

A Million Tears II, The Tears of War and Peace

PROLOGUE

Sir David Griffiths had recovered from his recent bout of bronchitis and, now allowed out by his doctor, was sitting in the wheelhouse of his motor sailer, *My Joy II*. Various members of the family were aboard, preparing to get the boat underway. The *Time* magazine reporter appeared on the jetty, threw a holdall onto the deck and climbed nimbly aboard.

‘Morning, Sir David. It’s a beautiful day,’ he greeted the octogenarian.

‘It is that. A pleasant cruise into the Channel, lunch and a leisurely journey back is called for. I’m glad you decided to come.’

‘I wouldn’t have missed it for the world, sir,’ he replied, casting an admiring glance at Sian, Sir David’s granddaughter. Sir David chose to ignore the look, but as usual, had missed nothing.

Sian, a beautiful, black-haired girl in her early twenties was adroitly coiling up a berthing rope and slinging it down the forward hatch. She was dressed in snugly fitting jeans and a warm jumper; the clothes she wore left little to the imagination.

‘Perhaps you could give Sian a hand?’ Sir David suggested. ‘As soon as Madelaine gets here we’ll cast off and head out to sea.’

The young man nodded and went out on deck to be given instructions to get the boat ready. Contentedly, he leapt to the jetty and removed the forward spring passing it up to Sian. They exchanged shy smiles, both of them remembering the previous evening. It might be the swinging sixties, he thought, but there were still conventions to follow. Dinner in a nearby restaurant had been followed by a brief tussle in the front of Sian’s MG Midget. After a suitable display of reluctance on her part, a certain amount of intimacy had taken place but they had not actually made love. Sian seemed to be reading his mind because she looked at him, blushed, and then giggled. His heart soared; in his fevered imagination that giggle held a great deal of promise.

‘Here are my mother and grandma,’ Sian said, looking along the jetty.

Walking towards them were two striking-looking women, one a red-haired, elderly lady, with streaks of grey in her shoulder length hair. In her seventies, Madelaine looked ten years younger. Beside her was her step-daughter, Susan. Slim,

black-haired with streaks of grey, there could be no mistaking whose daughter Sian was. Both women were laden down with baskets, and the reporter stopped what he was doing to rush forward and give a helping hand.

‘Take Madelaine’s,’ said Susan. ‘I can manage.’

‘Thank you,’ Madelaine said, handing the two baskets over. ‘David, darling, it’s a wonderful day to go sailing,’ she called to her husband, who waved in acknowledgement.

A short while later the last line was cast off and Sir David moved the gear lever into reverse. The boat, a sixty footer and single screw, needed an expert to handle her properly and Sir David had years of experience. Once clear of the jetty he put the lever into neutral, paused and pushed it forward. The boat slowly moved ahead. Changing too quickly from reverse to forward there was always the danger that the engine would stall and result in an embarrassing situation or even a dangerous one. He smiled to himself, remembering a time when he had done just that and ended up jammed against another boat, held there by a strong wind. That had been a long time ago.

Once clear of Shoreham Harbour he handed the wheel over to Sian and went below for a cup of coffee. Sir David’s brother, Sion, was sitting at the table in the wood-lined saloon, his hands wrapped around a cup of fresh coffee. His face was haggard, the ravages of the cancer that was killing him etched in his face.

‘Well, bro,’ Sion said with a smile, ‘a last trip.’ He coughed but stopped after a few seconds and sipped his drink.

Sir David shook his head. ‘Not the last. We’ll have some more.’

Sion shook his head. ‘No, I don’t think so. I’ve lived too long. It’s time to go. My God, but it’s been a great life. I’ve been sitting here remembering it all. There’s a lot of sadness but a great deal of happiness as well.’ A spasm of pain passed through him which left him gasping.

‘Can I get you anything?’ Sir David asked, worry lining his face.

His brother shook his head. ‘No, it’s all right. I’ve had enough painkillers for an hour or two. Where’s this reporter you were telling me about?’

‘He’s in the wheelhouse with Sian. Shall I send him down?’

Sion nodded. ‘If he wants to talk to me he’d better do it quickly, before it’s too late.’

David was about to argue but thought better of it. It was an insult to both men’s intelligence not to recognise the fact that Sion had only a short while to live.

Sir David poured himself a coffee from the jug sitting on the coal-fired stove, added milk, and went up to the wheelhouse. The reporter was sitting on the stool at the chart table, plotting their course. He looked up when Sir David appeared.

‘Do you know what you’re doing, young man?’ Sir David asked.

‘Sure, sir,’ was the laconic reply.

‘Gramps, you aren’t going to believe it but Tim has spent half his life at sea. His father owned a fishing boat and fished the seas around Newfoundland. He was practically born with sea-water in his veins, not blood,’ Sian smiled at the reporter.

‘Oh? So how did you end up in Boston as a reporter for *Time* magazine?’

‘My father died at sea in a storm fifteen years ago.’

‘That’s really sad,’ said Sian.

