RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

The Man in the Queue

Josephine Tey

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About the Book

About the Author

Josephine Tey is one of the best known and best loved of all crime writers. She began to write full-time after the successful publication of her first novel, *The Man in the Queue* (1929), which introduced Inspector Grant of Scotland Yard. In 1937 she returned to crime writing with *A Shilling for Candles*, but it wasn't until after the Second World War that the majority of her crime novels were published. Josephine Tey died in 1952, leaving her entire estate to the National Trust.

Also by Josephine Tey

A Shilling for Candles
Miss Pym Disposes
The Franchise Affair
Brat Farrar
To Love and Be Wise
The Daughter of Time
The Singing Sands

THE MAN IN THE QUEUE

Josephine Tey

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To Brisena
who actually wrote it

CHAPTER 1

MURDER

It was between seven and eight o’clock on a March evening, and all over London the bars were being drawn back from pit and gallery doors. Bang, thud, and clank. Grim sounds to preface an evening’s amusement. But no last trump could have so galvanised the weary attendants on Thespis and Terpsichore standing in patient column of four before the gates of promise. Here and there, of course, there was no column. At the Irving, five people spread themselves over the two steps and sacrificed in warmth what they gained in comfort; Greek tragedy was not popular. At the Playbox there was no one; the Playbox was exclusive, and ignored the existence of pits. At the Arena, which had a three weeks’ ballet season, there were ten persons for the gallery and a long queue for the pit. But at the Woffington both human strings tailed away apparently into infinity. Long ago a lordly official had come down the pit queue, and with a gesture of his outstretched arm that seemed to guillotine hope, had said, ‘All after here standing room only.’ Having thus, with a mere contraction of his deltoid muscle, separated the sheep from the goats, he retired in Olympian state to the front of the theatre, where beyond the glass doors there was warmth and shelter. But no one moved away from the long line. Those who were doomed to stand for three hours more seemed indifferent to their martyrdom. They laughed and chattered, and passed each other sustaining bits of chocolate in torn silver paper. Standing room only, was it? Well, who would not stand, and be pleased to, in the last week of *Didn’t You Know?* Nearly two years it had run now, London’s own musical comedy, and this was its swan song. The stalls and the circle had been booked up weeks ago, and many foolish virgins, not used to queues, had swelled

the waiting throng at the barred doors because bribery and corruption had proved unsuccessful at the box office. Every soul in London, it seemed, was trying to crowd into the Woffington to cheer the show just once again. To see if Golly Gollan had put a new gag into his triumph of foolery – Gollan who had been rescued from a life on the road by a daring manager, and had been given his chance and had taken it. To sun themselves yet once more in the loveliness and sparkle of Ray Marcable, that comet that two years ago had blazed out of the void into the zenith and had dimmed the known and constant stars. Ray danced like a blown leaf, and her little aloof smile had killed the fashion for dentifrice advertisements in six months. ‘Her indefinable charm,’ the critics called it, but her followers called it many extravagant things, and defined it to each other with hand-wavings and facial contortions when words proved inadequate to convey the whole of her faery quality. Now she was going to America, like all the good things, and after the last two years London without Ray Marcable would be an unthinkable desert. Who would not stand for ever just to see her once more?

It had been drizzling since five o’clock, and every now and then a light chill air lifted the drizzle and half-playfully swept the queue from end to end with it in one long brush-stroke. That discouraged no one – even the weather could not take itself seriously tonight; it had merely sufficient tang to provide a suitable apéritif to the fare in front of them. The queue twiddled its toes, and Cockneywise made the most of whatever entertainment provided itself in the dark canyon of the lane. First there had come the newsboys, small things with thin, impassive faces and wary eyes. They had flickered down the queue like wildfire and disappeared, leaving behind a trail of chatter and fluttering papers. Then a man with legs shorter than his body laid a ragged strip of carpet on the damp pavement and proceeded to tie himself into knots until he looked as a spider does when it is taken

