Breaking New Ground

by flashofthefuse

Summary

Having embarked on a mutually exclusive relationship, Jack and Phryne try to move forward.

Notes

This is a sequel to my earlier fiction "If the Choice Were Mine," and continues where that one left off.

I'm still missing Miss Fisher. Until they give me more stories I'm just going to have to make up my own.
Chapter 1

Jack woke slowly from the best sleep he’d had in a very long time. Without opening his eyes he knew exactly where he was. He could feel Phryne’s warm body snug against his own. His arm draped heavily across her middle, her hair tickling the bottom of his chin and her scent filling him. He smiled. *A man could get used to this,* he thought.

That had his eyes flying open and a cold reality settling over him. He removed his arm and rose from the bed as quietly as possible. He didn’t want to wake her. He needn’t have worried. She was sleeping quite soundly and only rolled over onto her stomach with a sigh. He stood looking at her, splayed out on the bed, her hair floating over the pillow. Again, the contented, happy feeling washed over him. He would need to get this under control if he hoped to survive.

He went into the bathroom to wash. It was still very early and the house was quiet. The whirlwind of the last few days played in his head. He was incredibly happy, perhaps dangerously so, and dropping his guard. After telling her he needed to take things slowly, he’d instead ended up back in her bed the very next night. Not only that, but he’d allowed her access to his home to collect some of his belongings and right now bits of his clothing hung in her wardrobe and his own toiletries were here in her bath. *So much for slowly.*

The worst part was how thrilled he was by all of this domesticity. He knew it wasn’t the same for her. That the sight of her things alongside his didn’t fill her with the same emotion. All of this was new and exciting for her and, as always when something felt good, she moved along with glee, never thinking too far ahead.

But this wasn’t a surprise. He had known what he was getting into. He’d just let himself forget and be carried away. He wanted her so much, and had for so long. His fantasy life had been rich and had often included scenes that closely resembled a happy, committed life with her.

Even now, in his own private thoughts, he noticed he avoided the word marriage.

He thought he’d settled all this in his head long ago and had come to terms with it. *God I’m a fool,* he thought. He stuck his head under the cold water tap, wanting to contemplate his next move with a clearer mind. Collecting his things he went back into the bedroom dressed only in his shorts. He’d laughed when he’d realized she hadn’t provided a singlet for him. Phryne stirred in the bed.

“Jack?” She reached her hand beside her and coming up empty, raised her head to look for him, just making out his form in the dim light. “You’re not leaving?”

“I would have woken you to say goodbye. I want to be gone before your staff awakens.”

“I won’t have you sneaking off like a common thief,” she said. “It’s much too early. Besides, you owe me now. You’ve denied me the pleasure of waking by your side.”

She stretched out her hand to him and he knew it was a lost cause. He would always go to her when she reached for him. He took her hand and sat beside her.

“Come back to bed,” she said, giving his hand a little tug.

She looked incredibly tempting. She also didn’t appear to be shying away from him after what he viewed as his overly possessive behavior the previous night. Even so, he knew if he laid down with her he’d stay longer than he should.
“No, Phryne. I really must go.”

She sat up and the sheet fell away from her body leaving her exposed to her waist. He couldn’t stop his eyes from roaming over her and felt the familiar prick of desire. He stood, pulled the clothes she’d brought for him from her wardrobe and began to dress. She watched silently for a minute, then rose and grabbed her silk robe to wrap around her.

“At least stay for breakfast,” she said casually.

He smiled, looking down to button his waistcoat. He wondered how many of her guests rated breakfast invitations. He checked himself before his mind could slip once more into fantasies of domestic bliss.

She had come to stand directly in front of him. Looking up, he gave her a warm smile, then pulled her to him and kissed her. It was quite passionate. He held her tight and teased her mouth open with his tongue, deepening the kiss. His hands ran over her body, cupping her bottom and pressing her into him, filling her with longing. When he pulled away she smiled.

“Well, what did I do to earn that?” she asked. “It was only an invitation to breakfast after all.”

“You said I owed you for leaving the bed this morning. I like to pay my debts,” he said, slapping her lightly on the rump before turning away to pick up his suit coat.

She looked at him approvingly. He was pleased. He wanted to leave her feeling happy and hopefully wanting more. He turned to collect last night’s clothes from where they lay scattered.

“Leave those,” she said. “I’ll have Mr Butler clean and press them for you.”

“Absolutely not!” he said. “Mr. Butler does not work for me. I have my own cleaning service.”

“Really Jack, he won’t mind,” she began, but didn’t press when he gave her a look that would brook no opposition. “Alright, have it your way,” she conceded.

“Thank you for the invitation, but I’ll not be staying to eat. I want to get an early start today.”

“Well, in that case, I’m going back to bed. It’s ungodly early.”

She let the robe drop off her, gave him a saucy look over her shoulder that she knew would have him thinking about her all day, and slipped back into bed.

Jack crept quietly from the house feeling more settled. Now that the first flushes of their relationship were behind him, and he had his wits about him once more, he was sure he would be able to cope.

After Jack left, Phryne burrowed under the covers. She laid her head on the pillow he’d slept on. It still smelled of him.

Jack seemed in a better mood this morning. He’d been a little sad the night before, his emotions a bit raw. As it turned out this had made for some very passionate lovemaking. That had been a pleasant surprise. Rarely had she felt so needed and appreciated. It had been more arousing than she could have imagined.

Her intentions in inviting him to her home had been sincere. She’d wanted to take care of him.
That too had come as a surprise, but as it turned out her altruistic feelings had worked in her favor and the entire night had been most satisfying.

She was a little disappointed when he’d gathered his clothes and gone. She’d thought he might leave some of his things behind so that he would have them when he stayed over next.

Perhaps it was just as well. It may have been too much, too soon, to so obviously telegraph their relationship to her staff. She couldn’t do anything about the clothes, but she could discreetly add a few new items to her bath. The soap he liked, a razor. She rolled over to settle in for a few more hours of sleep.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Jack and Phryne work together for the first time since becoming romantically involved. Phryne discusses her new relationship with Mac.

Jack had been in the morgue with Dr. MacMillan for less than a minute when Phryne arrived.


“No, I haven’t yet begun,” said Mac. “Tell me Miss Fisher, what exactly is your interest in this case?” she asked, with a mischievous smile, glancing between Phryne and Jack.

“I was there when the boy was found and naturally wanted to help.”

“Naturally,” Mac replied.

Jack watched the little interaction between the two friends. Clearly what was happening between Phryne and him was known to Dr. MacMillan. He cleared his throat to get things back on track, saying;

“What have you learned about our victim Doctor? How old is he, 11, 12?”

“Closer to 14 I’d say. Small for his age and malnourished,” said Mac. “He’d been in the water quite some time. Four or five days at least. The water didn’t kill him. There was blunt force trauma to the back of his skull, that’s what did the trick. No water in his lungs, so he was dead before going into the drink.”

Jack looked down sadly at the small body laid out on the cold, steel table. No matter how may times he witnessed scenes like it, he didn’t think he’d ever get used to it.

“Thank you Doctor,” he said.

“What now Jack?” Phryne asked.

“Well, as there are no missing person’s reports matching his description, Hugh and I will start canvassing neighborhoods with a photo. See if anyone recognizes him,” he said.

“That may be complicated by the time in the water,” Mac said. Jack nodded grimly.

“Give me a photo, Dot and I can go around on our own. I think we’ll cover more area if we split up and I may have more luck getting people to talk. In the areas we’ll be going most people aren’t too fond of police,” Phryne said.

“Well, be careful,” he said. Handing her a photograph from the file.

“I can take care of myself,” she said, bristling.

“Don’t start,” he said, smiling fondly. “I’m not telling you anything that I wouldn’t tell one of my constables.”
“Alright then,” She relaxed. “Perhaps you can stop over later for a nightcap and we can discuss our findings?”

Mac had watch this exchange with amusement. Now she spoke up.

“Wait a minute, aren’t you forgetting something?” she asked. “You have plans with me tonight.”

“Oh! Mac!” cried Phryne. “Of course. Sorry, it slipped my mind. Perhaps you’d care to join us Jack?”

“No, thank you. I’d only be in the way. If you learn anything of importance today you can phone the station.”

Mac smiled in approval. Jack had handled that quite well she thought.

Mac and Phryne sat with their heads together at a small table in the center of a rollicking jazz club.

“Well,” said Mac. “That clears a few things up. I didn’t know the Inspector had it in him. Good for him.”

Phryne had just finished recounting the story of how she’d snuck into town a day early to spend time with Jack.

“I can tell you’re happy Phryne, but have you really thought about what this means? What he may be expecting?”

“What do you mean?” Phryne asked. She had a good idea of exactly what Mac meant, but needed more time to think about how to explain things.

“It’s just that Jack is not your typical conquest.”

Phryne started to object but Mac held up her hand.

“Let me finish. I know he’s more to you than that, but how much more? I don’t think I’m wrong in believing that Jack Robinson is a one man, one woman kind of guy. You know, the marrying kind.”

“No, you’re not wrong. That is what he prefers.”

“He wants to marry you?!” Mac asked, alarmed.

“Not that he’s said,” Phryne replied quickly. “But he’s made it clear that he does want an exclusive arrangement.”

“That was a requirement of his?” Mac was finding this more astonishing by the minute. That Phryne would allow a man to dictate her behavior.

“No, he didn’t require it of me. He said it was to be my choice.”

Mac looked confused.

“It was really rather sweet. It was shortly before I left for London. He said he was mine, whether I
wanted him or not, and that he wished for me to be his, of my own choosing. And if I didn’t choose that, he would love me still, but we couldn’t be together. He couldn’t be one of many.”

Well, good for him. Mac thought. At least he was being straight about what he wanted. She hoped he meant it about letting Phryne choose and would not display the kind of jealous, possessive behavior Mac too often saw in men.

“So then, are you his Phryne?” Mac asked.

“I think I am Mac,” she said, with a wry smile. “I had a lot of time to think about it while I travelled. I found I had little interest in anyone else. And when I got his letter, I knew how I truly felt.”

“He wrote you? How did he know where to reach you?” Mac asked.

“I wrote him first, sending the address.”

“You wrote him?” Now Mac was beyond flabbergasted.

“Only twice, or maybe it was three times...and a couple of telegrams,” Phryne said, looking down at her drink, slightly abashed.

“I received only one, very short telegram!” Mac complained. “And in it you mostly whinged about your father, while apparently Jack was getting messages of love every other day!”

“Oh hardly!” Phryne laughed. “Don’t be so dramatic. I’m sorry if I haven’t expressed my undying affection for you Mac. You know I adore you.”

“Well, you’re forgiven,” Mac said grudgingly. “This is all a lot to take in. I think I may need another drink.” She waved over to a waitress and signaled for a refill of both their glasses.

A few minutes later a handsome young man approached the table and asked Phryne for a dance. Mac gave a permissive wave and Phryne bounced to her feet and onto the floor.

Phryne’s partner was a very good dancer. He knew just when to press her close, when to release and exactly how to use his hands to the best advantage. It was titillating and quite fun, but every once in awhile Phryne’s body remembered other hands. Hands that had thrilled her more, quite recently.

After one dance she glanced in Mac’s direction to see a pretty young girl had joined their table and Mac was currently deep in conversation. When Phryne’s companion asked for another dance, she conceded. By the third dance, she’d had enough. She declined his request for a fourth and returned to her table. He followed, seating himself next to her, uninvited. She shrugged and allowed it. Mac was still talking with her new friend, so at least he would keep Phryne entertained.

He was young, quite good looking and obviously keen to impress her. She accepted his attentions, flirting coyly but promising nothing. When he asked if he could escort her home, she declined, to his great disappointment. It looked like Mac was going to be awhile longer. She and the pretty young woman seemed to have quite a bit to talk about. Phryne said her goodbyes and went to find a cab home.

She thought briefly about giving Jack’s address as her destination. She’d had a few drinks, was a bit wound up by the dancing and flirting, and found she wanted badly to see him. But what would he think of her turning up so late on his doorstep? She gave her own address to the cabby and took herself home to bed.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

The detective get some information on their case and devise a new strategy

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Jack was at his desk early again the next morning. He still knew nothing about the identity of the boy in the morgue, but the neighborhood canvassing hadn’t been entirely fruitless. It seems there was a new gambling operation in town. They used young boys as runners and debt collectors. It was entirely possible his young victim had been caught up in that somehow, but it would be difficult to confirm. This new group had a reputation for being ruthless and no one was talking.

It was around 10 in the morning when Phryne breezed into his office. He was surprised to see her so early. She looked beautiful, as always, and alert, showing no ill affects from what he assumed had been a late night out with Mac.

“Good Morning Jack!” she sang.

“Miss Fisher,” he replied.

She stood across the desk from him, they were smiling at each other, both obviously pleased to see the other. She removed her hat and gloves, placing them on his desk and came around to perch atop it in front of him.

“I’m sure Hugh told you that Dot and I were unsuccessful in determining the identity of our victim.”

“Yes,” he said. “We had no more luck than you. However, I do have an angle on the case I’d like to pursue.”

“The gambling ring?” she asked.

He wasn’t surprised that she had been able to uncover this information as well.

“No one seems willing to talk about it. I’m in a bit of a tough spot as to how to move forward,” he confessed.

“Something will turn up,” she assured him.

He couldn’t help noticing her legs as she sat with them crossed upon his desk. She’d sat just so a hundred times before and it had always been a distraction. Now he smiled slightly, realizing he was allowed to act on his desire, and perhaps ease some of the tension building in him.

He reached down, behind the desk and grasped her ankle in one hand, keeping the other on the desktop so as to avoid the look of impropriety should anyone enter the office. His thumb began making small circles on the back of her calf. She smiled.

“Did you miss me last night Inspector?”
“In fact I did,” he said, returning her smile and looking into her eyes, his hand continuing its attentions to her lower leg.

“I trust you and Dr. MacMillan had a nice evening?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “It was a lot of fun. And you’ll be glad to know I was tucked up into bed at a very respectable hour.”

Hugh Collins walked into his boss’s office to inform him of a visitor only to find the Inspector and Miss Fisher staring intensely at each other with hooded eyes and sly smiles on their faces. He was always uncomfortable when he found them like this and he found them like this far too often. It had always been this way from the earliest days of their acquaintance with Miss Fisher and it never ceased making him squirm. He cleared his throat.

“Um, sir?” he began.

Jack looked up, his face immediately re-formed into its usual stern expression. Miss Fisher turned too, a polite curiosity now on her face. They didn’t look remotely abashed. *How do they do that?* wondered Hugh.

“Yes, Collins?” Jack said.