The reporter shrugged. ‘That’s life, I guess. Anyway, my mother went back to Boston where we lived with my maternal grandparents. I took a degree in English and drifted into reporting. But I’ve still spent as much time as I could playing with boats, sailing and racing. I love it.’

Sir David nodded. There was more to the man than he had first imagined. ‘Could you go below and talk to my brother, Sion? He wants to tell you what he can remember - before it’s too late.’

Tim Hunter nodded. He knew about the cancer. He smiled at Sian and, notebook in hand, went down into the saloon. Sir David was looking out to sea, aware of the glances his granddaughter had been casting at the reporter.

‘Seems a nice enough young man,’ he said.

Sian made no reply but looked down at the compass and swung the wheel a few degrees to port. Sir David noted her deep blush and smiled. She could do worse, he thought and then mentally shook himself. They had only just met and here he was already marrying them off. It must be, he thought to himself, a factor of age. So little time left and so much to do.

He went below to find his wife. He needed a hug.

David's Story

Chapter 1.

Spring 1912.

I had been in South Wales for over six months and I was bored. After the initial delight in seeing the family - my uncles, aunts and cousins - and catching up on all their news I was left at something of a loose end. I made my base in Cardiff and for a while travelled by train up the valley to Llanbeddas. I called in to see my old friends and at first, had been excited at the prospect of seeing Cliff, my boyhood best friend. But the meeting had been fraught with embarrassment: we had nothing in common now. Cliff was a coal-miner working in the local pit as he had done from the age of thirteen, two years after we had left for America. He was married to a pleasant girl from one of the neighbouring villages and had two children. He already had the beginning of a miner's cough. I played down my family's success, not wanting to appear too boastful but at the same time itching to tell him all about it. I did describe some of the places I had seen and the people I had met. I found his lack of interest off-putting and, to some extent, insulting. After my first three visits I went back to Llanbeddas only to stand at my sister's grave. Sion and Sian had been twins; she had been killed when a slag heap had swept down onto the village school. I liked to stand next to her head-stone in order to talk to her and tell her all that had happened to us. I had heard my aunt telling my uncle that it was morbid but I didn't think so. Sian's death had been the beginning of it all.

I was sitting in the lounge of the Angel Hotel in Cardiff when my Uncle William entered. 'David, I thought I'd find you here,' he greeted me. 'This arrived in the second post.'

I took the letter and eagerly scanned the envelope. It was from America and I recognised Dad's writing. I ripped it open and began to read. As I finished each page I handed it to Uncle William, knowing that he was as eager as I to receive news from America.

According to the letter all was well and the business was going from strength to strength. Sion was working too hard but was also spending even more of his spare time on his hobby. Originally this had involved a fascination with kites, but now it had developed into an obsession with flying. So far he had crashed twice but had walked away without serious injury. Dad said that he was using up his lives faster than the proverbial cat with nine; needless to say Mam worried herself sick. Dad's time in Congress was becoming more demanding and he and Mam were in the process of buying a house in Washington DC.

The last part of the letter contained an instruction to me to contact John Buchanan in London at an address in Mayfair. I was to telegraph John to tell him when I would be going to see him.

‘I wonder what John wants?’ I asked my uncle, who shrugged in reply. ‘Well, there’s no time like the present to find out. I see from the letter that John’s in London now.’ I looked round the large, luxurious room and waved to a button boy standing next to the door. He marched smartly to where we were sitting and I asked for a telegraph pad and the *Railway Gazette*. I thought for a moment and then said, ‘Do you mind if I go tomorrow?’

He shook his head. ‘You’ve surprised us by staying so long.’

I was handed the railway timetable and I checked the time of trains from Cardiff to London. I wrote a brief telegram to John, telling him that I would be arriving the following evening. ‘Where shall I meet him?’ I asked my uncle.

‘The United Services Club,’ he replied promptly. ‘He’s bound to be a member.’ I added the suggestion we meet at the USC for dinner. I gave the button boy a half crown and asked him to send it immediately.

‘I take it that’s the same John Buchanan who was the captain of the liner when you travelled to America?’

I nodded. ‘He’s been a family friend ever since. He’s quit the sea and is now on the board of directors that runs the shipping line.’ I grinned. ‘Though, as he’s the first to admit, inheriting the majority of the shares in the company from his father did help him to become a board member.’ John now spent his time between England and America overseeing his considerable shipping interests. Although he had married a few years earlier they still had no children.

I waved over a waiter and ordered two whiskies and sodas. I asked my uncle, ‘What did you think about that Frenchman Henri Seimet flying non-stop from London to Paris, yesterday?’ I was referring to the news that was in all the papers on that day in March 1912. There was talk about flying around the world but I couldn’t see that happening for a few years yet.

‘It’s amazing, if you think about it. Only a few short years ago aeroplanes were crashing left, right and centre,’ Uncle William stated with a fine sense of exaggeration, ‘and now they’re flying between two of the greatest capital cities in the world.’

I grinned. ‘Don’t let the Germans hear you say that. They think Berlin is the greatest capital in Europe.’

‘I know, but we have the greatest empire the world has ever known and the French have the most beautiful city,’ replied my uncle. ‘Berlin is drab, claustrophobic and, worst of all, full of Germans.’