unawares, his mournful toad’s eyes gleaming now and then from totally unexpected places, in the writhing mass, so that even the most indifferent spectator felt his spine trickle. He was succeeded by a man who played popular airs on the fiddle, happily oblivious of the fact that his E string was half-a-tone flat. Then, simultaneously, came a singer of sentimental ballads and a syncopated orchestra of three. After they had scowled at each other for a moment or two, the soloist tried to rush things on the possession-being-nine-points principle, by breaking into a wailing *Because you came to me*, but the leader of the orchestra, handing his guitar to a lieutenant, proceeded to interview the tenor, with his elbows out and his hands lifted. The tenor tried to ignore him by looking over his head, but found it difficult, because the musician was half a head taller than himself and appeared to be ubiquitous. He persevered for another two lines, and then the ballad wavered uncertainly into bitter expostulation in his natural voice, and two minutes later he faded up the dark alley, mumbling threats and complaints, and the orchestra broke into the latest dance tune. This being more to the taste of the moderns than inappropriate resurrection of decayed sentiment, they promptly forgot all about the poor victim of *force majeure*, and twiddled their toes in time to the lively measure. After the orchestra, and severally, came a conjurer, an evangelist, and a man who allowed himself to be tied up in a rope with imposing-looking knots, and as imposingly worked himself free.

All these did their little turn and moved on to another performance elsewhere, and each one before leaving made a tour of the line, thrusting limp but importunate head-gear into the meagre interstices of the queue, and saying, ‘Thank you! Thank you!’ as encouragement to the bountiful. By way of punctuation to the programme, there had been vendors of sweetmeats, vendors of matches, vendors of toys, vendors even of picture postcards. And the crowd had

parted good-naturedly with their pence and found amusement sufficient to their needs.

Now a shudder ran down the line – a shudder that the experienced recognised as but one thing. Stools were given up or folded into hand-bags, food disappeared, purses appeared. The doors were open. The lovely exciting gamble had begun. Was it to be win, place, or lose by the time they came to the wicket? Up in the front of the queue where the order was less mathematically two-and-two than down in the open, the excitement of the door-opening had for a moment or two overcome the habitual place-keeping instincts of the Englishman – I say Englishman advisedly; the Scot has none of it – and there had been a mild pushing and readjustment before the queue had become immobile in a wedged and short-breathing mass before the *guichet* which was immediately inside the pit door. The clink and rattle of coin on brass proclaimed the continual hurried transactions which made the lucky ones free of paradise. The very sound of it made those behind strain forward unconsciously, until the crowd in front protested as audibly as their crushed lungs permitted, and a policeman went down the queue to remonstrate. ‘Now then, now then, stand back a bit. There’s plenty of time. You won’t get in by pushing. All in good time.’ Now and then the whole line tottered forward a few inches as the emancipated ones ran in twos and threes from the head of it, like beads rolling from a broken string. Now a fat woman held them up by fumbling in her bag for more money. Surely the fool could have found out before now the exact amount required instead of keeping them back like this. As if conscious of their hostility she turned to the man behind her and said angrily:

‘’Ere, I’ll thank you to stop shoving. Can’t a lady be allowed to take out her purse without everyone losing their manners?’

But the man she addressed took no notice. His head was sunk on his chest. Only the top of his soft hat met her beady indignant gaze. She snorted, and moving away from him to face the box office squarely laid down the money she had been searching for. And as she did so the man sank slowly to his knees, so that those behind almost fell over him, stayed like that for a moment, and then keeled still more slowly over on his face.

‘Chap fainted,’ said someone. No one moved for a moment or two. Minding one’s own business in a crowd today is as much an instinct of self-preservation as a chameleon’s versatility. Perhaps someone would claim the chap. But no one did; and so a man with more social instinct or more self-importance than the rest moved forward to help the collapsed one. He was about to bend over the limp heap when he stopped as if stung and recoiled hastily. A woman shrieked three times, horribly; and the pushing, heaving queue froze suddenly to immobility.