“There’s a woman here that would like to speak with you. Says she may have some information about the boy.”

“Show her into the next room, I’ll be there shortly. Thank you, Collins.”

Jack and Phryne made their way into the interview room. Jack was glad of her company. He’d found that women often were more comfortable talking when another woman was in the room. They’d gotten used to sharing interviewing duties and seemed to instinctively know which of them should take the lead.

The woman seated at the table today was young and looked wary. She was dressed in very old, worn clothing with brittle looking hair and the hollow cheeks of one that has not had enough to eat. Jack took the chair opposite, while Phryne sat behind him in the corner of the room. The girl wasn’t a suspect and Phryne felt she should take a back seat and allow Jack’s warm, sympathetic nature persuade the young woman to talk. It didn’t hurt that most women found him attractive and he had a voice that could charm a scorpion.

As she’d expected, he managed to put the girl at ease and she barely seemed to register Phryne sitting quietly in the corner. It turned out she had recognized the boy when he and Hugh had shown her his photograph yesterday but had not wished to be seen talking to them.

She knew him only as Peter and had seen him several times where she worked. She was a barmaid at a less than reputable establishment and Peter had often come in. He seemed to be delivering or collecting some kind of messages. She didn’t know the nature of those messages, but she’d seen envelopes passing between him and many of the patrons.

She said he was a cheeky lad, often flirting with her, but he was also sweet and so small that she felt an affection for him. She’d try to slip him a bit of bread or cheese whenever she could. He hadn’t been around lately and she’d wondered what may have become of him.

She seemed truly affected by his death. Jack gave her his handkerchief when she began sniffling and patted her hand gently with his own, much larger one. He thanked her for the information and called Collins in, asking him to bring her some tea and take down any information she could
provide about the patrons she saw interacting with Peter.

Jack and Phryne returned to his office.

“Well,” said Jack, “That’s a little something to be going on with. It’s very likely whoever was using young Peter as go between is our killer.”

“Or perhaps one of the marks, unable to make payment, killed the messenger, so to speak,” said Phryne.

Jack nodded. “Either way, we’ll need to keep an eye on that establishment.”

“You won’t get far hanging around looking like a copper. You need a man, or woman, on the inside.”

“[Phryne?]” He said, a worried caution in his tone.

“I could easily slip in as a barmaid and have a look around”

“Oh, yes, easily,” he said sarcastically. “You look just like the kind of desperate woman that would seek employment in such a place.”

“You know me Jack. I’m a master of disguise.”

“It’s far too dangerous. You can’t go in there on your own.” he objected.

“Then you’ll just have to go with me. You can be a barman, or perhaps my overly possessive lover. Insisting on hanging around to keep an eye on me,” she said, smiling suggestively.

She sounded positively excited by the idea. He still didn’t like it, but realized it might be the quickest way to get information. Getting her hired as a barmaid would be far easier than trying to have one of his constables infiltrate the place. Besides, he had to admit that she would play the role better than any of his officers.

However, he would be there with her every moment. The lover angle could work. It would give him an excuse to sit at the bar, nursing a drink while keeping an eye on things.

They went back into the interview room and made arrangements to meet up with the young lady the next day. She would take Phryne into the bar and make the necessary introductions, trying to get her hired. They could say she was the cousin of a friend. New in town and desperate for work. If they succeeded and Phryne was given a job, Jack would make his appearance as her jealous boyfriend and plant himself at the bar.

The girl was apprehensive, but Phryne assured her that when she’d made the introductions, her role would be finished and she could back away from the whole affair. Once it was settled, they agreed on a meeting place and the girl went on her way.

Jack walked Phryne to the door and out to her car, his hand at her elbow.

“So, what do you have planned for the rest of your day?” he asked.

“I thought Dot and I should come up with a costume for my undercover assignment.” She was positively glowing with eagerness. “And, perhaps you could come over tonight and we can rehearse your role as my jealous lover,” she said, the idea of a little role playing adding to her excitement.
“Shall I dress for this rehearsal?” He teased. He found her enthusiasm contagious.

“Oh definitely,” she said. “I think it will serve our case most if we both are in character.”

“Well, if it will ‘serve our case’ how can I refuse?” he said, smiling at her.

She nearly jumped out of her skin with anticipation. This was going to be so much fun. She felt a little guilty. It was, after all a murder they were investigating. She brushed the thought aside.

“Come over around seven,” she said. “We can take our act out on the town for a test drive.”

“As you wish, Miss Fisher.”

Chapter End Notes

I know other fictions have had Phryne and Jack going undercover but it was too tempting not to try and write for myself. Any similarities to other stories is purely coincidental.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Jack and Phryne test the undercover aliases.

Clothes lay scattered all over the room. Nothing was quite right. Phryne wanted to find at least two different costumes. One that would be appropriate for this evening and another to wear should she succeed in getting employment.

Dot had gone to phone her sister in the hopes she had something they might be able to use. Lola should have some garments from her days employed at a local gentlemen’s club that would suit. Miss Fisher had recently found Lola a much less dangerous place of employ, as a hostess at a reputable restaurant, and Lola was glad to be able to return the favor. Within an hour she’d arrived with a few choices. Phryne selected the ones that fit her best and Dot set about making the slight alterations they required. When seven o’clock rolled around, Phryne was completely transformed.

Around that time Mr. Butler was opening the door to an unfamiliar looking Detective Inspector Robinson. He’d been aware of the commotion upstairs and managed to greet Jack with his usual, unflappable elegance, expressing no surprise at the Inspector’s slightly shabby appearance.

He left him to await Miss Fisher in the parlour. Jack leaned against the mantle watching the doorway. He was very curious to see what kind of get up Miss Fisher had pulled together. The task of finding appropriate attire had not proved challenging for Jack. He wore an old pair of moleskin trousers that he used for gardening, a worn, collarless shirt with the sleeves rolled past his elbows and a thick woolen vest. He’d used less pomade in his hair than usual and it fell over his forehead in more unruly curls than he generally allowed.

When Phryne entered the parlour, his face broke into a large, amused grin. She wore a peach colored silk dress with thin straps at the shoulder. It was adorned with garishly, glittering gold beads along the neckline, which dipped low, revealing an amount of décolletage that bordered on indecent. Her bangs had been pushed to the side and her hair formed into waves that framed her face. She’d applied her make-up with a heavier hand than usual, her eyes rimmed with black and her lips a bright pink. Rouge was smeared in a careless patch on each cheek. She entered the room and twirled.

When she stopped and took a look at Jack, it was all she could do to stop herself from dragging him upstairs immediately. His unkempt hair alone was enough. That, along with his bared forearms and the trousers, their fit managing to convey his muscular thighs, had her positively panting. She strolled seductively over to him.

“Evening, love,” she said in her best Collingwood accent. “How ‘bout a kiss for your girl?”

Jack grabbed her around the waist and pulled her hard to him, kissing her aggressively.

“Mmm,” she hummed in appreciation. “I think we are off to a fine start Inspector, but we might want to get moving before I need to completely re-apply my make-up,” she said, wiping the pink stain from his lips.

“This is your production Miss Fisher, I’m at your mercy tonight,” he said with a small bow.
“I like the sound of that,” she replied. “Let’s remember that later. But you’d better up your game once we are out on the town Jack, and behave in a much more controlling manner.”

“Don’t worry your little head about me darlin,’” he said roughly, giving her rump a much harder smack than he had the other morning. She squealed in delight.

“Oh, yes,” she said. “You’ll do just fine. You’ll need to come up with an alias. I haven’t decided on my yet, it’s either Sadie or Franny, what do you think?”

“Franny,” he said instantly. It was close enough to her own name that if he slipped up it might go unnoticed.

“Alright, Franny Collins. That should be easy to remember. And I think you should resurrect Archie Jones. I was rather fond of him,” she said, referencing a name he’d used during a previous undercover operation.

“Archie it is,” he said. “Since tonight is mainly a reconnaissance mission, I thought he should head into the neighborhood near the bar and perhaps stop in for a drink. That would get us seen around the area and make your story of having newly arrived plausible. If that’s alright with you,” he added.

“You’ve read my mind,” she said, linking arms with him and heading for the door. They took Jack’s car and parked several blocks outside of the neighborhood they were targeting, covering the rest of the distance on foot. They stopped in front of a newsstand and staged a brief argument to draw attention to themselves. Eventually they made their way to the bar where Jack draped an arm heavily over Phryne’s shoulder and pushed their way though the door. Once inside they took a seat at a small table near the door so they could watch anyone who entered or exited.

A quick glance around revealed a seedy establishment. The floors were filthy and most of the patrons looked to have been already over served, though the night was young.

The young barmaid that had come to the station that morning was working and approached the table to get their drink order. She didn’t recognize them until she was at their side and then her alarmed gasp nearly brought unwelcome attention. Phryne covered for her quickly, standing and giving her a rough hug, stating loudly how surprised she was to see her here. She whispered to the girl to act as though they were old friends and then take their order calmly.

When the girl returned with their drinks, Phryne improvised further and suggested they might as well make the most of the situation and have the girl introduce her to the owner tonight, rather than wait until the next day. Jack agreed. He was keen to have this whole undercover operation behind them and the sooner they got started the sooner it would be done.

Phryne left the table, following the girl to the bar where the introductions were made and it was explained that Franny, new in town, was looking for work. The owner looked Phryne over in a manner that nearly had Jack rising from his seat. He held his position. He was suppose to be a jealous boyfriend, he was playing the part well, but over-reacting now might mean Phryne would not be hired.

The owner knew a good deal when he saw one. Here was a very attractive woman that was bound to catch a man’s eye and make him stay for another drink or two. She had a slightly rough look about her, a bit of class but not too much. Her skin and hair glowed and she didn’t have the starved, scrawny look of most of his girls. She would bring in good tips, and as all his girls were required to turn any money over to him, that would be another benefit. He told her she could start the next night.
Once that was settled, Phryne returned the the table and spent the next hour hanging on Jack’s arm while they watched people come and go. At one point a boy of about 16 entered, exchanged angry words with a drunk at the bar and left looking agitated. They couldn’t hear everything that was said, but it was apparent the boy was expecting something from the man that he did not receive. The detectives guessed he’d been unsuccessfully trying to recover a debt.

Not wanting to overplay their hand, they left soon after. Walking the few blocks back to Jack’s car.

“That went well,” Phryne said. “I must say, the way you were glaring at our charming bar owner when I went to inquiry about the job was most convincing.”

“Just playing my part Franny.”

“And you played it very well, but I think we could use a bit more rehearsal,” she said. “You did say you were at my mercy tonight.”

“What do you have in mind?” he asked.

“I thought we could work on being convincing lovers,” she said, sliding over to him and leaning into his side, her hand on his thigh. “I hope you take direction well Archie.”

She noticed the car had increased its speed.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The detectives head home after a successful first outing with their undercover identities. Things heat up.

Chapter Notes

This chapter gets a bit smutty. If that's not your cup of tea, feel free to skip.

When they got back to Wardlow the house was quiet. She had told Mr. Butler not to wait up. Phryne took Jack’s hand and headed straight up the stairs to her bedroom.

She had been waiting to get Jack alone all night. His turn as Archie Jones with her as Franny Collins had been very arousing. The dangerous, menacing look he’d worn while she talked to the bar owner about employment was thrilling. Even after she’d returned to the table, and told him she’d been successful in securing a barmaid’s position, they had not broken character.

She’d fawned over him, batting her eyes and rubbing along his arm while he sat sullenly; barely acknowledging her attentions, but watching the crowd and glowering at any man that dared look her way. He silently signaled to the entire room that she was his and dared anyone to challenge that assumption. She was alarmed by how much it excited her, but she knew that was only because it was Jack, and completely against his true nature.

Finally alone with him, she closed the bedroom door and kissed him as she’d wanted to for hours. His hands ran over her body as he sighed into her mouth. She pulled back and began unbuttoning the heavy wool vest he wore. When she looked up at him, his hand came to the side of her face and his thumb swiped lazily over her cheek. He was looking at her with a slightly puzzled expression, his head tilted to one side.

“What’s wrong?” she said, continuing in the rough accent she’d used all night. “Don’t ya like yer Franny?”

“She’s beautiful. But I think I’m missing someone else that I’m longing to see,” he said quietly, sounding far more like Jack than Archie.

She leaned back and blinked, stirring him back to reality, or fantasy, or wherever he was suppose to be right now. He felt unsure of himself.

“I’m sorry. Did I spoil the fun?” he asked.

“Not at all. I’ll be right back. Make yourself comfortable,” she said, heading into the bath.

Jack removed the half undone vest, his shoes and socks and sat himself down on the bed. Leaning back against the headboard, he closed his eyes and stretched his legs out in front of him. He looked up when he heard her enter the room.
She wore her black, silk kimono style robe, her hair was damp and combed into it’s usual, neat bob and all trace of make-up had been removed. She crawled over him on the bed, straddling his legs and wrapping her arms loosely around his neck.

“Hello Jack,” she said. “Just so you know, I’m quite glad you’re here and don’t really prefer Archie.”

He smiled, looping his arms around her waist, pulling her in for a kiss. Their kisses became more intense. The proximity of her core at his lap had his body responding quickly. The way she moved over him, sliding slowly back and forth only served to increase his arousal.

Phryne was enjoying the rough feel of him through his trousers but wanted more and moved to unbutton his fly, hoping to rid him of his clothes as quickly as possible. He had no objection and when she raised her hips, he lifted himself off the mattress to push his trousers down, along with his smalls. With her help they were completely removed in moments.

Once his shirt had been dealt with, he grabbed the tie around her waist and pulled it loose, pushing the robe savagely off her shoulders and attacking her neck with his mouth. She arched into him, pressing her chest to his and rocking against him, increasing the delicious friction until she felt her body climbing.

He needed to feel her, hold her as close as possible. He wrapped his arms beneath her and lifted her so he could bring his legs beneath her in a crossed position, cradling her in his lap. She wrapped her legs around him. She was pressed up to him, her mouth on his, hot and possessive. The robe had fallen from her shoulders and the cool, smooth silk lay against his thighs.

She rose up over him and took him in. Lowering her body slowly until he was completely sheathed in her warmth. She began to rock, never taking her eyes from his. He held the contact and brought his hand between her thighs, hooking a finger inside her, slowly caressing the spot that brought her such pleasure. He watched her head fall back as her rocking increased in speed.

When he knew she was close, he moved swiftly, lifting her off him and pushing her down on her back, her head at the foot of the bed. He brought himself over her, grasped her behind one knee and bent her leg to her chest before driving himself back inside. She was so warm and tight and he began to move slowly. Agonizingly slowly, pulling nearly all the way out and then pushing back in deeper with each thrust, until she couldn’t take it anymore. She moaned loudly and pulled him tight to her as waves of ecstasy swept over her.