My grin widened. My uncle had been abroad on numerous occasions, mainly to France, but one summer a few years previously, he and my aunt had taken a grand tour through the Continental Lowlands, Germany, Switzerland and south to Italy. He had come back with a deep seated dislike of foreigners in general and Germans in particular. Although he had been successful in business he was essentially a modest man and the arrogance he found in the Germans he met was more than he could stand. He maintained that one day we would have to take them down a peg or two. When I pressed him as to what he meant by that he had looked despondent and said, 'War. I mean war.'

Naturally I thought he was talking nonsense. He was a very presentable man, my uncle, a few inches shorter than my six feet two and with just the beginnings of a pot-belly straining at his waistcoat. His hair was grey, swept back from his forehead and hanging over the back of his collar. My aunt was forever nagging him to get it cut, but he did not. It was his one touch of vanity.

After we left the hotel we hailed a taxi and went to my uncle's house in Rhiwbina, a small hamlet on the outskirts of Cardiff. While I packed my trunk, my uncle sat in my room idly chatting about the political situation in Europe. His great fear was that Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire would agree on a treaty that threatened the stability of Europe. I was surprised at his knowledge and his understanding of the events that were taking place and, I have to admit, I learned a great deal from him. Most of it was interesting although I still considered it fantasy gleaned from reading too many newspapers.

The next morning I said goodbye to my uncle and aunt and caught the train for London. I travelled first class and enjoyed the panoramic scenery that unfolded as we made our way through the Welsh countryside. We stopped at Newport, Caerleon and Caldicot before entering the Severn Tunnel. It was an odd feeling to be travelling nearly three miles underground, a good part of it with water over our heads. As it was a fine, warm day I had the window open and as we entered the tunnel the smoke and soot from the engine suddenly engulfed the train and filled the carriage. With an oath I leapt to my feet and shut the window, coughing and spluttering in the noxious fumes. After a few moments the air cleared and I was able to breathe properly again. I was very happy when we re-emerged into the sunlight and pulled in to the small station at Almondsbury, in the county of Gloucester.

My aunt had provided me with a picnic basket and I now opened its contents whilst I sat and gazed out of the window. I enjoyed a very good lunch of chicken, baked potatoes and pickles, washed down with a fine Chardonney. As I did so I reflected on the differences between my family in Cardiff and those who had stayed

behind in Llanbeddas. They were worlds apart yet separated by less than fifteen miles as the river Taff flowed.

The rest of the day saw me passing through the gentle farming countryside of southern England. I had never travelled that way before, and I found it fascinating to see the different towns and villages. People joined and left the train at various stops but nobody entered my compartment. I didn't mind as I was too busy wondering why I was to see John Buchanan. I had no wish to engage in small talk with a stranger.

It was exactly seven in the evening when the train pulled into Paddington station. It was huge, with a high domed roof stretching over the whole station. I was aware that Cardiff station had the world's longest island platform but I was unprepared for the grandeur, bustle and noise that greeted me in London. It was my first time in the capital and I was hungry to see as much of the city as possible.

My instructions had been to take a cab to the United Services Club along the Mall. I had a porter take my trunk while I carried my overnight bag to the cab rank. Although there were still horse drawn hansoms in use I was directed to one of the new cabs which I recognised from America as a black, Ford Model T.

I climbed up beside the driver and asked, 'Where on earth did this car come from? The last time I saw one of these was in America.'

He grinned, showing tobacco stained teeth at me through a walrus moustache and replied, 'Why, sir, you're not from around these parts I can tell. This car was made in Manchester last year, the first to be made by Mr Ford outside of America. A wonderful invention it is too. It cost £105 and has the new lowered chassis. I'm going to have a starter and a lighting set added as soon as I save £15 to pay for them.'

I nodded, enjoying the ride and seeing for the first time the sights and sounds of London. People were everywhere, hawkers on every corner and, here and there, match and boot-lace sellers scraping a living of sorts. The journey down Park Lane and along Constitution Hill took a pleasant fifteen minutes. Once we had passed Buckingham Palace and travelled a few hundred yards along The Mall the traffic came to a halt. The road was jammed with cars, omnibuses, horse-drawn hansoms and drays loaded with barrels of beer. People were milling about but we were not moving forward an inch.

'What on earth's happening?' I asked.

'Sorry, sir,' the driver spoke in his Cockney accent. 'I think it must be them suffragettes protesting again. A bleeding nuisance they are and no mistake.'

Damnation, this was the last thing I needed. Although I had enjoyed the journey so far I was eager to see John. 'Listen driver. If I leave you here will you bring my bags through and I'll meet you at the club? Here's a sixpence, with another when you get there.'

'Why, sir, that's very kind of you.' He touched his forepeak on his hat by way of a salute. 'I'll do it and no mistake.'

I jumped down from the cab and shouldered my way through the jostling crowd to see what I could of the protest. I had read a good deal about the suffragettes and I had to confess that not only did I have a sneaking regard for what they were trying to achieve, but I wholeheartedly endorsed their right to have a vote. It seemed to me a nonsense that half the adult population was denied the vote simply because of being female.