In the white clear light of the naked electric in the roof, the man’s body, left alone by the instinctive withdrawal of the others, lay revealed in every detail. And rising slantwise from the grey tweed of his coat was a little silver thing that winked wickedly in the baleful light.

It was the handle of a dagger.

Almost before the cry of ‘Police!’ had gone up, the constable had come from his job of pacification at the other end of the queue. At the first of the woman’s shrieks he had turned. No one shrieked like that except when faced by sudden death. Now he stood looking for a moment at the picture, bent over the man, turned his head gently to the light, released it, and said to the man at the *guichet*:

‘Phone for the ambulance and the police.’

He turned his rather shocked gaze on the queue.

‘Anyone here know the gentleman?’

But no one claimed acquaintance with the still thing on the floor.

Behind the man there had been a prosperous suburban couple. The woman was moaning continuously and without expression, ‘Oh, let’s go home, Jimmy! Oh, let’s go home!’ On the opposite side of the *guichet* stood the fat woman, arrested by this sudden horror, grasping her ticket in her black cotton gloves but making no effort to secure a seat now that the way lay open to her. Down the waiting line behind, the news went like fire in stubble – a man had been murdered! – and the crowd in the sloping vestibule began to mill suddenly in hopeless confusion as some tried to get away from the thing that had spoiled all thought of entertainment, and some tried to push forward to see, and some indignant ones fought to keep the place they had stood so many hours for.

‘Oh, let’s go home, Jimmy! Oh, let’s go home!’

Jimmy spoke for the first time. ‘I don’t think we can, old girl, until the police decide whether they want us or not.’

The constable heard him and said, ‘You’re quite right there. You can’t go. You first six will stay where you are – *and* you, missus,’ he added to the fat woman. ‘The rest come on.’ And he waved them on as he would wave the traffic past a broken-down car.

Jimmy’s wife broke into hysterical sobbing, and the fat woman expostulated. She had come to see the show and didn’t know anything about the man. The four people behind the suburban couple were equally reluctant to be mixed up in the thing they knew nothing about, with results that no one could foresee. They too protested their ignorance.

‘Maybe,’ said the policeman, ‘but you’ll have to explain all that at the station. There’s nothing to be scared of,’ he added for their comfort, and rather unconvincingly in the circumstances.

So the queue came on. The doorkeeper brought a green curtain from somewhere and covered up the body. The automatic clink and rattle of coin began again and went on,

indifferent as rain. The doorkeeper, moved from his habitual Jovian abstraction by their plight or by the hope of reward, offered to keep their rightful seats for the seven derelicts. Presently came the ambulance and the police from Gowbridge Police Station. An inspector had a short interview with each of the detained seven, took names and addresses, and dismissed them with a warning to be ready to come up if called upon. Jimmy took his sobbing wife away to a taxi, and the other five straggled soberly in to the seats over which the doorkeeper was brooding, just as the curtain rose on the evening performance of *Didn't You Know?*

CHAPTER 2

INSPECTOR GRANT

Superintendent Barker applied a carefully manicured forefinger to the ivory bell-push on the under side of his table, and kept it there until a minion appeared.

‘Tell Inspector Grant that I want to see him,’ he said to the minion, who was doing his best to look obsequious in the great man’s presence, but was frustrated in his good intention by an incipient embonpoint which compelled him to lean back a little in order to preserve his balance, and by the angle of his nose which was the apotheosis of impudence. Bitterly conscious of failure, the minion withdrew to deliver the message and to bury the memory of his confusion among the unsympathetic perfection of files and foolscap from which he had been summoned, and presently Inspector Grant came into the room and greeted his chief cheerily as one man to another. And his chief’s face brightened unconsciously in his presence.