He groaned and thrust hard, feeling himself nearing release. She shuddered and clenched around him, crying out, “Jack!”

His name from her lips sent him over the edge and he came hard, pouring himself into her. Collapsing a moment later and rolling to lay by her side, panting.

“Oh. Yes, Jack,” she said, her voice husky. “I choose you any day of the week. Over Archie Jones. Over all others.”

He groped along the mattress between them until he found her hand, grasping it in his and intertwining their fingers. She had no idea how her words affected him, but he knew they’d been spoken in a state of sated bliss and willed his heart not to soar into the stratosphere.

They lay side by side trying to catch their breath while their sweat soaked bodies cooled. When he began to feel a chill, he tugged her along to the head of the bed, pulled the covers up over them and tucked her in by his side, drifting into a contented slumber.
She looked at his face, its granite features softened in sleep, there was a tightness in her chest. She was going down in flames.

She knew she would never have enough of him. She would be old and grey and still remember his kiss and the way his body fit so perfectly into hers, as though it were a piece she didn’t know had been missing until she’d found it.

She leaned in close to his ear, and though she knew he couldn’t hear her, or maybe because he couldn’t hear her, whispered, “I love you Jack Robinson.” The knot in her chest loosened and she smiled.
It was Jack’s turn to wake up alone. He sat up in the bed. A faint light peeked around the curtains indicating early morning had arrived. Before he’d had much time to wonder where Phryne had got to, she was pushing her way through the bedroom door with her behind, carrying a large breakfast tray.

“Let me help with that,” he said, starting to rise.

“No thank you. I have it under control,” she said, kicking the door closed with a foot.

She came over to the bed and set the tray beside him. There was a pot of tea, two cups with saucers, some toast with jam and a bowl of strawberries.

“What on earth is this?” he asked.

“Breakfast Jack. I’m sure you’ve heard of it,” she said, climbing into bed beside him.

“Did you make it?”

“Don’t look so shocked. I can make toast and boil water. It’s not exactly grand cuisine.”

He still thought it was the best breakfast he’d ever seen. She plucked a strawberry from the bowl and put it in her mouth, her lips closing over the sweet red fruit in a way that had his mouth watering. He leaned over to kiss her, tasting the berry on her tongue.

“Thank you for this. You needn’t have gone to the trouble.”

“No trouble at all. I was hungry. And, it’s in my own best interest to keep you fed. I need you to have your wits about you tonight,” she said, as he poured the tea.

“Well, thank you all the same.”

They settled back to enjoy their tea and toast.

“About tonight,” he began, “What time do you need to be there?”

“Six o’clock”
“Then I will have to leave the station early to make the change into Archie Jones.”

“There’s no need for you to arrive right away. Having you sitting there all night long would be ridiculous. No man is that possessive! I’ll be fine on my own for a few hours.”

He wanted to object, but there was no logical reason. As much as he hated the idea of having her out of his sight in a place like that, she was right.

“Then I’ll stop in around 8:00, let you get settled in first,” he conceded. “Now I’d better get moving.”

He rose to put on last night’s clothing. He’d need to stop home to bathe and change before heading to the station. He would have to wear these same clothes again tonight but the fact that they were now rumpled and a bit soiled would only add to his disguise. She watched him from her spot on the bed, chewing thoughtfully on a piece of toast.

“You know Jack, if you had listened to me, and let Mr. Butler tend to your suit the other day, you wouldn’t have to rush off now.”

“How right you are Miss Fisher. And yet, I do not regret my decision.”

“Don’t wish to appear a ‘kept man’ Inspector?”

“Something like that,” he said smiling. “See you later tonight.”

He approached her, planted a kiss on top of her head and snatched some toast off the plate before leaving.

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Phryne sat at her dressing table while Dot rolled her hair in rags for the waves that would help transform her into Franny Collins. She was a little pleased that Miss Phryne had chosen to use her married name as part of her undercover alias. It helped her feel part of the investigation.

She’d initially helped in trying to discover the boy’s identity, but once the undercover angle was decided on, her role had diminished. Miss Fisher could no longer risk being seen in the neighborhoods near the bar and she did not want Dot to travel in those areas on her own. Helping with the Franny alias was currently the best place for Dot to focus her talents.

“Are you nervous Miss?” she asked.

She herself had gone undercover once before, in a factory, but she couldn’t imagine working in a place like the one Miss Phryne was going into tonight.

“Not really Dot,” Phryne replied. “I spent my childhood dragging Father out of rougher places. I’m sure I’ll be fine. I’ll have this” she showed her the dagger she alway kept in her garter. “And Jack will be there.”

Dot took notice when Miss Fisher used the Inspector’s Christian name. This was happening more and more often of late. And while it wasn’t unusual for her to call him Jack when speaking to him, she usually referred to him as Inspector Robinson when speaking about him.
Since her marriage, Dot no longer resided at Miss Fisher’s residence and did not know if there had been any recent overnight guests, but lately Miss Phryne had been in the kind of elevated spirits that usually followed such visits.

Hugh had mentioned that Inspector Robinson had been in an unusually good mood and recently Hugh had been able to leave work earlier than was usual too. Actually leaving at the end of a shift instead of working back. All of this taken together had Dot thinking.

‘Archie’ walked through the door around 8:20 pm. He took a seat at the end of the bar where he had a good view of most of the room and the door. ‘Franny’ was carrying a tray laden with empty glasses. She picked up a few more on her way back to the bar. Spotting Jack, she gave him a wink and a smile.

He watched Phryne work. She moved casually through the room and looked comfortable in the rough surroundings. He couldn’t help thinking that this could easily have been her life. If her father hadn’t inherited his title, giving her a secure future, it wasn’t hard to imagine she might have ended up in a place like this.

Would their paths have crossed then? If they had, he thought he still would have been able to see her fire, courage and independent spirit; her lust for life and the deep compassion of her soul. Surely her beauty would still have been in evidence. He would have loved her still. He was sure of it.

Just then a customer she was serving got a little too forward, grabbing her around the waist and trying to draw her into his lap. Jack rose to his feet, but before he had moved, she’d managed to extricate herself, while continuing to charm the drunkard. Jack sat slowly back down and watched as she teased the man into laughter before sashaying away.

The barman saw Jack watching and came over, wiping an empty glass with a filthy towel. It put Jack off his beer.

“She’s a feisty one,” he said to Jack. “She can take care of herself, that one.”

Jack grunted in acknowledgment.

“Didn’t I see you in here with her last night?” the barman asked. “She your girl?”

“What if she is?” Jack replied gruffly.

“Hey, no worries,” the man raised his hands in supplication. “If she were my sheila, I’d keep a right eye out too.”

Jack gave him a half smile and small nod, just this side of friendly. He was suppose to be her hulking, possessive boyfriend, but didn’t want to appear too rude. He might need information from the man at some point.

Shortly after 10:00 the same young boy they’d seen the night before entered. He approached a man sitting alone and sat opposite. Phryne moved nearby under the guise of wiping down a table. No words were exchanged but she watched the older man slide an envelope across to the boy.
The boy glanced inside, nodded approvingly and headed straight for the door.

Once he’d left, Jack gave a small head tilt to another man seated several stools away. That man got up immediately, dropped some coins on the bar and followed the boy outside. Phryne looked to Jack. He could tell by her expression that she hadn’t noticed his constable sitting there and was irritated that he had not filled her in. He was a little pleased at being able to put one over on her, but that hadn’t been his intent. He’d decided during the day to have the extra man there in order to follow should the boy show up again. He just hadn’t had the chance to convey his plan to Phryne.

Phryne approached the bar, standing near Jack she called to the barman. While she was close, Jack put a hand territorially on her backside. She gave him a smile and draped an arm over his shoulder.

“Hey Coop,” she said to the barman. “D’ya meet my fella, Archie?”

“Yeh Franny. Seems a real nice bloke.”

Jack glared darkly, looking not so very nice after all.

So, what’s the story with that kid there,” Phryne said quietly, leaning in toward the barman, giving him a good view inside her plunging neckline. Coop looked her over with lust.

“What’s the interest?” he asked suspiciously.

“Well, it’s just Arch and me, we heard there might be some new action in town.”

The barman looked at ‘Archie’. Jack had kept his head down, appearing disinterested in the conversation, now he looked up.

“Go on back to work Fran,” He said, slapping her on the behind. She shuffled off obediently.

“Ya let yer skirt handle yer business?” Cooper asked.

“She don’t know as much as she thinks she does,” Jack answered snarling. “Just enough to keep her happy and quiet.”

“Sure,” Cooper made a lewd gesture. “Makes ‘em more cooperative in the bedroom too, don’t it?”

Jack smiled while trying to swallow the bile rising in his throat. He was liking this man less and less.

The rest of the night proved fruitless and when the place began to empty out Coop told Phryne she could go.

Jack saw her home and declined her invitation to come in. That didn’t stop them from a bit of pashing before he walked her to the door.

‘Archie’ didn’t mind kissing ‘Franny’ tonight. Their rough personas made the brief tumble in the car highly stimulating.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

The investigation leads Phryne and Jack into danger.

In the morning Jack conferred with his constable. He had followed the young man to a derelict building not far from the bar. As Jack’s instructions had been to observe only, his officer had not entered the building or apprehended the boy. Jack decided to take Collins along and go to the building tonight to have a look around.

He called Phryne and told her that with this new lead they could drop the undercover routine and she wouldn’t need to return to the bar tonight. She objected, saying if she didn’t show up to work it would bring suspicion and she should continue until they’d caught whoever was behind all this. After going round with her a few minutes Jack gave in.

He didn’t like it, but knew he couldn’t stop her. He told her to stay put at the bar and out of harm’s way.

There was a bit more activity tonight than the previous two. More than once Phryne saw the boy come into the bar to collect an envelope or pass something the other way, handing a small package over rather than receiving something. She noticed that Cooper was very interested in these transactions. He was always watching out of the corner of his eye while pretending not to notice.

She suspected there might be more to this than just a gambling operation. Around eleven Cooper said something to his runner and slipped out the rear door. Phryne waited a beat, then pretending to head back to the toilets, followed him.

Phryne tracked Cooper to a seedy building a few blocks from the bar. Once inside she edged her way down the corridor toward a room from which a faint light emanated. She stopped just outside. She could hear voices further down the hall, but the room appeared unoccupied. She slipped inside and shut the door quietly behind her.

The room was large and dark. The only light coming from a shaded lamp on the desk. She moved quietly around to see a locked cash box and papers laying on the desktop. Another door stood open at the back but she didn’t have time to worry about that. There was a glass of whiskey and a cigar burning in an ashtray. Someone had been here very recently and could be back any moment. She’d need to work fast.

The papers were covered in dates and figures but there was nothing to indicate what they represented. She picked up a sheet. A fine white powder slid from the page and fell onto the desktop. She dabbed her pinky in it and touched it to her tongue.

Suddenly an arm went around her waist, she was pulled upright against a large mass and felt a
cold, steel blade at her throat.

“What do we have here?” a voice she recognized growled in her ear. He must have come in from the back without her hearing.

The door flew open and Jack, his gun drawn, stepped into his worst recurring nightmare. Phryne in the grip of a desperate man, a knife to her throat. He shouldn't have been so surprised to see her here.

"So, not “Archie”, I guess. And who’s she really?” Cooper said, nodding toward Phryne. “Never mind. Whoever she is, you’re gonna wanna put that gun down mate, unless you want to see her cut.

Cooper removed the knife from Phryne’s throat to draw it lightly over her cheek.

Jack raised his hands and brought the barrel of his gun up to show he didn’t intend to shoot. He moved slowly, trying to buy time. He looked in Phryne’s eyes. Damn her! She didn’t even look frightened. She looked excited and he saw her hand move slightly as she began rucking her dress up one thigh. He just had to keep the man distracted until she could get to the sharp, stiletto blade he knew she had in her garter.

It was a good plan, until he heard the click and felt the muzzle of a gun at the back of his head. Phryne’s face went ashen and a look of abject terror filled her eyes. Jack's heart shattered.

“Oh, now she’s shakin’, this little one,” Cooper laughed. “Guess one thing wasn’t a lie. Seems she’s pretty fond of you Archie. No matter, I’ll see that she forgets.”

The thug behind Jack let out a filthy snort. Jack moved in an instant. Bringing his heel down on his captor’s foot, feeling the bones break. He turned and forced the man’s hands up, pushing the gun in the air as it fired, the bullet lodging harmlessly in the ceiling while he brought his knee up hard into the man’s groin.

Phryne used the distraction to wrest herself from Cooper’s grip, grabbing the cash box from the desk and smashing it into his temple.

Having heard the gunshot, Hugh Collins rushed to the scene. He got there in time to see the Inspector cuffing a man who was bent over in pain. Hugh moved to secure the other, larger man crumpled on the floor by Miss Fisher.

Once the men had been hustled outside, Jack turned on Phryne.

“What the hell were you thinking! I told you to stay put!” He shouted.

“Don’t you shout at me Jack Robinson! If I hadn’t been there you’d have had your head shot off!” she yelled back.

“If you hadn’t been there, Collins and I could have had this whole thing wrapped up without anyone being hurt.”

He was livid, gesticulating wildly. He knew his anger was a release of the horrible tension he’d felt at seeing her in danger, but he couldn’t control it.

“No one was hurt Jack!” she said. “I’m fine, you’re fine, everyone’s fine! Apart from that unfortunate man’s foot.”

“Don’t try to make light of this Phryne,” he said. “I won’t allow it.”
She looked like she’d been slapped. He knew he shouldn’t have said it, but she was wrong about no one being hurt. *He’d* been hurt. He couldn’t get the image of her face, white with fear, out of his mind.

“You won’t allow it?” she said coldly. “I don’t remember asking your permission Jack. I’ll find my own way home. Goodnight Inspector.”

She turned and began walking away from him. She had to move fast. She was shivering slightly and thought she might cry. The sight of that gun at Jack’s head, knowing she could lose him in an instant, had shaken her to the core.

“Phryne!” he called, starting after her.

“Sir!” Collins was coming up behind him. “Sir, we need to get these men back to the station. Are you coming?”

“Uh-” Jack was torn. He looked around and grabbed the nearest constable.

“You!” he ordered. “See that Miss Fisher gets home safely.”

The man stood gaping at him.

“Go!” Jack shouted. Pushing him in the direction Phryne had stalked off.