I reached the edge of the pavement about fifty yards along the Mall and looked at the marchers. Though the crowd was predominantly made up of women, I could see a number of men. At its head was Emmeline Pankhurst, the founder of the Women's Political and Social Union and walking next to her was her daughter Christabel. They were both recognisable not only from photographs which appeared frequently in the newspapers but also from the encouraging yells they received from some of the crowd. However, for every one who yelled encouragement, two yelled abuse.

As the protesters reached Marlborough Road, policemen poured out of the side roads and another contingent of police marched up from Buckingham Gate to confront the women, things turned ugly. Somebody near me threw what appeared to be an apple at the marchers which struck a placard. Suddenly missiles were raining down, thrown from all sections of the crowd lining the pavements and I could see the marchers trying to use their banners and placards for protection. I heard loud screams, and suddenly the air was filled with the sound of police whistles. To my horror I saw the police line up and baton charge the protesters.

Without thinking I pushed my way onto the road with the intention of helping the women. I reached one policeman who had his arm raised with a baton ready to strike down on the unprotected head of a young lady. I grabbed his arm, bent it back and tore the baton from his grasp.

'Pick on someone your own size,' I yelled at him, and for good measure poked him in the stomach with his own baton. He doubled up in pain and fell backwards. However, two other constables saw what had happened and leapt at me with their batons raised ready to hit me. I did the unexpected and stepped towards them, side-swiped one on the head and followed through with the baton to block the other's swing at me. I was only just in time. If the blow had landed I would have been badly injured. As it was the force sent a jarring shudder up my arm and I smashed my fist into the constable's nose. He crashed backwards and sent a number of his colleagues sprawling. A hand grabbed my arm and I turned, ready to fight, when I realised it was the girl I had saved from attack.

'Quickly, we must go. It will get a lot worse now this has started.'

I looked about me and saw that she was right. Women were laid out on the street, many of them bleeding. Some were being carried away, still struggling, while others were leaping at the police, in an attempt to rescue their friends.

I didn't need any further urging. I took her hand and pushed and shoved my way through the crowd, down The Mall, with the young lady right behind me, and away from the trouble. After a few minutes our progress became easier. Then we broke free from the crowds and were able to run down the street.

'Stop! Stop!' She pulled at my hand and I stopped running. 'That's better,' she panted, 'I couldn't keep up.'

'Sorry,' I ran my fingers through my hair, as I took a good look at her. 'Are you all right?'

She was about five feet three inches tall, was slim built with auburn hair, curls from which were showing under her hat. She had a pretty face with a determined chin, brown eyes and a wide mouth.

'Yes, thank you. And...and thank you for saving me back there.'

'That's okay. I wasn't going to stand around and let any rozzar lay into you. My God, that was appalling. All those women hurt...and arrested.'

She nodded sadly. 'We were only trying to march to the Palace to protest peacefully before the King. He's due there later on, coming from the Guildhall, and we wanted him to see the depth of feeling there is for votes for women.'

'I'm sure he knows that already. But why stop you like that? It's barbaric.'

'It always happens that way.' She spoke in a cultured, educated voice. 'Mr Asquith has said that as long as he is Prime Minister these protests will not be tolerated and they are to be stopped at all costs.'

I knew that. However, it wasn't all one-sided. On March 1 that year militant suffragettes had caused havoc when they had rampaged through the West End of London. They had been carrying stones and hammers hidden in their muffs and pockets, to smash windows and property. More than one hundred and twenty of them had been arrested. Some had broken through to Downing Street and hurled stones at Number 10, shattering windows on both sides of the famous door. Groups of women had struck in co-ordinated attacks without warning and within twenty minutes the trail of destruction had stretched from Oxford Street to the Strand via Piccadilly and Whitehall. No, I didn't agree with what I had just witnessed, but it was definitely not all one-sided.

'Look, can I escort you somewhere? See you safely home?'

'That's very kind of you but I'll have to find out where they've taken Emmeline and try and get her bail.'

'It's too soon for that. You need to give them an hour or two to settle down first. Then we can see about bail.'

'We? You mean you'll help me?'

'Why not? I've come this far, so I may as well see it through.'

'This isn't a game, you know,' she said with some asperity. 'We have the right to vote and we are determined to establish it.'

'I know, and I agree,' I said, giving her my warmest smile. 'But believe me, I know what I'm talking about. Where I come from I practice law. I'm a lawyer,' I added in explanation.

'A lawyer? Oh, a solicitor. You're American,' she said, her eyes opening wide, giving her a slightly startled look.

'Welsh by birth, American by adoption,' I explained. 'I'm going to the United Services Club, which I believe is further along The Mall. If you care to accompany me I'll see about getting you a cup of tea, perhaps something to eat and then we'll go and see about your friends.'

She hesitated a moment and then smiled. 'I'll be delighted to.' She put her hand on my arm and we strolled together along the street. From the corner of my eye I could see that she was surreptitiously looking up at me, trying to weigh me up. I guessed her age to be about twenty-one or twenty-two and I had noticed that there were no rings on her left hand.