If Grant had an asset beyond the usual ones of devotion to duty and a good supply of brains and courage, it was that the last thing he looked like was a police officer. He was of medium height and slight in build, and he was – now, if I say dapper, of course you will immediately think of something like a tailor’s dummy, something perfected out of all individuality, and Grant is most certainly not that. But if you can visualise a dapperness that is not of the tailor’s dummy type, then that is Grant. Barker had for years striven unsuccessfully to emulate his subordinate’s chic; he succeeded merely in looking too carefully dressed. He lacked the flair for things sartorial as he lacked flair in most things. He was a plodder. But that was the worst that could be said about him. And when he started plodding after

someone, that someone usually wished he had never been born.

He regarded his subordinate now with an admiration untinged with any resentment, appreciated his son-of-the-morning atmosphere – he himself had been awake most of the night with sciatica – and came to business.

‘Gowbridge are very sick,’ he said. ‘In fact, Gow Street went so far as to insinuate that it was a conspiracy.’

‘Oh? Someone been pulling their legs?’

‘No, but last night’s affair is the fifth big thing in their district in the last three days, and they’re fed up. They want us to take this last affair over.’

‘What is that? The theatre-queue business, is it?’

‘Yes, and you are O.C. investigations. So get busy. You can have Williams. I want Barber to go down to Berkshire about that Newbury burglary. The locals down there will want a lot of soft soap because we have been called in, and Barber is better at that than Williams. I think that is all. Better get down to Gow Street right away. Good luck.’

Half an hour later Grant was interviewing the Gowbridge police surgeon. Yes, the surgeon said, the man had been dead when he was brought into hospital. The weapon was a thin, exceedingly sharp stiletto. It had been driven into the man’s back on the left side of the backbone with such force that the hilt had pressed his garments to a wad which had kept any blood from flowing. What had escaped had oozed out round the wound without coming to the outer surface at all. In his opinion the man had been stabbed a considerable time – perhaps ten minutes or more – before he had collapsed as the people in front moved away. In a squash like that he would be held up and moved along by the crowd. In fact, it would have been a sheer impossibility to fall if one had wanted to in such a closely packed mob. He thought it highly unlikely that the man was even aware that he had been struck. So much pressing and squeezing and

involuntary hurting went on on these occasions that a sudden and not too painful blow would not be noticed.

‘And about the person who stabbed him. Anything peculiar about the stabbing?’

‘No, except that the man was strong and left-handed.’

‘Not a woman?’

‘No, it would need more strength than a woman has to drive the blade in as it has been driven. You see, there was no room for a back-sweep of the arm. The blow had to be delivered from a position of rest. Oh no, it was a man’s work. And a determined man’s, too.’

‘Can you tell me anything about the dead man himself?’ asked Grant, who liked to hear a scientific opinion on any subject.

‘Not much. Well nourished – prosperous, I should say.’

‘Intelligent?’

‘Yes, very, I should think.’

‘What type?’

‘What type of occupation, do you mean?’

‘No, I can deduce that for myself. What type of – temperament, I suppose you’d call it?’

‘Oh, I see.’ The surgeon thought for a moment. He looked doubtfully at his interlocutor. ‘Well, no one can say that for a certainty – you understand that?’ and when Grant had acknowledged the qualification, ‘but I should call him one of the “lost cause” type.’ He raised his eyebrows interrogatively at the inspector and, assured of his understanding, added, ‘He had practical enough qualities in his face, but his hands were a dreamer’s. You’ll see for yourself.’

Together they viewed the body. It was that of a young man of twenty-nine or thirty, fair-haired, hazel-eyed, slim, and of medium height. The hands, as the doctor had pointed out, were long and slim and not used to manual work. ‘Probably stood a lot,’ said the surgeon with a glance at the man’s feet. ‘And walked with his left toe turned in.’

‘Do you think his assailant had any knowledge of anatomy?’ asked Grant. It was almost incredible that so small a hole had let a man’s life out.

‘It wasn’t done with the precision of a surgeon, if that’s what you mean. As for a knowledge of anatomy, practically everyone who is old enough to have lived through the war has a working knowledge of anatomy. It may have been just a lucky shot – and I rather think it was.’