An hour later Jack stood at the front desk inside City South. The two men, their wounds tended to, had been booked and taken down to the cells. It appeared that Cooper had been running a gambling and drug operation out of the bar. Jack was sure he was also responsible for the death of young Peter. He decided it all could wait until morning. He was exhausted.

“Go home Collins,” he said to Hugh. “It’s late and I’m sure your wife is worried. Good work tonight.”

He slapped Hugh on the back and walked into his office, sitting heavily down in his chair. He longed to go home too. Not to his own home, but another. One where she would be waiting in the parlour for him with a drink and a smile. He sat with his elbows on his desk, head in his hands, feeling defeated.

This was ridiculous. He had to see her. He stood up from his desk to find her standing in the doorway. She was still dressed as Franny but her face was clean. She moved into the room and quietly shut the door behind her.

She’d barely had time to turn around before finding herself caught up in his embrace. His arms circling her waist and pulling her tight to him as he buried his head in her hair. She wrapped her arms around his neck, burrowing into his chest, wanting to feel him and breathe him in. Jack heard her quietly say the words he’d been thinking all night.

“I can’t lose you.”

He pulled back and looked in her eyes to see them rimmed with tears. And then she was all over
him. Her mouth on his, hot and desperate, her hands moving over him, never lighting anywhere as though trying to touch everywhere at once.

He placed his hands on the wall above her and moved to pin her against it with his body. His tongue pushed into her mouth, their lips smashing roughly together. He ground against her, feeding their desperation. She gripped his behind, pulling him hard to her.

Her hands slid around his hips and found their mark at the front of his trousers, where her fingers began working the buttons there. He gathered her dress up over her hips, and lifted her from the ground. Having undone his fly, she pulled him free and wrapped her legs around his hips. Moving aside her silks, she guided him between her thighs. He pushed in hard, holding her from the ground with the force of his thrust, the wall solid at her back.

He moved inside her, vainly trying to bring her closer, get in deeper. It was not enough and too much all at the same time. She cried out for him and he knew he wouldn’t last long. The emotions of the night, his need for her, too powerful and he let go, spilling himself inside her and feeling her shake against him. He leaned his forehead to hers, breathing heavily.

“I’m sorry Phryne,” he said. “So sorry. I was just...terrified.”

“I know darling, me too,” she sighed, untangling herself from him and letting him set her gently down on her feet. He pulled her into his chest again and held her while they stilled.

“Take me home Jack,” she said.

Once they’d pulled themselves together; he adjusting his trousers, her straightening her dress and smoothing back her hair, he took her hand and they walked from the station to her car.

“You drive,” she said. Tossing him her keys. “I’m still a bit shaky.”

He pulled her to him for a kiss before handing her into the passenger side of her Hispano. As he started the car, she placed a hand on his.

“Can we go to yours tonight?” she asked. “I think we need the privacy.”

He nodded and turned the car toward his house. She slid along the seat to his side and rested her head on his shoulder.

They walked quietly into his home. He poured them each a drink, sat in his armchair and pulled her down onto his lap. She curled into him and they sat together in silence for several minutes.

“You know we’re going to have to talk about this,” she finally began.

“Yes,” he said. He didn’t really want to. He felt so content with her warm and soft in his arms.

“So,” she bounced upright in his lap. “Let me start by saying that I’m sorry that I worried you, but you know I will never sit idly by while you walk into danger.”

“I do know,” he acknowledged. “But that comes with my job, and I won’t quit trying to stop you following me in.”

She nodded. She was going to say something about her job as a detective requiring the occasional foray into danger, but thought better of it and went a different way. Bringing up what was truly on her mind.

“Of course, after tonight-” she hesitated. “I think I have a better understanding of how you feel
when you find me in a precarious position.”

A ‘precarious position’. He wanted to point out that her position had been far worse than precarious, but didn’t. He knew she was trying to tell him that she’d feared for him, as he had her, and that really was the larger point.

He looked at her beautiful face, placing his hand on her cheek. She leaned into his touch.

“How do we move forward Jack?” she asked.

He thought for a moment. Tilting his head to one side before leaning in to kiss her gently on the lips.

“We just do Phryne,” he said. “We move forward. As we have from the day we met. And we will find ourselves in tough situations, and we will help each other through. Then when we arrive safely on the other side, we will roar at each other out of utter frustration and relief.”

“After which,” he continued, tightening his grip around her waist, his voice dropping. “I will get you alone somewhere and tear the clothes from your body and throw myself into you until we’re both convinced that we are whole and alive and well.”

She was slightly breathless after that last bit and took a moment to compose herself. Smiling, she cocked an eyebrow at him, and said;

“I think I can cope with that.”
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The detectives enjoy a picnic on a rare day off.

“Give them to me Phryne”

“Not until you agree to act sensibly and come down to breakfast.”

“I can’t.”

“Why not Jack? It’s Saturday, you’re off work and our case is closed.”

They were in her bedroom and she was holding his trousers hostage behind her back. The argument was one they’d had many times in recent weeks.

“You’re being absolutely ridiculous,” she said. “No one is fooled. Everyone knows! In fact have known for months. Besides the only one here is Mr. Butler and he is the soul of discretion.”

He was running out of arguments.

“Perhaps I am being too old fashioned,” he said. “God knows I’m here often enough and have no desire to leave just yet.”

His voice had dropped to a low, sultry tone that made her tingle and his eyes had taken on a smolder that never failed to hypnotize. He moved slowly toward her. She smiled.

“I knew you’d see reason.”

He closed the distance between them, snaked an arm around her waist and snatched the trousers from her grasp, stepping back quickly and raising them in triumph.

“Hah!” he cried.

“Damn you!” She sat down on the bed in a huff.

He looked at her on the bed, shoulders slumped in defeat. She looked irresistible. Instead of putting them on, he dropped the trousers over the arm of a chair and began to remove the rest of his clothing.

She stood, looking like a child at Christmas.

“You’ll stay?”

“As it turns out, I find I have an appetite,” he said, drawing her in and nuzzling her neck while untying the sash around her waist. His hands found their way inside her dressing gown as his lips sought hers. Very shortly Phryne found herself on her back in bed, moaning loudly. His mouth was on her and she was delirious.

“What did I do to deserve you,” she sighed, as divine sensations washed over her.
Jack thought he was the luckiest man in the world and that no breakfast could ever taste so good.

Mr. Butler poured the tea and backed silently out of the dining room. Inspector Robinson was taking great pleasure in the large breakfast set before him, and Miss Fisher watched him eat with equal enjoyment. He made it back to the kitchen just as Dorothy Collins came through the back door.

“Good morning Dorothy. I wasn’t expecting you today. Doesn’t Hugh have the day off?”

“Good morning. Yes he does,” Dot replied. “I’m only stopping in to return a dress I’ve mended.”

“Do you have time to stay to tea?”

“Thank you, that would be lovely.”

She sat down in her usual chair. Dot missed having tea with Mr. Butler in the mornings. She gave him a puzzled look when she heard laughter coming from the dining room.

“Miss is up early today,” she said, smiling. “And she has company for breakfast?”

“Yes, Dorothy. It seems Inspector Robinson has finally been persuaded to end the charade of escaping out the door at the crack of dawn.”

“Good. While I understood his reluctance, even I thought it was becoming absurd,” Dot laughed.

Being a married woman had brought a new understanding for Dot as to the pleasures of sharing one’s bed with a man you loved. She even conceded that the pleasure alone could have some merit, but that was not for her. She loved Hugh deeply and he was the only man she would ever want.

Miss Phryne had been very happy lately and it warmed Dot’s heart. If anyone deserved love and happiness it was Miss Fisher. And Dot was convinced it was love. Having succumbed to it herself, she recognized the symptoms in another.

No other man had ever spent more than a few nights with Miss Phryne and recently she'd been turning down other invitations so that she could stay home and entertain the Inspector. They would sit in her parlour playing draughts, talking and laughing. He was often present at dinner. In fact, other than going out with Dr. Mac on a fairly regular basis, Miss Fisher had been thoroughly neglecting her social obligations.

There was one obligation she would not be able to ignore. An invitation had arrived yesterday from Prudence Stanley and Miss Fisher could not put off her aunt without causing offense.

After breakfast Phryne walked Jack to the door. She pulled it open.

“Look at that Jack! You’re still here and the sky hasn’t fallen!” she teased.

“Don’t be a poor winner Miss Fisher, you’ve had your way,” he replied.

“As have you, Inspector. Don’t think I’ve forgotten, or am likely to,” she said, looking up at him from hooded eyes burning with lust. It had been a spectacular morning, first in bed and then later at breakfast.
Jack resisted the temptation to throw her over his shoulder and head back upstairs. How was it possible to want someone this much? She was like a drug. He resigned himself to be satisfied with a kiss and one last embrace, pressing her hard to him before leaving. After all, he’d see her again in a couple of hours. They had plans to go for a drive and have a picnic. He only need go home to shave and shower and then he’d be back to collect her.

Dot found Miss Fisher standing in the foyer staring dreamily at the closed door.

“Miss? she said. “Has the Inspector gone?”

“Yes, Dot. Good morning! What are you doing here?”

“I stopped to return your dress,” she said. “I’ll just take it upstairs for you.”

“Don’t bother, I can take it up. You go on home, I’m sure you have plans with Hugh.”

“Speaking of plans miss, have you asked him?”

“Not yet Dot. I only just persuaded him to stay to breakfast. One hurdle at a time. We must not overwhelm our poor Inspector,” she said.

“You will have to reply to Mrs. Stanley soon.”

“I know. I’ll bring it up today. Jack and I are going for a picnic,” she said, happily.

Phryne sat on the blanket, leaning against a large tree, her legs outstretched and crossed at the ankle. Jack was on his back, his head resting in her lap. His eyes were closed and she played absentmindedly with his hair. They’d just finished the delicious lunch Mr. Butler had provided for them.

The drive had been lovely. They’d headed out in her Hispano-Suiza toward Riddells Creek, deciding on a whim where to stop. They’d walked along, enjoying the peace and quiet until finding the perfect picnic spot. The day was beautiful and cool and the company excellent. It wasn’t often they could be completely alone for this length of time. A full day together was a luxury.

“Penny for your thoughts Inspector.”

“My thoughts?” he said. “Hmmm. I have a couple of things on my mind right now. The first being worry that if I eat much more of Mr. Butler’s fine cooking, I soon may not fit into my trousers.”

“I can think of activities to help with that,” she said. “What else?”

He opened his eyes looking up at her. “That I am happy.”

“How interesting,” she said. “So am I.”

He sat up. “Are you really Phryne?”

“Do you need to ask Jack? I would have thought it obvious to such a skilled detective.”

“I’m not always my sharpest when I’m with you. You have a way of keeping me on my toes.”

“I do try to keep you intrigued.”
“And you’ve been most successful Miss Fisher.”

He pulled her to him for a lengthy, passionate kiss. The spot they’d found was very secluded and they indulged themselves for a bit, Jack taking liberties he would have thought impossible a few months earlier. There were limits to how far he would go out of doors and he pulled away from her before he was unable to turn back. She opened her eyes slowly and smiled at him.

“I love you Jack,” she said, “You know that, don’t you?”

She felt such relief at saying it aloud. The expression on his face, the exhilaration in his eyes, matched her own. She wondered why she’d waited so long to tell him.

“And I love you Phryne,” he said, his voice nearly failing him. “So very much.”

She already knew, of course. He’d told her before, though perhaps not in so forthright a manner. He took her hand in his, intertwining their fingers.

“Imagine that,” he said, smiling from ear to ear. “And still, the sky does not fall.”

She pulled him to her.

The air grew cooler. They repacked the hamper and began the trek back to her car, hand in hand.

“Since today seems to be a day for firsts, I have a proposition for you,” she said.

Alarm bells went off in his head. He knew what was coming next would give him grief.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Jack suffers through an evening at Prudence Stanley’s estate.

Chapter Notes

This is a long chapter with a little bit of smut at the end.

Jack checked the mirror one last time, straightening his bow tie. He still couldn’t believe he’d agreed to this. He’d been overcome by her declaration of love, and the tumble in the grass that followed. When she’d sprung it on him, he really hadn’t stood a chance.

He knew her aunt disapproved of him, but dressed in his formal attire at least she couldn’t say he didn’t look the part.

The look on Miss Fisher’s face when he came to her door told him she approved. She, herself, was a vision.

Phryne had dressed carefully, wanting to reward Jack for agreeing to the dinner at Aunt Prudence’s home. She knew he’d rather do almost anything else.

She wore a new gown of pale blue silk charmeuse. He liked her in blue, saying it set off her eyes. The gown was of the latest fashion. The neckline fairly modest, swooping across her upper chest, well within the bounds of decency. The remainder of the dress slipped smoothly down her body, skimming her hips before falling like a sheet of water to pool at her feet. She turned around. The image of propriety had been deceiving.

The dress at the back was completely open to the waist with two ribbon width straps coming together in a V at the waistband and held to the dress only by a gem encrusted brooch. An expanse of porcelain skin was exposed. The dress was fitted to show off her backside to it’s best advantage and a modest train flowed behind her. Sparkling chandelier earrings adorned her lobes. Her final touch had been to pin a small, blue swallow shaped brooch to the front of the dress where strap met the bodice.

If the mere sight of her didn’t make up for his discomfort at the evening, removing that fabulous gown from her later definitely would.

“You look-” He was lost for words. “I can’t do it justice. You are beyond lovely Phryne.”

“Thank you, Jack. And you look very handsome,” she said, leaning forward to accept the kiss he pressed to her cheek.

“Are you ready for this?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be. Shall we, Miss Fisher?” He helped her into her wrap and offered his
When they reached the car he went to open the door for her. She grabbed his hand and placed it at her waist, keeping hers on top.

“Jack, as you may have noticed, this dress leaves little opportunity for lingerie. The back is quite revealing, allowing for no straps or buckles and I found any type of pant destroyed the lines of the dress completely.”

She slid his hand down her waist, over her hip. “So, you can see, or more accurately feel, that I’ve had to go without tonight.”

His hand confirmed her words. She wore absolutely nothing beneath the dress. He swallowed hard.

“I just thought I’d share that information with you. To give you something to look forward to during the trying evening I’m afraid lies ahead.”

Jack had a hard time thinking of anything else the entire ride.

They pulled up outside Prudence Stanley’s impressive home. Jack straightened his tie, took a deep breath and went around to hand Phryne out of the car and lead her to the door.

“Phryne!” Prudence Stanley huffed, approaching to greet her niece. “There you are!”

“Good Evening, Aunt Prudence, I’m sure we’re not late. You remember Jack?” Phryne said.