The door to the club was high and imposing. We entered to a salute from the doorman and walked to the reception desk.

'Yes, sir?' asked the elderly man, who managed somehow to smile at me and scowl at the young lady.

'I'm meeting Mr John Buchanan. My name is Griffiths.'

'Ah, yes, sir. The Commodore is expecting you. He is in the members' lounge. However, erm, the young lady cannot enter. She may only use the ladies' lounge.'

I looked quizzically at him and he added, 'It's at the top of the stairs, sir.'

I nodded my thanks and led her past the marble bust of The Duke of Wellington and another of Caesar. They seemed to scowl at the idea of a woman walking in their hallowed halls.

'I still don't know your name,' I said.

'I know yours is Griffiths,' she smiled. 'What's your first name?'

'David. And yours?'

She seemed to be thinking about it for a moment and then she gave a gentle shrug. 'It's Emily, Emily Watson.'

'Nice to meet you, Emily,' I said as we walked up the wide stairway and into the ladies' lounge. Inside it was pleasant enough, with chintz covered chairs and sofas

with occasional tables next to them. A few tables were occupied by ladies sitting with pots of tea and plates of cakes and sandwiches.

'Emily, you sit here,' I indicated a seat, 'while I see about some tea. Unless you'd rather something stronger?'

She looked up at me with a sudden start and a wide grin. 'Good grief, if I took anything stronger than a cup of tea I'd be the talk of the town,' she said. 'You'd better go and find John.'

I was a little surprised at her familiarity with his name, but I left her and went downstairs where I ordered tea for Emily and then went to find the members' lounge. In fact it was a well-appointed bar and I quickly spotted John Buchanan standing at the bar in conversation with two other gentlemen. He didn't appear to have changed much. He was still tough and athletic looking, a bit greyer around the ears perhaps, but his back was as straight as ever and there was hardly any paunch showing.

I tapped his shoulder and he swung round to me. 'David, my boy, it's wonderful to see you.' He grabbed my hand and shook it warmly. 'Allow me to introduce you to Lord Stockdale,' he indicated a slight, stooped, grey haired man, 'and Sir Angus Frazer.' I shook hands with Frazer and guessed from the name and accent that he was Scottish. Frazer was about my age, thick set, very fit looking and very alert.

'Can I have a word?' I asked, indicating that we should move away from the other two for a little privacy.

'Don't worry, you can speak freely in front of these two. In fact they're the reason I asked you here. Or rather, asked Evan to write to you.'

Intrigued, I nodded. I briefly told them what had happened and about the young lady sitting upstairs waiting for me. The reactions of the three men were comical in their diversity. John looked bland, Frazer laughed and Stockdale scowled.

'I couldn't let the police attack her,' I protested.

'Why not?' said Stockdale. 'Serves them right. It's a load of nonsense if you ask me. Votes for women, indeed. I ask you. They'll be wanting equal property rights next. Too many of the country's resources are being wasted on containing these blasted women and not enough on the important issues. Which is why we want you,' he said.

I was taken aback by his words but before I could ask any questions John said, 'That can wait. Let us go and see to the welfare of this young lady before we go for dinner.'

'I'll leave you to it,' said Lord Stockdale. 'You know what's required and I won't take no for an answer.' With that he nodded a curt goodbye and left us.

'Considering the old man must be pushing eighty, he's like a human hurricane,' said Frazer.

I looked from one to the other and said, 'Will someone please tell me what's going on?'

'Later. Come on,' said John and led the way up to the ladies lounge.

As we entered I saw Emily pouring a cup of tea. She looked up, smiled and said, 'Hullo, Uncle John. Hullo, Angus.'

She looked at me and suddenly giggled. 'If only I could capture that look on your face, I'd make a mint.'

I pulled myself together and smiled. No wonder she had felt free to be familiar with John's name.

'Hullo, Emily,' said Frazer. 'Does your keeper know you've escaped?' Which was sufficient to send her into peals of laughter.

'Your faces; all three of you.' She laughed again and abruptly stopped as the laugh turned to hiccups.

'Uncle John?' I asked quizzically.

'My sister's youngest daughter and the bane of my life,' said John, sighing and smiling at the same time.

'Now, Uncle John, you know that's not true. I'm your favourite niece, as well as the bane of your life.'

John smiled and sat down on the sofa next to his niece. 'Tell me all about it,' he took her hand and held it for a few seconds, the warmth and concern evident.

Emily more or less repeated what I had told him. When she had finished John shook his head and said, 'Emily, do you know what could have happened? If a baton hits you too hard you could be maimed for life, or worse, dead. You must stop this silliness.'

At his words she withdrew her hand and sat up straighter. 'It isn't silliness, Uncle John. It's time we had the vote and a say in what happens in our country. We contribute as much as any man, some of us more. We're better educated than many others who have the vote simply because they're men,' she snorted, scornfully. 'What's more, most of them don't know why they vote, nor why they vote for any particular candidate. At least we all have an idea of the issues. The things that really matter.'