Grant thanked him and came to business with the Gow Street officials. On a table were laid out the scanty contents of the man’s pockets. Grant was conscious of a faint dismay when he saw their fewness. A white cotton handkerchief, a small pile of loose change (two half-crowns, two sixpences, a shilling, four pennies, and a halfpenny), and – unexpected – a service revolver. The handkerchief was well worn but had no laundry mark or initial. The revolver was fully loaded.

Grant examined them in a disgusted silence. ‘Laundry marks on his clothes?’ he asked.

No, there were no marks of any kind.

And no one had come to claim him? Nor even anyone to make inquiries?

No, no one but that old madwoman who laid claim to everyone the police found.

Well, he would see the clothes for himself. Painstakingly he examined each article of clothing. Both hat and shoes were well worn, the shoes so much so that the maker’s name which should have been on the lining, had been obliterated. The hat when new had been bought from a firm who owned shops all over London and the provinces. Both were good of their kind, and though well worn neither was shabby. The blue suit was fashionable if rather too pronounced in cut, and the same might be said of the grey overcoat. The man’s linen was good if not expensively so, and the shirt was of a popular shade. All the clothes, in fact, had belonged to a man who either took an interest in clothes or was accustomed to the society of those who did.

A salesman in a men's outfitter's, perhaps. As the Gowbridge people had said, there were no laundry marks. That meant either that the man had wanted to hide his identity or that his linen was washed habitually at home. Since there was no sign of any obliteration of marks it followed that the latter was the reasonable explanation. On the other hand, the tailor's name had been deliberately removed from the suit. That and the scantiness of the man's belongings pointed certainly to a desire on his part to conceal his identity.

Lastly – the dagger. It was a wicked little weapon in its viperish slenderness. The handle was of silver, about three inches long, and represented the figure of some saint, bearded and robed. Here and there it was touched with enamel in bright primitive colours such as adorn sacred images in Catholic countries. In general it was of a type fairly common in Italy and along the south coast of Spain. Grant handled it gingerly.

'How many people have had their hands on it?' he asked.

The police had commandeered it as soon as the man had arrived in hospital and it could be removed. No one had touched it since. But the expression of satisfaction was wiped from Grant's face when the information was added that it had been tested for fingerprints and had been found blank. Not even a blurred one spoiled the shining surface of the smug saint.

'Well,' said Grant, 'I'll take these and get on.' He left instructions with Williams to take the dead man's finger-prints and to have the revolver examined for peculiarities. To his own sight it seemed to be an exceedingly ordinary service revolver of a type which since the war has been as common in Britain as grandfather clocks. But, as has been said, Grant liked to hear authorities on their own subject. He himself took a taxi and spent the rest of the day interviewing the seven persons who had been nearest the unknown when he collapsed the previous night.

As the taxi bore him hither and thither he let his thought play round and over the situation. He had not the faintest hope that these people he interviewed would be of use to him. They had one and all denied any knowledge of the man when first questioned, and they were not likely to alter their minds as to that now. Also, if any of them had seen a companion with the dead man previously, or had noticed anything suspicious, they would have been only too ready to say so. It was Grant's experience that ninety-nine people proffered useless information where one was silent. Again, the surgeon had said that the man had been stabbed some time before it had been noticed, and no assassin was going to stay in the immediate neighbourhood of his victim until the deed was discovered. Even if the possibility of a bluff had occurred to the murderer, the chances of a connection between himself and his victim being established were too good to allow a sensible man – and a man bent on self-preservation is usually shrewd enough – to indulge in it. No, the man who did it had left the queue some time before. He must find someone who had noticed the murdered man before his death and had seen him in converse with someone. There was, of course, the possibility to be faced that there had been no converse, that the murderer had merely taken up a place behind his victim and slipped away when the thing was done. In that case he had to find someone who had seen a man leave the queue. That should not be difficult. The Press could be called to help.