“Of course. Good Evening Inspector. So good of you to come,” she said, pursing her lips sourly and looking him up and down. Obviously less than pleased.

“Good Evening Mrs. Stanley, it was kind of you to invite me,” Jack replied.

“Well, come in,” she said leading them into the next room where the other guests were gathering. “Let me introduce you.”

Phryne took Jack’s arm, holding him tight around the bicep.

The cocktail period before dinner was tolerable. Aunt P kept hauling Phryne away to introduce her to one aristocratic looking man after another. Phryne would either drag Jack along or return to his side as quickly as she could disentangle herself. Finally, when they had a moment alone he told her these efforts were unnecessary.

“Phryne, I appreciate what you are doing, but I’m a grown man. I can take care of myself. You don’t need to hold my hand all night long.”

“I just want to make sure you’re having a good time”

“I’m afraid even you cannot accomplish that,” he teased.

The staid, formality of the evening was interrupted by the arrival of Phryne’s cousin, Guy and his wife Isabella. They blew into the room in their usual fashionably late, scene stealing style. Jack had met them both during an investigation into the death of a member of Mrs. Stanley’s household staff. If he had thought Phryne unconventional when they met, she couldn’t hold a candle to
Prudence Stanley’s oldest son, Guy. Isabella, his young bride, seemed to relish shocking polite society and drawing attention. When she saw Jack and Phryne, she shrieked loudly and rushed to their side.

“Phryne darling!” she cried. “You look amazing! I must know where you found that fabulous gown?” Without awaiting an answer, she turned her attention to Jack. “And this beautiful specimen, wherever did you find him? You always have such excellent taste,” she said eyeing him appreciatively.

“Hello Isabella. You remember Detective Inspector Robinson,” Phryne said, tightening her grip on Jack’s arm.

“Of course we remember him.” Guy had caught up with his wife. “Nice to see you again Jack,” he said extending his hand. “I’m glad it is under happier circumstances than the last time we met.”

“I’m not sure I’d call one of your mother’s gatherings a ‘happy’ circumstance darling,” Isabella groused, “But one must make concessions for family.”

Soon enough they were called into dinner and Jack found himself seated far from Phryne but with a clear view of her. If he’d had any doubt of Prudence Stanley’s opinion of his relationship with her niece, they were now settled.

Phryne was sat between two very eligible, gentlemen. The man to her left was as old as the hills, incredibly wealthy and incredibly boring. The man to her right was a different kettle of fish. He was the son of a dear friend of Mrs. Stanley’s late husband. Young, charming and very good looking, he definitely had Phryne’s ear, leaning in to whisper things that made her laugh.

Jack’s dining companions were a dour, matronly woman that droned on about her pet cats and a blustering older gentleman, who had made his money in steel during the war. They were both polite, if dull, but it was the look he got when explaining his line of work that annoyed him. It had been the same all evening whenever it had come up. He would receive a polite smile and a sympathetic nod, as though he were someone to be pitied.

His only relief would come when he’d catch Phryne looking his way or once, when she appeared to be enthralled by the young man seated next to her, but she played absentmindedly with the swallow brooch pinned to her dress.

Even so, he found himself in a disgruntled mood by the end of the night that was only made worse as they were departing. He had gone to fetch Phryne’s wrap, returning to overhear a bit of conversation between her and her young dining companion.

“Thank you, but no,” Phryne said. “I must tell you that I am unavailable in that capacity. I’m sure you met my partner, Jack Robinson?”

“Oh?” the young man said. “Mrs. Stanley led me to believe that in your work as a lady detective you had a business relationship with the police officer.”

“Senior Detective Inspector,” she corrected. “And yes, we do often work together, but that is not where our partnership ends.”

“I see,” the man said, sounding dubious. “I’m sorry if I’ve offended.”

“Not at all,” she trilled. “It was an honest mistake. I was delighted to make your acquaintance.”

Jack felt it was time to make his presence known and stepped to Phryne, placing the wrap around her shoulders. He let his hands linger in case her words had not convinced the young man of her
unavailability. The young man sized Jack up in a way that said he didn’t view him as much of an impediment.

Like everyone else in the room, Jack knew he thought Phryne would soon tire of this new novelty, stepping out with a lowly member of the Victorian constabulary. She was, after all, known to be prone to wild flights of fancy. She would return to the fold where she belonged soon enough.

Jack should have been pleased by the way she had rebuffed the man’s advances. He was, but it galled him to know that because she would never wear his ring, men would always make the assumption she was available. That, and the knowledge that her aunt actively sought to undermine them, along with the humiliation of the entire evening proved hard to shake. His black mood increased.

“You’re very quiet,” Phryne said as they drove toward her home. “You didn’t have a good time?”

“It was fine,” he said.

“Then what is wrong.”

“Nothing’s wrong. I’m just tired and need to concentrate on the road.”

She sat back and remained silent the remainder of the trip. He walked her to the door, but when she opened it, he remained on the doorstep. She turned back.

“Aren’t you coming in?”

“I think I’ll head to my home tonight if that’s alright. I’m rather tired”

“So you said earlier. And no, it is not alright. You will come inside and tell me what’s bothering you.”

He sighed, following her in the door and through to her parlour. She poured them drinks.

“I know that wasn’t a fun evening for you Jack, but it wasn’t really that awful was it?”

“You seemed to enjoy it.” he said, bitterly.

“Is that it? Because I talked with other men?”

“Not other men. One other man. One that seemed to captivate you and be captivated by you.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“So you deny that you flirted with and encouraged the young man?”

He didn’t know why he kept on with this. He wasn’t angry with her. He was upset at having seen tonight just how absurd people thought it was for her to be with him.

“I categorically deny it! You are being patently unfair.” Now it was her turn to be upset.

“I asked you to come tonight because I wanted you there. I want you with me most places these days, but I will speak with whomever I like and will not be chastised for it.”

“I’m sorry. Of course you’re right. But didn’t you see them Phryne? They think me so beneath you! And your Aunt, actively championing other men and dismissing me altogether. How was I suppose to feel!”
“As for Aunt P. Do you think she thought Isabella suitable for her precious Guy? She never gets her way, she’s used to it. Why do you care what any of them think anyway?”

“They’re your family, your peers.”

“Is that why you were so deferential toward them? Because they’re my family?”

“What do you mean?”

She came over to stand before him.

“I’ve watched you command a room full of people without ever raising your voice. You demand respect from ruffians and wealthy, powerful men alike. You have such a quiet confidence about you Jack! It often leaves me in awe. And yet, get you in a crowd of vapid, ridiculous socialites and I don’t know what comes over you!

Aunt P can throw one hundred men at me such as that vain boy tonight. I don’t care what she or any of them think. They are of no consequence Jack. Not to me. And they shouldn’t be to you either.”

He didn’t say anything in reply, just looked at her with a far away expression. He reached out and gently touched the blue swallow brooch. He remembered pinning it on her. The first real gift he’d given her. She’d been wearing it, pinned to her scarf, the day she flew off to England.

“Did you wear this for me?” he asked, quietly.

“I wore it because it makes me happy. That’s why I wear most things. Now, this dress,” she replied, her voices changing in tone. “That’s another story. This dress, and everything under it, is entirely for you.”

She took his hand and headed upstairs.

She stood before her dressing table removing her jewelry. No matter how many times he’d seen this, it still enthralled him. He went to stand behind her, wrapped his arms around her waist and pressed against her. His eyes watching in the mirror as her graceful hands lighted on her earlobes and then unpinned the brooch from her chest, laying it carefully in her jewel box.

He knew he was a very fortunate man. Other man could gaze upon her, talk and flirt. Only he was welcome in her home and in her bed. Only he was allowed to touch her like this. He moved his hand down her smooth, flat stomach reaching for her core. She stopped him, turning to face him.

“Not so fast, Jack,” she said. “I want to unwrap my present and I intend to take my time.”

She pulled his bowtie loose, undoing the knot, letting the slip of silk drop before moving on to his collar and waistcoat. He stood silently, letting her hands work over him. When she pushed his pants down and sunk to the floor, he placed a warning hand on her shoulder.

“No, Phryne. Don’t.”

“Yes, Jack,” she replied, taking hold of him and stroking, first with her hands, then her tongue and lips. He looked down at her, on her knees before him, still in her beautiful ball gown. He was lost.
When he was nearly gone she stood, reached behind her to unclasp the fastener of her dress. He watched as it cascaded to the ground, unveiling the wonderland that was her body.


He lifted her and set her gently on the bed, climbing on top of her and pushing himself inside, her anguished cry ripping through him. The rest of the world fell away. There was the two of them only, joined as one, and it was so simple. So perfect.
Phryne awoke to what was becoming a familiar sensation. Jack’s warm form up against her back, his arm draped over her. He shifted and she became aware of a particular part of his anatomy pressing insistently into her lower back.

“Good lord, Jack,” she said. “You are insatiable.”

“I know,” he sighed, chuckling, and gripping her tighter. “It’s become ridiculous, hasn’t it. Don’t feel obliged to accommodate me in any way.”

“Accommodate you?” she said laughing. She turned to face him. “Do you not know me Jack Robinson? I accommodate no one, do nothing against my own will.”

She pushed him back against the mattress and slid on top of him, kissing his neck and up his jawline, until she found his mouth. Her hands moved over his firm, muscled body. He groaned and rocked against her, letting his own hands roam freely. She sat up straddling him, moving over him to increase her desire, as he caressed her gently.

“You are in my home and in my bed, because it is where I want you to be. I hope it is where you wish to be as well.”

They rocked together, their breath coming faster, blood rushing through their veins. She rose up over him. She sank down and took him in. He watched as they were joined together, then looked up to find her eyes locked on his. He couldn’t look away. She was his entire world, everything he would ever want, ever need.

They lay wrapped in each other’s arms.

“Is it always like this for you Phryne?” he asked.

“You mean with other men?” She said, matter of factly.

“Yes.”

She was the most incredible woman he’d ever known and his desire for her infinite. He hadn’t imagined it could be like this. He was embarrassed to be asking, but had to know if it was as wonderful for her.

“It is different with you,” she confirmed. “Better.”

She felt him release the breath he’d been holding.

“Why do you suppose that is?” he asked.

“I don’t really know,” she replied honestly. “And truthfully, I don’t care. It is what it is Jack. Something rather incredible, and I don’t question it. I’m satisfied to simply let it be.”
“For as long as it makes you happy,” he stated.

“Well, yes. And you,” she replied, “you must be happy too.” She came up on one elbow to look at him. “This is different for me in more ways than just the bedroom. You must know that?” she said. “I love you Jack. I don’t say that lightly and I would never want to hurt you.” He pulled her in to him.

“I love you too, Phryne. So desperately. And I don’t wish to hurt you either. Forgive my jealous outburst last night.”

“And I’m sorry you were upset by those self-important fools. I should have taken better care of you.”

“You take excellent care of me. I must grow a thicker skin. You are absolutely right, they are of no consequence to us.”

He pressed his mouth on hers. There was a knock at the bedroom door.

“Miss,” called Mr. Butler. “Sorry to disturb, but Constable Collins is on phone, the station has been trying to reach the Inspector.”

“Thank you Mr. Butler,” Jack called. “I’ll be right down.” He rose and hastily pulled on his pants, rushing down to the phone. Mr. Butler was nowhere to be seen, having discreetly vanished.

“What is it Collins?” Jack asked.

“Sir,” replied Collins, "there has been a death and your presence is requested.”

Jack took down the details and told Hugh he’d be on his way as quickly as possible. He headed back up, hurrying past Phryne on the stairs where she'd been listening.

“I’m afraid I have to rush off,” he said. “This may concern you too. I’ll contact you when I know more.

Damn!” he cursed. “It will take me far too long to run home for a proper wardrobe. I can hardly turn up to a crime scene in evening dress!”

“Jack-” she started, but he had already closed himself in the bath. Well that was all very cryptic, she thought.

When he returned to the room she was dangling a brand new men’s suit on a hanger.

“What have you done?” he asked.

“Don’t be angry,” she said. “I was planning to give this to you another time, as a gift, but it seems you need it now.”

“Phryne, I can’t-”

“You most certainly can! I want to give it to you. Let me. Won’t you please?”

He took it from her, looking it over. It was an extremely well-tailored wool suit. Deep blue, light weight and of a quality far superior to anything he owned. As he inspected it, she went to her dresser and removed a new, white dress shirt.

Though he would still need to stop by his house for his everyday shoes, Jack realized this would
definitely save time. Besides, the suit was exceptional, and it was from her. He wanted to keep it. He grabbed her around the waist and kissed her.

“Thank you Phryne. It’s too generous of you.”

She grinned happily.

“It’s also a tiny bit selfish of me,” she said. “I will enjoy seeing it on you. And I want you to keep it here whenever you can, so it will be here when you need it.”

He pulled a face. He’d been very careful not to leave anything of his at her home. She had pointed out the razor she’d set in for him and he’d taken advantage of it, but he hadn’t presumed to move anything else in. Now she was asking him to, and he could see the advantages of doing so. Too many mornings he’d been late to the station after having to make the stop at his home for fresh clothes. Another knock interrupted his thoughts and Mr. Butler’s voice came through the door.

“Miss, once again, sorry to disturb, but Mrs.Stanley is now on the phone for you and I’m afraid she is rather insistent.”

Phryne went to take the call. When she returned to the room, Jack was nearly fully dressed in the new suit. She looked him over. She’d been right about the size. It was cut perfectly for him, even without tailoring. He had a form for clothes. Long and lean with broad shoulders and a trim waist. He cut quite a figure. She’d been planning to give it to him two weeks from now, for the six month anniversary of their romantic relationship, but today seemed a better time.

“Wait,” she said. “One more thing.”

She went to her dresser to retrieve a long, thin box, presenting it to him. He opened it to find a handsome tie. It was mostly of a dark, rich red with shades of blue and a touch of deep purple in a bold pattern, more daring than he normally wore. He could see it would complement the suit perfectly.

“This is beautiful, but too much for day,” he said.

“Nonsense, you should wear whatever you like,” she replied taking it from him and wrapping it around his neck. He raised his chin, letting her put it on him.

“There,” she smiled. “Very dashing. Oh, and I’ve collected your keys and sent Mr. Butler to your home to retrieve your shoes and overcoat. That will give you time to have a bite to eat while I dress. We can head to Aunt Prudence’s together. There is tea and toast waiting in the kitchen.”

When he’d heard it was her Aunt on the phone he knew she’d be accompanying him this morning. He decided to let himself enjoy her ministrations and made no objections.

“You really do take excellent care of me,” he said.
When they rolled up to Prudence Stanley’s home, not twelve hours since they’d last been there, Constable Collins was awaiting them on the front steps, alongside a very anxious looking Aunt P.