'Some of you do, my dear, it's true. But your disdain for the uneducated man applies equally to uneducated women. And there's a lot more of them,' he added.

'That's why we need the vote. To make life better for all women. To free them from drudgery and...and slavery. That's why we educated women need to lead the way.'

'I give up,' said John with a shake of his head. 'You talk some sense to her, Angus.'

'Me? She hasn't listened to me since she was knee high to a grasshopper and wore pigtails,' said Angus, a grin hinting at the corner of his mouth.

Emily, very unladylike for a moment, poked her tongue out at him and picked up her cup. 'I shall finish this and then go to the police station and find my friends,' she announced, calmly.

'You'll do no such thing,' said John, firmly. 'You will go home and I will find out all I can. When I know where they are and what's to be done, I'll do it.'

Emily smiled over her teacup at him. 'Thank you, Uncle John.'

It was obvious to me that she knew he would make the offer. Looking at John I saw that he knew it too. This was a scene they had played out before.

John stood up and looked down at his niece. 'Do as I tell you, Emily. Go home and I'll sort it out. I'll come over later and tell you how I've got on. Come on you two, we've a dinner to eat and, more importantly, a drink is needed.' With that we left Emily sitting with her tea and we retired back to the bar.

Once we each had large whiskies and sodas in our hands we took a corner table out of earshot of anybody else, and I was at last able to ask John what was going on.

'What's going on? You mean with regards to Emily?'

I shook my head. 'No. I mean why am I here?'

'Ahh, that's easy. We want you to go to Europe for us. Germany, Austria and Yugoslavia to name but three countries.'

Whatever I had been expecting it wasn't that. I had half thought that the summons had something to do with business. I didn't understand this.

'Why?'

'You tell him, Angus. I need to get hold of Parker and send him ferreting around the police stations to find out what he can for Emily.' With that he got up and left the room.

'Parker?' I enquired of Frazer.

'A sort of private detective. Used to be a peeler until he was shot by a Bolshevik during a siege in the Old Kent Road.' I nodded, remembering reading something about this a few years earlier. 'Now John uses him whenever he, em, needs certain things done.' He offered no further explanation and I dropped the matter.

'So what's this all about? Me and Europe?'

'How much do you know about the political situation across Europe?'

I shrugged and remembered what my uncle had told me. I repeated what he had said and at the end Frazer nodded. 'Good. Very good. In effect Europe is in turmoil. The Germans are arming as fast as they can. They have also signed a treaty with

Austro-Hungary and are currently trying to persuade Italy to join their unholy alliance. If that happens we are fearful for the safety of Russia or even France and the Lowlands,' said Frazer, referring to Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg.

'I still don't understand what you want me to do,' I said, starting to get annoyed.

'We want you to visit a few places, meet a few people and gauge what's happening over there. Then we want you to report back on a regular basis and tell us what's going on.'

'You've got to be joking,' I said. 'Anyway, I haven't got time for that. I'm planning to return to the States shortly. I've even booked my passage for next month, on the maiden voyage of the Titanic. That's an event I don't want to miss. It'll be historic.'

'I'm sure it will but there'll be plenty of opportunities for you to sail on the Titanic in the future,' replied Frazer. 'We want you to attend a gathering at a private house in Bavaria. The Kaiser will be there along with half the German Cabinet. So will Archduke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne. If that isn't enough the Italian Premier Antonio Salandra will be there and we want you to have a private word with him.'

'Look, this doesn't make any sense. Why me?'

'There are many reasons, which I'll let John tell you about.'

'Let me ask you a different question. What's all this to do with you? Why are you talking to me and who's Lord Stockdale? And what's it got to do with him?' I added.

Frazer grinned. 'That's more than one question but I'll try and answer them. Lord Stockdale is responsible for the safety of the United Kingdom and all her dominions. By that I mean he sits in the House of Lords and collects information from all over the world which he then passes on to a committee who report to the Prime Minister. You can imagine, I'm sure, how much information has to be sifted through, so that our, shall we say rulers, can make valid judgements regarding all manner of things.'

'Such as?'

'Such as, should the people in German East Africa attack Northern Rhodesia, who do we blame and what do we do about it? Such as if Serbia attacks Albania what should we do and what will the Italians do? And so it goes on. Masses of knowledge are needed to enable us to make decisions to protect not only our Empire but also parts of Europe. Turkey and the Dardanelles are a point in question. What if Turkey were to join with Germany and...'

'Wait a moment. You've just said what if Italy joins an alliance with Germany and Austro-Hungary.'

'I know I did. But don't you see, that's precisely my point. The whole lot is a big cauldron of supposition which could drag us into a war we not only don't want but aren't yet ready for. Why is Germany arming at the rate it is? Why are they building so many battleships and other craft? We need to know.'

I shrugged. 'Ask them,' I suggested. 'Let me get you another drink.' I stood up but Frazer told me to sit again.

'You can't buy drinks as you're not a member.' He waved to a passing waiter and ordered refills. While he was doing so, I was thinking. This was a preposterous idea. There was nothing for me to do but to return to America and get on with my life, perhaps join the business with Sion or even start my own legal practice.