Idly he considered the type of man it would be. No thorough Englishman used such a weapon. If he used steel at all he took a razor and cut a person's throat. But his habitual weapon was a bludgeon, and, failing that, a gun. This was a crime that had been planned with an ingenuity and executed with a subtlety that was foreign to an Englishman's habit of thought. The very femininity of it proclaimed the dago, or at the very least one used to dago habits of life. A sailor perhaps. An English sailor used to the

Mediterranean ports might have done it. But then, would a sailor have been likely to think of anything so subtle as the queue? He would have been more likely to wait for a dark night and a lonely street. The picturesqueness of the thing was Latin. An Englishman was obsessed with the desire to hit. The manner of the hitting did not habitually concern him.

That made him think of motive, and he considered the more obvious ones: theft, revenge, jealousy, fear. The first was ruled out; the man's pockets could have been picked half a dozen times by an expert practitioner in such a crowd, without any more violence than a fly bestows in alighting. Revenge or jealousy? Most probably – dagoes were notoriously vulnerable in their feelings; an insult rankled for a lifetime, a straying smile on the part of their adored, and they ran amok. Had the man with the hazel eyes – he had, undoubtedly, been attractive – come between a dago and his girl?

For no reason whatever Grant did not think so. He did not for a moment lose sight of the possibility, but – he did not think so. There remained fear. Was the fully loaded revolver prepared for the man who slid that sliver of steel into the owner's back? Had the dead man intended to shoot the dago on sight, and had the assassin known it and lived in terror? Or was it the other way about? Was it the dead man who had carried a weapon of defence which had not availed him? But then there was the unknown man's desire to slough his identity. A loaded revolver in these circumstances pointed to suicide. But if he contemplated suicide, why postpone it while he went to the play? What other motive induced a man to make himself anonymous? A brush with the police – arrest? Had he intended to shoot someone and, afraid of not getting away, made himself nameless? That was possible.

It was fairly safe, at least, to suppose that the dead man and the man whom Grant had mentally christened the Dago

had known each other sufficiently well to knock sparks from each other. Grant had very little belief in secret societies as the origins of picturesque murders. Secret societies delighted in robbery and blackmail and all the more squalid methods of getting something for nothing, and there was seldom anything picturesque about them, as he knew from bitter experience. Moreover, there were no impressive secret societies in London at present, and he hoped they would not start. Murder to order bored him stiff. What interested him was the possible play of mind on mind, of emotion on emotion. Like the Dago and the Unknown. Well he must do his best to find out who the Unknown was – that would give him a line on the Dago. Why had no one claimed him? It was early yet, of course. He might be recognised by someone at any minute. After all, he had only been 'missing' to his people for the space of a night, and not many people rush to see a murdered man because their son or brother has stayed out for the night.

With patience and consideration and an alert mind, Grant interviewed the seven people he had set out to see – quite literally to see. He had not anticipated receiving information from them directly, but he wanted to see them for himself and to sum them up. He found them all going about their various business, with the exception of Mrs James Ratcliffe, who was prostrate in bed and being attended by the doctor, who deplored the nervous shock she had received. Her sister – a charming girl with hair the colour of honey – talked to Grant. She had come into the drawing-room quite obviously hostile to the thought of any police officer being admitted to her sister in her present state. The sight of the police officer in reality was so astonishing that she looked again at his card quite involuntarily, and Grant smiled inwardly a little more broadly than he permitted himself to outwardly.

'I know you hate the sight of me,' he said apologetically and the tone was not wholly acting – 'but I wish you would

let me talk to your sister for just two minutes. You can stand outside the door with a stop-watch. Or come in, if you like, of course. There is nothing at all private in what I want to say to her. It's only that I am in charge of investigations in this case, and it is my duty to see the seven people who were nearest the man last night. It will help me enormously if I can write them all off the slate tonight and start on fresh lines tomorrow. Don't you see? It's mere form but very helpful.'