She sniffed slightly upon seeing them arrive together, most likely having come from the same place, so early in the morning. Must that girl be so brazen! she thought. But now was not the time to worry about propriety, she was actually quite relieved to have them here. They walked into the house to find Guy milling idly about the foyer.

“Phynekins,” he said. “Can you believe this? It seems each time you enter this home it results in a dead body turning up.”

“I hardly think that fair, Guy. After all, everyone was quite well when I left last night.”

“Be that as it may, they are not well now, and Mother is beside herself,” Guy said, as Isabella entered and came to link her arm through his.

“Good morning,” she sang, as though they were all gathered for a spot of tea.

“If someone could take us to the deceased?” Jack interrupted.

“Wonderful isn’t it,” Isabella said. “How handy to have a beau so helpful in a crisis.”

Her entire manner had a bored, indifference to it. After all, it appeared to her that a tired, dull old man had died in his sleep. She couldn’t imagine what all the fuss was about. Jack shook his head, exasperated.

“This way Inspector,” Collins said, finally getting things moving.

Hugh lead them upstairs into one of the large guest bedrooms. On the bed with the covers drawn up and looking very peaceful, was the steel magnet Jack had sat next to at dinner. Herbert Menson was his name, Jack recalled. If not for the deathly pallor of his skin, he might have been sleeping.

“When Herbert didn’t come down for breakfast this morning, I sent the maid up. Poor girl found him like this,” Aunt Prudence said, wringing her hands. “Quite dead,” she added unnecessarily.

“Was a doctor called?” Phryne asked.

“Well, no,” Aunt P. replied. “He was dead. What would have been the point? I phoned the police.”

“Collins, get on the horn to the coroner,” Jack said. “Before anything else we will need to establish cause of death, this may have been from natural causes.”

“I rather doubt that Jack,” Phryne said.

She had approached the bed and pulled back the covers. A red stain sprawled over the man’s pajama top, opening a few buttons revealed a large wound, most likely cause by an equally large knife.

“Dear God!” cried Aunt P.
They sat in the sun room. Tea had been called for and all the house guests gathered. Present were Guy and Isabella, Mrs. Miller, the cat lady, as Jack thought of her; young Harold Simone, Phryne’s would-be pursuer and of course, Prudence Stanley. These were the only people, along with Menson, that had stayed the night, the rest of the guests having been local. As Mr. Menson was seen alive after all others had departed, Jack didn’t see any need to round up the rest of the guests just yet. He thought preliminary questioning could take place in Mrs. Stanley’s home as a courtesy to her. But if need be, he wouldn’t hesitate to haul any of these people in to the station. The household staff couldn’t be ignored and he sent Collins to begin inquiries to that end.

Phryne watched Jack take command of the situation. This is my Inspector, she thought proudly. This man, who knew his power and channeled it in the quiet, confident manner she’d spoken of last night. No one could doubt his authority. Even the supercilious Harold Simone appeared cowed. He sat nervously on a chair, not knowing where to rest his eyes. He smiled at Phryne, apparently seeking a friendly face. She gave a polite nod in return, but remained at Jack’s side, in her official capacity as his crime solving partner. Mrs. Miller leaned over to Aunt Prudence.

“How glad you must be to have such an acquaintance. I’m sure your niece and her friend will have this sorted in no time.”

Mrs. Miller seemed especially flustered, smoothing her hair and dress repeatedly and eyeing Jack nervously. But then, she’d always seemed a somewhat fussy woman.

As a group, they were all in agreement. The majority of guests had departed and they had each drifted up to their rooms. As best as anyone could recall, Mr. Menson had headed upstairs around 11:15. No one claimed to have seen him after that until the maid found him in the morning.

Dr. Mac had been called to give a preliminary inspection of the body. Her initial assessment was that death had occurred between 8 and 10 hours earlier. As it was now nearly eleven in the morning, the murder would probably have taken place sometime between 1:00 and 3:00 a.m. She also estimated the size of the blade used and all knives of that approximate size were removed from the kitchen for closer examination.

Rooms were searched and the body prepared for transport to autopsy, but cause of death appeared obvious. Once Mr. Menson had been removed from the premises, Jack cautioned all in attendance to remain in the vicinity. Aunt Prudence graciously told them they were welcome to be her guests for as long as needed. Neither Simone nor Mrs. Miller looked too happy at that prospect. Guy and Isabella appeared unconcerned, and she took herself out to the gardens at the earliest opportunity.

Collins had made inquiries of all the staff and taken copious notes. Jack dispatched a few constables to search the grounds. There had been no sign of forced entry, but he wanted to cover all avenues. There was nothing left to be done here today. Aunt Prudence escorted Jack and Phryne to the door.

“Thank you for coming so promptly at my request, Inspector,” she said.

Phryne found it interesting, but not surprising, that Aunt Prudence had been the one to demand the police on the scene call Jack.

“And you Phryne, thank you for coming.”

“Of course Aunt P.” she said, taking the woman’s hands in her own. “You know Jack and I will do all we can to help.”
“It’s just such a dreadful business,” Prudence lamented. “He was so lively last night, such good company.”

Jack could have disputed that, but thought better than to speak ill of the dead.

“And murder! I can’t imagine who would want to harm the man.”

“That is what we intend to find out Mrs. Stanley. I assure you, we will find the person responsible,” Jack said.

“Yes, Inspector. I know you will and I am most appreciative. It is such a relief to have someone to rely on.”

Prudence Stanley gave Jack a grateful smile and grasped his hand. As they neared the car, Phryne linked arms with Jack.

“You see, darling, Aunt Prudence really thinks quite highly of you.”

“I’m sure she thinks me a competent police officer and would rather have someone she knows trampling through her home at a time like this,” he said smiling. “I still doubt I’d be her choice for your companion.”

“Well, it’s a good thing I’m not asking her opinion on that,” Phryne said. "You’re not wrong about one thing. She does seem most glad of my work as a detective when it benefits her. Otherwise, she often dismisses it as a silly whim, accusing me of meddling where I don’t belong. She really is a good egg though, deep down, you know.”

He smiled down on her. How could she be surprised that he’d treat her relatives with deference. They were good people. She obviously loved them and they her. He would never show them anything other than respect.

They sat in his office going over what they knew so far. Menson had been seen alive around eleven, that was confirmed by multiple people. Everyone at the party had turned in by midnight, the last of the household staff, having finished the clean-up, were in bed by one a.m. They had not heard nor seen anything unusual. No one appeared to have a motive to murder Menson. He was a bit of a boor, but no more so than most wealthy businessmen of his age, and everyone seemed to get along well at the party. Neither Jack nor Phryne had noticed any outward signs of animosity. So far there was not much to go on.

“Neither Gertrude Miller nor Harold Simone seemed comfortable with having to stick around,” Phryne said.

“No. I’m sure Mrs. Miller is most anxious to get back to her cats, Topsy and Turvy,” Jack said sarcastically.

“What have you got against cats?” Phryne asked.

“Nothing really, but they were all the woman spoke of at dinner and I thought my head might explode.”

“I promise next time Aunt P has us to dinner, I’ll insist she seat us together.”

Jack cringed inwardly at the thought of a next time. Phryne decided to head back to Aunt P’s now
to pick her brains about her friends while Jack pursued background on the two remaining guests. Phryne took a quick glance around to make sure they were alone and moved to Jack’s side of the desk, leaning down for a kiss.

“Will I see you tonight?” she asked.

“It doesn’t look like it,” he replied. “I’ve been woefully neglecting my duties of late and paperwork has piled up.”

She nodded. They agreed to meet in the morning at the morgue to see what the autopsy revealed. He stood, placing his hands on her hips and kissed her again.

“I’ll miss you,” she said, smoothing the lapel of his new suit. He smiled.

“And I’ll miss you, but you should have a night out with friends, you’ve seen me every night this week.”

“Oddly enough, I’m not tired of you yet, Inspector,” she said smiling. “But perhaps I’ll see what Mac is up to.”

He watched her walk from his office, then sat back down and got to work.
Phryne and Mac sat in the parlour. They’d opted for a quiet night in, as it had been a long day for both of them.

Phryne had spent a tedious few hours back at Aunt P’s trying to learn as much as she could. It had required a fair bit of conversation and even some flirtation with Harold Simone, but she’d learned that there was a connection with the deceased man that went beyond social. Whether it was of significance remained to be seen.

Mrs. Miller too, had a long connection, her husband having partnered with Menson in the steel business during the war. That was hardly surprising. Aunt P had known both of them for as many years. As far as she’d been able to discover, there was no prior connection between Mr. Menson and any member of the household staff.

Phryne was glad to have Mac’s company tonight. She was always great fun, even just to talk to, and no one knew Phryne better.

“Jack looked quite handsome this morning,” Mac said, with feigned innocence. “New suit?”

“Yes,” Phryne said. “I picked it out for him. Wasn’t it divine?”

“Picking out his clothes are you now, darling? You two have made this thing last quite awhile haven’t you?”

“In just under two weeks it will be six months,” Phryne said happily.

“Phryne Fisher! Counting down the days? Are you keeping a diary as well?” Mac teased.

Phryne stuck out her tongue.

“I’m glad you’re happy, Phryne. Really I am.” Mac said raising her glass as if to toast. For all her teasing, Mac was a romantic at heart.

“I am happy, Mac and I really want to make this work, but it can be a challenge. He does tend to get a bit insecure. Sometimes he acts as though I’m doing him a great favor by being with him, when in fact, he’s the best thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“You really are quite mad about him, aren’t you?”
“Yes. He treats me as an equal and challenges me in every way. Intellectually. In the bedroom. Why just the other night-”

“That’s enough, thanks,” Mac cut her off.

“You’re not usually so squeamish about sex, Mac!” Phryne exclaimed.

“True, but remember, I have to look Jack in the eye, usually across a corpse. The image of the two of you in the throes of passion is not one I need,” she said emphatically.

Phryne laughed. Then her face took on a serious expression.

“I love him, Mac,” She said, hugging her knees to her chest.

“I can tell. Does he know that?”

“I’ve told him so, more than once,” Phryne confided. “And I know he believes me, it’s other people that get in the way. Last night, for instance, he was rather upset after the dinner at Aunt P’s.”

Phryne recounted Jack’s anguish the night before. Mac listened quietly.

“You know Phryne, I’ve said it before, Jack is the marrying kind.”

“What has that to do with anything?”

“I just think that until he sees you wearing his ring, declaring to the world that you want him and him alone, he will never feel entirely secure.”

“But he knows that even marriage is not a guarantee. Look at his with Rosie!”

“I’m not saying it’s entirely rational. And it’s only my opinion. What do I know anyway,” she said with a wave of her hand.

Phryne sipped her drink, deep in thought.

Jack arrived at the morgue early the next morning.

“Snappy tie Inspector,” Mac said by way of a greeting. “Is it new?”

Jack smiled. Apparently Mac and Phryne had got together the previous evening after all. He didn’t have on the new suit, for some reason he had not wanted to wear it in the morgue, but he had put on the tie.

“Good morning, Dr. MacMillan. And yes, it is a new tie, which I’m sure you already knew.”

“I hope you realize how lucky you are,” Mac said.
“Believe me, I do.”

“Good. Because you are a man without precedent.”

“In what way?” Jack asked, curious.

“You, Jack Robinson, are the man Phryne Fisher loves,” she said.

She looked at him pointedly and was satisfied to see him blush. Jack swallowed hard, feeling suddenly too warm. The door opened and Phryne breezed in.

“Good morning all!” she cried.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Phryne and Jack find motive for murder in an unexpected place.

Phryne leaned back, her feet up on Jack’s desk. The autopsy had confirmed Mac’s estimated time of death and one other thing of note. Mr. Menson had a sedative in his system. It was a fairly common sleep aid and there was no way of knowing if he’d taken it on his own or if it had been slipped to him unawares. Either way, that, combined with the alcohol would have rendered him well out for the night. He most likely never awoke to see his attacker. Jack already had Collins on the phone to his doctor to see if the sedative had been prescribed.

Phryne and Jack compared notes on what they had each discovered the previous day. Phryne telling Jack that Harold Simone was deep in debt to Menson. Simone’s father and Menson had been great friends and Menson had backed the younger Simone in a business venture that had failed. Simone expressed guilt at feeling relieved over the man’s demise. Menson left no heirs to his estate and Simone hoped his death might wipe the debt clean.

“Charming fellow,” Jack said.

“As for Mrs. Miller,” she continued, “it seems the late Mr. Miller was business partners with Menson, but I don’t know if that’s significant. Mr. Miller died four years ago.”

“How so?”

“Menson appeared quite wealthy and even bragged about how his steel business provided more money than he could possibly use in a lifetime. So why is the widow of his business partner scraping by on so little each month? Her husband should have left her well off when he died.” He handed Phryne the file containing Gertrude Miller’s financials.

“That explains the dress,” said Phryne, after perusing the file.

Jack gave her a curious look.

“Well, it was a fine dress, but at least two seasons old,” she explained. “And it looked as though it had seen more than its fair share of use.”

Jack knew little about women’s fashion. He knew what he liked, but whether it was from this year or even a decade ago, he doubted he’d be able tell. And he’d paid very little attention to what Mrs. Miller had been wearing.

“So, we know Simone may have had a motive,” Jack said.

“Yes, but he was awfully quick to offer it up, that doesn’t seem too wise for a murderer to me.”

“Maybe he’s not that bright,” Jack said with a smirk.

Phryne pulled a face.
“Regardless, I think it merits further investigation,” he said. “We should at least try to find out if he had access to the sedative. Might as well explore that avenue for Mrs. Miller as well. What about the rest of the household?”

“We can eliminate the household staff for the time being. I found no connections there,” she hesitated, before saying, “And, I think we need not worry about Aunt P?”

“That’s a safe assumption. I don’t believe your Aunt has it in her to stab a sleeping guest in her own home.”

“I think we can easily rule Guy and Isabella out,” Phryne said. “Guy managed to recall the name of the club they went to when they left the house seeking more scintillating entertainment that night, so their alibi should be easy enough to verify. Why don’t you come by tonight for dinner. Afterward we can do just that.”

“And where might that take us?” Jack asked. He had serious concerns about the kind of place those two might find entertaining.

“Just a small jazz club. It’s suppose to be quite lively.”

“Remember, Miss Fisher, we will be there in an official capacity.”

“You will be,” she said. “I’m a private consultant.”

She gave him a smile over her shoulder and sauntered out the door.