'We've tried asking them,' Frazer said when he had taken a sip of his drink. 'We asked politely and then not so politely. They used diplomatic words to tell us to mind our own business. Nothing that is happening there right now makes sense and we need to make sense of it. If we don't, we could be in serious trouble.'

'I still don't understand why you want me to go,' I argued.

At that point John rejoined us and answered for Frazer. 'It's simple. You travel as an American, a wealthy one at that, who is committed to the neutrality of the United States. Which is their official line anyway. I know you speak excellent German because of Gunhild.'

I nodded bleakly at him. I didn't need reminding. The pain of losing Gunhild could still hurt. I remembered all the happy times we'd had together and the pleasure my family and hers felt at our intended marriage. I also had a fair smattering of French as well as German. For some reason I seemed able to learn a new language at the drop of a hat if I put my mind to it. This was a talent I knew John to be fully aware of.

'We want you to travel around Europe, visiting certain places and attending selected events. Basically you'll be eavesdropping. We'll spend the next four or five weeks grounding you in European affairs and at the same time we'll teach you one or two more languages. I take it your German's up to scratch?'

I nodded. 'Fluent to all intents and purposes. My Welsh is fluent also if you'd like me to infiltrate that part of Europe,' I said with a spark of humour.

John smiled and shook his head. 'Not yet. We might if the nationalists get too uppity. We'll arrange for you to have a cramming course in Italian and Hungarian. It won't be perfect but at least it will give you a head start when you get there.'

'Wait a second. I haven't said I'm going yet,' I protested. 'Anyway, I've set my heart on the Titanic voyage and I've paid for a stateroom. Do you know how difficult it was to get passage?'

'I should,' replied John, 'seeing I'm in the business. Don't worry, you can sell your ticket at a premium and make a profit. You'll double your money easily.'

'I don't want to double my money,' I retorted. 'I want to take part in an historic voyage. It'll be something to tell my grandchildren.'

'Look, David,' said John with a flash of annoyance. 'We need you and that's final. All we're...I'm asking is for six months of your time. Travel around and find out what's going on. Act the dumb American, say nothing but listen a lot.'

'Where does Frazer fit in to all this?' I asked, changing tack for a moment.

'He'll be your contact. He'll be near you at all times, somewhere available if you need him. You and he can work out the details between you. Incidentally, he's a major in the Black Watch.'

I nodded, impressed. It was not only an elite and famous regiment, it was also reputed to be a tough one. I still didn't like it.

'John, I need to think about it. I've got a career or a business to build. I've spent the last, what, eight months, doing nothing! The holiday's over. I've got to get back.'

John Buchanan nodded his understanding. 'I'll make you an offer. Help us and I'll help you to establish the name of Griffiths back here in England.'

'How?'

'I've an idea that I've already spoken to your father about. It's for he and I, as partners, to open a bank here in London. You will run it along with one of my people.'

'I know nothing about banking,' I pointed out the obvious. 'And anyway, I'm not sure that's what I want to do.'

'You don't need to know much. My man does. You're a quick learner and you'll soon get to know what you need to know. Remember, we can hire cashiers, assistants and accountants. What we need is a driving force finding the deals, making it happen. That will be your job. My man will run the bank on a day-to-day basis.'

'Who's your man?'

John grinned, wolfishly. 'Angus's brother. His name is Hamish and he's currently working in a bank in Edinburgh. He's indicated that if he got an offer he'd accept it. We'll make an offer shortly. While you do your, shall we say spying, around Europe on our behalf, he'll begin to make things happen here. By the time you return you'll have a bank to run.'

I looked at John for a few moments as the idea percolated through my brain. The more I thought about it the more I liked it. I still hadn't met up with Jake, which had been my intention, and I wanted to see Estella and her brother Dominic, as well as the baby, before I went back to America. I could lead my hedonistic life for a little longer before I had to knuckle down to some hard work.

'I'll think about it,' I said, by way of a compromise. 'I don't promise, but I'm not ruling it out.'

'Good enough,' said John, while Frazer scowled at me.

'Away laddie,' he said. 'Your country needs you for a while. That's all. It's the least you can do.'

I was about to retort that my country as he called it had done nothing for me or my family and that we owed everything to America, when I caught John's slight shake of the head and I shut up. There was nothing to be gained by antagonising Frazer.

'Let's go in for dinner,' announced John. We drained our drinks and moved to the dining room.

We had finished our main course, the three of us eating well hung and gamy pheasant, when we were approached by a gentleman wearing a tweed cape over a grey suit and carrying a deerstalker hat.

'Parker,' greeted John Buchanan, 'please sit down.'

Parker drew up a chair and sat at our table while John poured him a glass of fine Tokay wine. 'Here's mud in you eye,' Parker lifted the glass and drained it, unaware that a bottle of vintage Tokay cost as much as a working man earned in a week.

'Well?' asked Frazer, impatiently.

'Well, sir,' said Parker, taking out a grubby handkerchief and wiping his mouth, 'they're at Bow Street.'

'What? All of them?' I asked.

