying on the floor. He ran his hand over his square jaw in anticipation.

'I shall do so right away, sir,' Marmaduke said eventually as he edged towards the door.

'Oh, Marmaduke,' Inspector Pilkington said quickly.

Marmaduke stopped in his tracks.

'Please fetch me another cup of tea.'

Marmaduke knew better than to react right away.

'No, make that a sherry.'