It wasn’t hard to verify the alibi. Not surprisingly most of the staff at the jazz club remembered the moment Isabella arrived. And Guy had paid the band to stay and play into the early hours of the morning. Within ten minutes they had what they needed and Jack was ready to leave. Phryne was looking around, eyes alight, swaying to the music. Jack would have liked to have danced with her. He knew how much she enjoyed it, but he was there tonight as a member of the police and it would be inappropriate.

Phryne spotted some friends across the room. They were waving wildly at her, inviting her over. She turned to Jack.

“Just one drink Jack? What do you say?”

"I’m sorry. I wish I could,” he said. “But you should stay. Go see your friends.”

“Are you sure? I invited you over tonight, I don’t want to abandon you.”

“You are not abandoning me. You only invited me to dinner. Your obligation is fulfilled,” he said. “You should stay and have a good time. I’ll take myself home to a good book.”

“I could come by later,” she said, placing her hand on his chest and giving him a look that warmed him all over.

“Do you have your key?” he asked, his voice low and quiet.

“Of course,” she answered.

It was not unusual for her to go out with friends and then want to end her evening with him. After
being awoken several times in the middle of the night, it seemed wise to have a key made for her.

“Well then, should you decide you miss me, you know where I’ll be,” he said, smiling. He watched her make her way over to her friends. Half way there she turned and blew him a kiss.

Around two in the morning, Jack felt Phryne crawl into bed next to him and curl to his side. He sighed happily and wrapped an arm around her, pulling her close.

Phryne entered the office and sat down across from Jack, waiting for him to finish his phone call.

“Thank you doctor, I appreciate the information,” he said, before hanging up. “Well, our victim was not prescribed the sleep aid and had never used one, as far as his doctor knew, so most likely someone slipped it into his drink,” he told Phryne.

“And I’ve just come from tea at Aunt P’s and witnessed something curious, but I’m not sure what to make of it. Aunt P was reminiscing about a trip she and Uncle Edward had taken with the Mensons and Millers. Apparently the three couples were quite close at one time. Sometime after that trip it seems the relationships cooled.

I couldn’t help but notice that Mrs. Miller looked remarkably uncomfortable with the conversation and contributed very little. Something about it didn’t sit right with me.”

“Well, I’ve heard back from the Miller’s solicitor,” Jack said. “Mr. Miller was indeed a wealthy man. However, upon his death, his entire estate was left to the Miller’s only child, a son. Nothing was left to the widow. The son allows her to remain in the home and provides her a monthly stipend, and not a very generous one at that.”

“That is odd,” said Phryne. “So, it appears Gertrude Miller was persona non grata with her husband and her son seems none too fond of her either.”

“But what, if anything, does this have to do with Menson’s death?” asked Jack.

“I don’t know, but I think perhaps we should talk to Mrs. Miller’s son. Do we know where he lives?”

“He’s here in Melbourne, care to take a drive Miss Fisher?”

After a brief stop at the man's home and a talk with the housekeeper, they found the junior Mr. Miller at his club. Phryne always enjoyed invading these bastions of male privilege. The looks she drew as she moved through the halls were very entertaining. She knew Jack didn’t think much of clubs like this and was more than happy to buck convention by having her at his side.

They introduced themselves and Miller seemed friendly enough until they brought up the subject of his mother and her finances.

“You said you are investigating a murder at the home of my mother’s friend? I don’t see how my family’s finances are at all relevant.”

“They may not be, but as the deceased was your father’s business partner, and your mother was present at the time of his murder, we need to explore all avenues,” Jack replied.
“Menson is dead? And you say my mother was there at the time?”

“Yes, they were both guests of my Aunt, Prudence Stanley. Does that surprise you Mr. Miller?” Phryne asked.

“It surprises me that my mother would be in the same city with Menson much less the same room,” he said. “She hated the man. Although in my opinion, she brought her troubles on herself.”

“Would you care to elaborate?” Jack asked.

“As I’m sure you’ve deduced, I have no great affection for my mother. She broke my father’s heart. He was decent man and he was good to her, yet she betrayed him in the worst way. She and Menson embarked on an affair. When my father found out, she tried to say it meant nothing, that it had been just a bit of fun and that it was he she truly loved. But how could he believe her after such a deception? With his business partner no less.”

“Yet your father did not divorce her?” said Phryne.

“No. They remained married, for the appearance, or maybe he still loved her. But he could never forget, nor truly forgive and they grew to hate each other in the end. She blamed Menson, saying he’d seduced her and turned her head, but she’d always been a selfish, vain woman. Doing whatever she liked, concerned only with her own happiness.”

“It appears you have never forgotten either,” Jack said.

“We are not close. I provide her what she needs to get by, nothing more,” he said. “Perhaps it seems cruel to you, but she was not much of a mother, even before the estrangement. Always more interested in parties and fashion than me. And her actions devastated my father. A man I loved and respected.”

They thanked the man and took their leave, heading to Prudence Stanley’s to find Mrs. Miller.

“For a woman that enjoyed society and fine living, she must be most unhappy to be forced to live so frugally,” Jack said. “And if she blamed Menson, to the point of hating him, that could be motive enough.”

Phryne didn’t respond, she sat staring out the window, lost in thought.

“Phryne?” Jack asked. “Is something wrong?”

“His description of his mother. A selfish woman, who put parties and her own happiness above all else. Who did as she pleased with no regard to other’s feelings. Does that remind you of anyone?” She asked quietly.

“No,” he said firmly. “It does not.”

“I’ve heard what people think of me and sometimes it sounds very much like that.”

Jack pulled the car to the side of the road and turned to face her.

“You are nothing like that Phryne and anyone that thinks so does not know you. It’s true that you live life fully, and on your own terms, but you are so far from selfish. You are the most generous person I have ever known. You take care of your family and the people you’ve made your family. Look what you’ve done for Jane, and Dot and even those two rabble rousing cabbies. And me. What you have done for me is more than you can imagine.”
She looked at him gratefully and smiled.

“Thank you, my love. But, I’m afraid you may be biased,” she said.

“I am most definitely biased, but I am not wrong,” he said, squeezing her hand.

It didn’t take long to obtain a confession. After days of fearing being found out, Gertrude Miller was almost relieved to make the admission. The dull, doddering demeanor Jack had witnessed at dinner disappeared as she spat vitriol at the deceased, her son and her late husband. She blamed everyone but herself for her miserable life.

Aunt Prudence was grieved at the treachery of a woman she thought a friend, but most grateful to have everything settled. She invited Jack and Phryne to dinner but Phryne begged off, much to Jack’s relief.

Later that evening he was content to find himself at her side, enjoying a quiet nightcap in her parlour.

“Well, that case was a bit of a let down,” said Phryne.

“In what way? We managed to solve it rather quickly. I suppose it’s a sad case, but most of them are, aren’t they?” Jack asked.

“There was no drama, no danger. Neither of us were placed in mortal peril,” she said.

“And this is a bad thing?” he asked, incredulous.

“Yes, because now what reason will you have for getting me alone and tearing off all my clothes?” she said, drawing near him on the chaise.

“Oh, I don’t need a reason for that, Miss Fisher. Only an invitation,” he said, toying with the buttons on her blouse. “But, as I’m fond of the way you look in this, I think I’ll avoid tearing it, if you don’t mind.”

“Have it your way,” she said, smiling as she took his hand and pulled him to his feet. “Let’s go upstairs, Inspector.”
Chapter 14

Jack had been putting in long hours the past few nights and Phryne had been attempting to honor some social obligations. It had been several days since they’d last seen each other. Phryne decided to stop by the station to see if there were any interesting cases she could insinuate her way into. That, and she missed Jack. She didn’t plan to leave his office until he promised to come to her home tonight.

She had reached the corridor outside his door when she heard him. The amused tone in his voice had her stopping to eavesdrop.

“That’s very flattering, but not entirely accurate,” Jack was saying.

“Well, that’s what I’ve been hearing,” came a light, teasing, female voice. “And what of Mrs. Robinson? What does she think of your dangerous job taking you into the path of so many hardened criminals?”

There was a brief pause.

“Ahh, well there is no...I am...unmarried,” Jack finally spat out.

“Really? How surprising,” the voice purred.

Phryne felt herself growing hot.

“And believe me, Miss Everson, my job is not so harrowing as you make it sound,” Jack continued.

“I’m sure you’re being modest, Inspector. Please, call me Sara, won’t you? And may I call you Jack?”

Oh definitely not! Thought Phryne. She moved to stand in the doorway, her hands on her hips.

“Miss Fisher!” Jack said, raising his eyebrows and trying hard not to smile when he saw the expression on her face.

“Good day Jack” she said brightly, strolling into the room to stand behind him, placing her hand firmly on his shoulder.

Across the desk sat a lovely young girl. She had blond, wavy hair and large brown eyes. She was smiling at Jack in a way Phryne did not appreciate.

Well, Miss Fisher. See how you like it, Jack thought smugly, then immediately felt a bit childish.

“Who have we here?” Phryne asked in an innocent, carefree tone Jack knew to be an affectation.

“This is Miss Sara Everson, a reporter with the Herald.”

“I’m the new crime reporter,” the girl said, excitedly, bouncing up to shake Phryne’s hand. “And you of course are Phryne Fisher! I’d love to interview you too, along with Inspector Robinson.”

Phryne and Jack exchanged a look and fought back laughter. The young girl’s enthusiasm bordered on manic.
“I’m afraid I don’t give interviews,” Phryne sniffed.

This was not entirely true. In fact Phryne loved seeing her name in the papers. She didn’t even mind the occasional appearance in the gossip pages, but she’d be damned if she gave this little upstart anything. The way she was looking at Jack, batting her eyes and leaning forward to display her rather ample bosom. It was too much.

“Well then, Inspector. I guess it’s just you and me. I’d love to take you to dinner and pick your brains,” Miss Everson said, her voice dripping with innuendo.

Phryne’s grip on his shoulder suddenly bordered on painful and Jack heard her suck in her breath. He knew a blistering put down was on the way. He gave her hand a gentle pat and rushed to speak first.

“Thank you Miss Everson, but I’m sorry. I’m not interested in giving any interviews. I don’t do this job for the accolades.”

“I’m afraid the Inspector is all too modest,” Phryne said.

The young woman looked at the couple. They were a formidable pair; Detective Inspector Jack Robinson and the Honorable Miss Phryne Fisher. Seeing them together she was also convinced the rumors were true. These two were lovers, but as she had no interest in writing for the gossip pages, there wasn’t much to be done with that information.

“Well, thank you for your time. Please take my card in case you change your mind, “she said, rising to go.

She held the card out to Jack. Phryne reached to intercept it.

“Thank you, have a pleasant day,” she said as the young woman left the office.

Phryne turned and planted herself on the desk at Jack’s side.

“Well, isn’t she a sweet, young thing? And very impressed with you,” she said.

“And why not? I’m an impressive man. Accomplished too, apparently. You should have heard her go on,” Jack goaded.

“I heard enough,” she said sourly. “So, while I endured another dull afternoon tea, what have you been doing? Other than breaking young reporter’s hearts.”

Jack smiled and wrapped his hand around her leg below the knee, slid it down her calf and up under the cuff of her trouser to caress her ankle.

“Are you jealous, Miss Fisher?”

“Of course not,” she replied indignantly.

“No? Too bad. I was looking forward to showing you later just how devoted I am to you.”

“Well,” she said coyly. “Perhaps I was a bit jealous. She was rather pretty.”

“Was she? I hadn’t noticed.”

“You’re a charming liar Jack Robinson,” she said. “When will you be finished here? I’m most anxious to hear more about this devotion you speak of. Seeing as you’ve been neglecting me for days, I’m beginning to question it.”
Jack rose from his seat, going to close and bolt both doors to his office.

“Then let me leave you in no doubt, Miss Fisher.”

He placed his hands on her knees, pushing them apart so he could stand between her legs. His arms went around her hips, pulling her tight to him.

“I’ve missed you Phryne,” he said as he brought his mouth down on hers.

She wrapped her arms around him, her body thrumming. It felt so good to be near him, to touch him. How could only three days apart have resulted in such desperate longing.

It was the middle of the day, with people milling around right outside the door. She was sure he intended no more than a brief fumble. A prelude to what would come later. That he was touching her at all was testament to how much he wanted her.

She enjoyed the feel of his hands moving eagerly over her. She slip her own under his jacket and slid them over the taut muscles of his back. She pressed her body to his, enjoying the wonderful friction of him hard against her. His mouth pulled at hers greedily, parting her lips and tasting her with his tongue. His arms held her firmly. She was so soft and he could feel the heat of her body, even through all the layers of clothing. He was aware of her hands on him, holding him tight. He shouldn’t have started this, not here, not now. He wanted her so badly, he wasn’t sure he could stop.

Outside the door the crash of something dropping reminded them of their surroundings. He stepped back from her, breathing heavily.

“Good God, Phryne,” he gasped. “One of these days you’ll ruin me.”

“Why wait? I can ruin you tonight if you like,” she replied, breathlessly.

She stood, and kissed him gently. She smoothed her clothing and checked her appearance in her compact. Once her lipstick had been expertly reapplied, she turned to him; tidying his hair and using her handkerchief to wipe the red stain from his mouth. When he looked less ravished, she turned to go.

“I’ll be expecting you,” she said. “Don’t be too late.”

Jack sat down heavily in his chair, trying to catch his breath and calm his body. Then he turned to the work on his desk like a man possessed, determined to complete it in record time.

He thought about her the rest of the day. His body protesting loudly at having been so cruelly teased. He found it hard to concentrate on anything. When he finally found himself at her door and she pulled it open to let him in, he grabbed her to him.

“I think, if you don’t mind,” he whispered into her ear, “we need to finish what we started before I go mad.”

“I couldn’t agree more,” she said. She grabbed his hand and they nearly ran up the stairs.

This is how she’d been imagining it. The desperate impatience. Tearing at each other’s clothes, their removal made more difficult by the fact that they couldn’t keep their lips apart. She was
trying to remove his waistcoat while he fumbled with the fastener of her trousers. It became one big tangle and she pulled away and threw up her hands in frustration.

“Too many clothes!” she cried and they both burst into laughter.

“Yes,” he agreed. “We don’t seem to be making much headway. I recommend we slow down, take our time,” he said, removing his waistcoat and loosening his tie. “I’ve been looking forward to this all day, no need to hurry.”

Calmer now, she reached for him.

“Let me help you with that.”

She took over the job of removing his tie and got to work on the buttons of his shirt. He watched her face, never taking his eyes off her as his hands pulled her blouse from her trousers. She paused in her work as he lifted it over her head. He dipped down, kissing her neck in the place that always made her melt. He felt her go limp in his arms. He lifted her then, carrying her to the bed, laying her gently down upon it. He slipped the trousers from her and she lay there in nothing but her dove grey camisole, pants and stockings.