'Most of them. Some are at Marlborough Street. Mrs Pankhurst is definitely at Bow Street and is locked up for the night. She will be seeing the magistrate in the morning. There's no bail and none will be set.'

'I expected as much,' said John, thoughtfully. 'All right, thank you, Parker. Here are five guineas for your trouble. I'll send for you when I need you again.' He handed Parker five guinea coins and Parker left, happily.

'Another bottle of this wine,' said John, 'and we'll go home and tell Emily what we know.'

A short while later Frazer left us and John and I walked out of the club. He hailed a taxi which quickly took us along Piccadilly and into Mayfair. We stopped at an imposing residence and John let us in through the front door using his key. 'Welcome to my humble abode,' he said, dryly.

His "humble" abode had four rooms on the ground floor, seven bedrooms, three bathrooms and servants quarters. It had been the Buchanan town house for nearly fifty years and had been continuously modernised as new inventions and, in particular, better plumbing had been installed.

Once in his study he pushed a button next to the fireplace and a few moments later a butler appeared. John ordered whisky and sodas for us and asked him to invite Emily to join us. We exchanged talk about business while I perused the titles of the books lining his walls and studied some of the paintings hanging there. After a short wait, Emily walked in carrying a silver tray with our whiskies.

'I thought I would save Beech the trouble,' she said. 'Have you found out anything about the Pankhursts and the others?'

John told her what we had learned and she hurried towards the door. 'I must go down there at once. To see if I can help.'

'Emily you will do no such...thing,' the last word was spoken to the closed door. 'David, go with her, will you? She's so headstrong, I fear she'll do something rash.'

'Like what?' I asked as I stood and drained my glass. I was delighted to be told to follow the delectable Emily.

'Like brain the desk sergeant if he doesn't let her friends go. And all that will achieve is that she'll spend the night in jail and get her name in the papers in the morning.'

'Right. I'll see you later.' I hurried after Emily and caught her at the door.

'Where do you think you're going?' she asked, evidently displeased to see me.

'With you,' I replied, smiling at her.

'You will most certainly not,' she replied. 'I don't need a nursemaid, thank you.'

'Oh? Like you didn't need a nursemaid earlier on,' I reminded her.

'That was different. Now it's not necessary. All I shall do is go to the station to reason with the police for the release of my friends.'

I shook my head, sadly. Her naiveté was refreshing but misplaced.

'Don't patronise me with that look,' she said. 'I know what I'm doing.'

She stalked out of the house with me at her heels. She hailed a taxi and as she was closing the door on me I grabbed the handle and climbed in after her.

'Bow Street Police Station,' I told the driver as I settled down besides her.

'Stop,' she said and the taxi came to an abrupt halt. 'This gentleman is leaving.'

'No, I'm not. Drive on.'

The taxi started again and Emily called, crossly, 'I said stop. This gentleman is leaving.'

The car stopped and I said, 'No, I'm not. Just drive to Bow Street Police Station, please.'

The man turned in his seat and looked at each of us in turn. 'Make up your minds. I'll take both of you, one of you or none of you. Now which is it to be?'

'I'm coming with you,' I said to Emily. 'Your uncle ordered it.'

'Oh, very well,' she said crossly. 'Drive on.'

We sat in silence, she in petulance, me with enjoyment. All too soon we drew up outside the police station, climbed out of the taxi and I paid the driver off. We went inside to the smell of sweat, the noise of people vying for attention and the sight of green painted, drab walls.

Emily marched boldly to the front of the queue and said, 'My good man, I insist you take me to see Mrs Pankhurst immediately.'

What did she think she was playing at? The sergeant behind the desk sighed, put down the pen he was writing laboriously with and said, 'Listen, go to the back of the queue and when I've dealt with all these others I'll deal with you.'

Emily looked at the other people as though seeing them for the first time. I was fascinated. She had been born to riches, servants and dealing with ordinary people as though they were serfs. I don't think it even occurred to her that the other men and women there had the right to be attended to first. I could see she was about to argue so I grabbed her arm and pulled her away from the desk.

'Look, Emily, you can't do that. If that's how you and your friends normally behave then it's no wonder there are riots and virtual anarchy in the streets.'

'What? Don't talk nonsense,' she pulled her arm from my hand. 'I shall behave just as I like.' She made no effort to keep her voice down and one or two of the drunks and prostitutes began to take notice.

She turned to go back to the desk but was yelled at to get back and wait her turn. She took no notice. Things were beginning to turn ugly when two constables appeared and started towards her. With alarm I recognised one of the men we had confronted earlier that day. I hurried forward, grabbed her by the arm again, and dragged her towards the door.

'Hey, you. Stop,' said the constable, hurrying forward. He grabbed Emily by her other arm, she pulled away from me and before I could stop her she hit the constable on the nose. He gave a yell, more of surprise than pain and let go. I grabbed her again and pulled her towards the door. She needed no urging as she realised her position and together we rushed outside. There were more yells from behind as a police whistle was blown. We rushed down the steps and onto the pavement just as the door opened behind us and a number of policemen ran out.

'Run, Emily, run,' I urged.