As he had hoped, this line of argument was a success. After a little hesitation the girl said, 'Let me go and see if I can persuade her.' Her report of the inspector's charms must have been a rose-coloured one, for she came back in less time than he had dared to hope and took him up to her sister's room, where he had an interview with a tearful woman who protested that she had not even noticed the man until he had fallen, and whose wet eyes regarded him continually with a dreadful curiosity. Her mouth was hidden behind a barricade of handkerchief which she kept pressed to it. Grant wished that she would take it down for a moment. He had a theory that mouths gave away more than eyes – certainly where women were concerned.

'Were you standing behind him when he fell?'

'Yes.'

'And who was alongside him?'

She could not remember. No one was paying attention to anything but getting into the theatre, and in any case she never noticed people on the street.

'I'm sorry,' she said shakily, when he was taking his departure. 'I'd like to be of use if I could. I keep seeing that knife, and I'd do anything to have the man that did it arrested.' And as Grant went out he dismissed her from his mind.

Her husband, whom he had to travel into the City to see – he could have had them all to the Yard, but he wanted to see how they were occupying their time on this the first day

after the murder – was more helpful. There had been a fair amount of churning in the queue, he said, as the doors were opened, so that their relations with their neighbours had altered a bit. As far as he could remember, the person who had stood beside the dead man and in front of himself was a man who had belonged to a party of four in front of that again, and had gone in with them. He, like his wife, said that he had not consciously seen the man until he had fallen.

The other five Grant found equally innocent and equally unhelpful. None had noticed the man. That amazed Grant just a little. How had *no one* seen him? He must have been there all the time. One doesn't shove in at the head of a queue without attracting a most uncomfortable amount of attention. And even the most unobservant of people will recall what their eyes have seen even if they were unconscious of taking notice at the time. Grant was still puzzling when he got back to the Yard.

There he sent a notice to the Press which asked anyone who had seen a man leave the queue, to communicate with Scotland Yard. Also a full description of the dead man, and as much of the progress of the investigations as was to be given to the public. Then he summoned Williams and demanded an account of his stewardship. Williams reported that the dead man's finger-prints had been photographed according to instructions and sent up for investigation, but he was unknown to the police. No corresponding finger-prints were to be found among those betraying dockets. The revolver expert could find nothing individual about the revolver. It was probably second-hand, had been used quite a lot, and was of course a very powerful weapon.

'Huh!' said Grant disgustedly. 'Some expert!' and Williams smiled.

'Well, he did say there was nothing distinctive about it,' he reminded.

And then he explained that before sending the revolver to the experts he had tested it for finger-prints, and finding

quite a lot had had them photographed. He was now waiting for the prints.

‘Good man,’ said Grant, and went in to see the superintendent, carrying the print of the dead man’s finger-tips with him. He gave Barker a *précis* of the day’s events without adducing any theories about dagoes beyond remarking that it was a very un-English crime.

‘Precious unproductive kind of clues we’ve got,’ said Barker. ‘All except the dagger, and that’s more like something out of a book than part of an honest-to-goodness crime.’

‘My sentiments exactly,’ said Grant. ‘I wonder how many people will be in the Woffington queue tonight,’ he added irrelevantly.

The knowledge of how Barker would have speculated on this fascinating question was lost for ever to mankind by the entrance of Williams.

‘The revolver prints, sir,’ he said succinctly, and laid them on the table. Grant picked them up with no great enthusiasm and compared them with the prints he had absent-mindedly been carrying about. After a short time he stiffened to sudden interest as a pointer stiffens. There were five distinct prints and many incomplete ones, but neither the good prints nor the broken ones had been made by the dead man. Attached to the prints was a report from the finger-print department. There was no trace of these prints in their records.

Back in his room Grant sat and thought. What did it mean, and of what value was the knowledge? Did the revolver not belong to the dead man? Borrowed, perhaps? But even if it had been borrowed there would surely have been some indication that the dead man had had it in his possession. Or had the dead man not had it in his possession? Had it been slipped into his pocket by someone else? But one could not slip anything of the weight and bulk of a service revolver into a man’s pocket unknown to him. No, not a