He removed one stocking, rolling it down slowly, kissing along it’s path, before repeating the process on the other leg. His impatience returning, he stripped himself quickly while she watched. He could see her chest heaving and the desire in her eyes. When he removed his pants and stood naked before her, she smiled, and arched slightly up off the bed.


She quickly removed her remaining items, lay back and reached for him. He went to her, letting her fold him into her arms.

Jack had lost track of how many times he’d stopped to look at them in the window. They were the drop style she preferred and would look spectacular swinging just below the dark fringe of her bobbed hair. The large stones were the color of her eyes. Surrounded by the tiny, glittering gems they were unique and beautiful. Just like her.

But it was ridiculous. Who made a fuss over six months? A year he could see. That was a proper anniversary, but six months? If he were to celebrate it as an milestone, would she think him a fool? They weren’t school children.

But it felt significant to him. When they had first started he’d been prepared that it might end any day and had been grateful for whatever she was willing to give him. It hadn’t ended, and now, at the end of this week, it would be half a year since he had met her at that airstrip and taken her to his home. And it was so much more than he’d dared hope. She still wanted him. She loved him even. The thought still brought a lump to his throat.

He would buy them. And he would plan a special night out and give them to her. He didn’t have to say anything about the six months. She probably wasn’t keeping track, and why should he need a special reason to give a gift to the woman he loved? He went inside the store.

Later that day he was at his desk looking at the earrings. They sat in a neat little box, sparkling up at him. He picked up the phone to call Phryne. Mr. Butler answered and went to find her.

“Jack!” she cried when she came to the phone. “I hope your not calling to cancel dinner?”
“No,” he said, “I’m still planning on it. But I’ve been taking advantage of your hospitality too often. I think it’s my turn to treat you.”

“That’s very sweet, but Mr. Butler is already preparing something for us here.”

“Well then, what if I plan a special evening out for another night? Are you free on Saturday, Miss Fisher.”

“A special evening! That sounds wonderful. And of course I’m free Saturday Jack. I’ve been keeping it open. It is our six month anniversary after all.”

*Once again, she’s two steps ahead of me,* Jack thought smiling.
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

Jack and Phryne mark a special occasion.

Chapter Notes

A challenge, a date and a little romance. Suspend your disbelief at my details of Melbourne. I don't know much about the city in the 1920's other than what I've seen on the show and found online.

After dinner they sat in the parlour. Phryne brought out the draughts board. She hated playing cards, but found she enjoyed this game, with Jack across from her. It didn’t require too much concentration, but the distraction was often enough to result in candid conversation. With his mind somewhat occupied, Jack was less careful in his speech. They’d been playing for a few minutes, moving their pieces thoughtfully.

“What do you have planned for us this Saturday?” she asked casually. He smiled, but kept his eyes on the board.

“I’ve been wondering when you’d ask. I’m keeping my plans a secret, Miss Fisher.”

“Oh, I love secrets!” she said happily.

“No,” he corrected. “You love uncovering secrets. But I have a vain hope that I may be able to surprise you.”

“You’ll have as much luck with that as you will in beating me at this game,” she said as her black piece jumped one of his white ones. He countered by capturing two of her own, his having been used as a pawn to lure her into the trap.

“I’ll take my chances,” he said.

“But it’s impractical, Jack. It’s easy enough for you, but if I don’t know where we are going, how will I know how to dress?”

“I’m sure you will look beautiful whatever you wear.”

“That’s not the point. I will need to dress completely differently if we are having a picnic, than I would if we are going to an elegant dinner.”

“I can see where that might be a problem,” he said. “However, it is not mine, and I am unmoved.” He captured another of her pieces.

“I can try other ways to persuade you,” she said.
“Such as?”

“I could withhold certain privileges to which you have become accustom,” she said.

“That is always your prerogative.”

“True. And honestly, not one I’m all that interested in exercising.”

“I have a proposition,” he said. “You have three days to try to discover my plans. I will provide some clues along the way, as well as plant some false information, and you can try to match your wits against mine,” he said as he took her last piece from the board.

“Looks like I win, Miss Fisher.”

“This time, Inspector.”

Phryne’s first step was to recruit Dot into her plans. She, in turn, prevailed on Hugh to assist. Hugh was naturally reluctant.

“He’s my boss Dotty and this is his personal business,” Hugh protested.

“Come on Hugh, it’s just a bit of fun. And the Inspector did challenge Miss Phryne, after all,” Dot said.

“I don’t know what you expect me to do anyway,” Hugh said. “I won’t ask him.”

“Just keep your eyes and ears open. See if he makes any phone calls to place reservations. Things like that,” Dot said. “You’re a fine detective Hugh, I’m sure you’ll notice something,” she flattered.

Jack was careful in what he revealed over the next days. He assumed Hugh had been drawn into the whole affair and made sure to reveal only clues he wanted Phryne to discover.

The truth was he didn’t really mind if she uncovered some of his plans. She would probably enjoy the night more if she beat him at this little game. He also knew how much she liked to dress for an occasion and he wouldn’t want to diminish her anticipation of the evening. Besides, he was having fun deciding which clues to provide and what to hold back. If he leaked things carefully, she wouldn’t probe too deeply. He was hoping to maintain a little mystery. One thing he kept well under wraps was the gift.

Phryne sifted carefully through information Hugh provided and the little tidbits Jack let drop. She thought she knew him well enough to discern which were genuine clues and which red herrings.

For instance, she was fairly convinced that a football match was not their destination for the evening. Much as Jack enjoyed a good match, he was far too romantic to think sitting among a hundred or so rabid fans made for a special occasion.

On Saturday evening Jack waited in her parlour, wearing the new blue suit and the tie she had given him. The small jewelry box was tucked safely in his pocket. He knew he’d revealed the right clues when Phryne entered the room. She strutted in proudly, head held high, wearing a shimmering, beaded, flapper style dress. She stopped, her triumphant grin faltering when she saw the look on his face.
“You cheated!” she said. “You wanted me to find out!”

“Of course not,” he lied. “I’m simply impressed by how well you’ve interpreted my clues.”

“Hmm,” she pouted. “It did seem a bit too easy.”

“Well, I’m afraid it is not difficult to manipulate poor Hugh. He is very trusting. I almost felt bad about it.”

“But, I am right about the dancing?” she asked, her excitement returning.

He loved this about her. She wasn’t one to gloat too long upon winning, nor sulk when she didn’t succeed. She just loved the game.

“Yes,” he said, wrapping his arms around her waist. “I am taking you dancing. But not right away. I do still have a few surprises up my sleeve. And you look breathtaking, by the way.” He kissed her lightly on the cheek, not wanting to muss her carefully applied face.

“As do you,” she said. Running her hands up his chest and around his neck to pull him to her for a passionate kiss. Lipstick be damned.

He momentarily lost his senses but kept enough of his wits to turn his body to avoid her feeling the hard lump in his pocket as she pressed against him. He knew when he wanted to give her his gift and very much wanted the earrings to be a surprise.

She pulled away and looked lovingly at him. She liked seeing him with her lipstick smeared on his mouth. Somehow it marked him as hers, even if it never lingered long. To that point, she pulled his handkerchief from his breast pocket and dabbed at the stain.

“Before we go, I have a little something to give you,” she said. He cocked his head to one side.

“Didn’t you just give me a rather elaborate gift in the form of this suit?”

“This is just a small token,” she said, reaching behind her to pick something off the nearby table and handing it to him.

“Dot took this,” she said, “when we went for a picnic at the shore. I’ve always thought it rather good and wanted you to have it.”

It was a small photograph of her, in a burl wood frame. She was looking directly at the camera, laughing, with her hair blowing in a breeze. It was captivating.

He already had two pictures of her. Neither obtained strictly honorably. The first had been taken at the station when he’d threatened to arrest her for breaking and entering. He’d always felt a little guilty for pocketing it. He’d had no right to it, but he couldn’t help himself. The second was a picture of the two of them in an embrace, clipped from the gossip section of the paper. That one was well hidden in a file in his desk. Now, he’d have a picture she had given him, that he was free to display in his home.

“Thank you Phryne. You don’t know how much this means to me. It’s beautiful.”

“I’m glad you like it.”

“I do. Very much.”

“Well then,” she said, looking pleased. “Shall we go, Inspector? I can’t wait to see what you have
They stopped in the foyer where he assisted her into a deep purple, velvet cloak with red silk lining before donning his own coat and hat. Then, offering his arm, he stepped out with her, finding it utterly remarkable that this gorgeous creature consented to be with him.

Their first stop was the restaurant he had taken her to on their first real date, shortly after she’d returned from England. It was in Fitzroy Street, near the Esplanade. He’d called ahead and made arrangements to reserve a secluded table near the back. In the center stood a single, long stemmed rose in an elegant vase.

After dinner, they left the car behind and walked along the Esplanade to Luna Park where they took a ride on the Great Scenic Railway. It was one of his favorite memories. It was before he’d realized the depths of his feelings, but he’d had such fun with her that day in the park. Tonight he held her hand firmly as they rose and dipped along the trail, listening to the music of her laughter and shrieks of joy.

As the ride slowed and crawled along the rails to its end, he pulled the small box from his pocket and pressed it into her hand. She looked at it in surprise, opened it to peek inside, then snapped it shut again, the smile on her face growing as she clutched it to her chest. Once they’d exited the ride and stood firmly on solid ground, she opened it again for a longer look.

“Jack!” she exclaimed. “They’re exquisite! You shouldn’t have.”

“I found I couldn’t resist them. Much like their new owner,” he said, thrilled that she liked them and that he’d been able to surprise her.

She handed him the box and began removing the earrings she currently wore. He was touched, knowing those had been carefully chosen to go with her dress and that his might not fit as well. He held the box open for her so she could retrieve the new earrings and place the other pair inside for safe keeping. Once she’d made the switch she looked up at him smiling.

“Thank you Jack, I will cherish them always.”

He reached out his hand to gingerly touch one of the earrings now hanging from her ear. It filled his heart to see it there.

“You are very welcome,” he said. “Now, come along, Miss Fisher. Our night is not done yet.”

They retraced their steps, stopping outside the Esplanade Hotel and heading back to the Eastern Tent Ballroom, one of Melbourne’s most popular jazz and dance venues. Jack let any concerns about his image as a member of the Victorian Constabulary fall away and allowed himself to enjoy the pleasure of moving on the floor with Phryne in his arms. Each time she swayed against him, or ran a hand seductively over him, the prick of desire in his core increased. After two hours of drinking and dancing, enjoying her smiles and whispers he didn’t think he could take much more.

She seemed to have arrived at the same place. As the current song ended, she leaned up and whispered in his ear.

“Let’s go home, Jack.”

He went to find their coats, smiling at her turn of phrase. Lately she no longer said, ‘take me home’ but more often, it was, ‘let’s go home,’ as though they were heading to a home they shared. He spent so much time at hers lately it was nearly true. His own house had become slightly neglected. It was dusty and the garden looked a bit rough and overgrown. He’d spent considerable
time correcting that earlier today.

He placed her cloak over her and they strolled out into the night, Phryne holding tight to Jack’s arm as they made the ten minute walk back to the car.

“If you are amenable to it,” he began, “I thought we might end the evening at my house tonight. Where we first began.”

“Jack,” she said, leaning in to him. “I appreciate how careful you are in seeking my consent, but you needn’t always ask. You should know by now that, most of the time, I prefer to end my evenings wherever you are. And, technically, I believe we began in a bathroom, at the home of my former friend, Lydia Andrews,” she said, referencing the case where they first met. “But, I think I’d much prefer your home tonight.”

“Have you enjoyed the evening Phryne?” he asked.

“I don’t think I’ve enjoyed any night more,” she replied, honestly.

When they entered his home the warm, welcoming atmosphere made her immediately comfortable. She felt surrounded by Jack in every way. The scent of lemon furniture polish sent her back to that first time she’d walked through the door. That day had been thrilling and unforgettable as they’d finally acted on the long simmering desire that had been brewing between them. She’d had no idea then how much her love for him would grow.

“I have a bottle of champagne chilling if you’d like a glass,” he said.

“That sounds lovely. I’ll just go freshen up a bit,” she said, heading for his bath.

Jack went to the kitchen and brought out the champagne, two glasses and a candle holder fitted with a fine, white taper. He removed his jacket, filled the glasses and lit the candle, turning when he heard her. He thought his heart would stop as she came forward and took the coupe from his hand, sipping from it elegantly.

She wore absolutely nothing but the glittering blue earrings he’d watched her don just a few hours early.

“Once again, it seems you’re ahead of me, Miss Fisher,” He said, letting his eyes roam slowly from her head to her toes and back again, stopping at her mouth.

“I have faith you’ll catch up quickly, Inspector,” she said.

She picked up the candle and headed down the hall to his bedroom.

“Bring the champagne,” she said.

He smiled, grabbed the bottle and followed.

Jack leaned in the doorway of his room, watching as she placed the candle down on the table by his bed and settled herself against the pillows with her glass of champagne. The flickering light bathed her in its warm glow.

“Are you just going to stand there, Jack? Or are you going to join me?” she asked. “I do like the look of you in those clothes, but I think I’d enjoy watching you remove them even more.”

“Your complete enjoyment has been my only goal this evening, Miss Fisher,” he said.
“You’ve been most successful so far, Inspector. Don’t disappoint now,” she warned. “I’ve found a very comfortable spot from which to view you, so get started. But, feel free to take your time, I don’t want to miss anything.”

Her unabashed expression of lust for him was possibly more exciting than the sight of her naked body atop his bed. He didn’t try to hold back his own desire, instead letting it wash over him and pool deep in his core as he slowly began to remove his clothing under her watchful gaze. By the time he’d finished he was aching to touch her and feel her body pressed to his.

“Do you have any idea how it makes me feel to see how much you desire me?” she said breathlessly.

“I don’t think it’s possible for you to see the extent of my desire,” he said. “I don’t simply want you Phryne. You are essential to me, like the air I breathe.”

He wrapped his arms around her, pushing her down on the bed and holding her tight to him. The sweet relief of feeling of her skin against his soon gave way to a flood of desperate demand. He moved over her body, now so familiar to him he knew every dip and curve. His hands recognized the arch of her ribcage, and easily found the small mole on her back, just at the base of her spine. His mouth sought her breast, drawing her in and feeling her harden against his tongue. She arched against him and moaned, sighing out his name.

“Yes, Phryne,” he implored. “Say my name. I love to hear you say my name.” His hand moved between her thighs.

She obliged, letting his name fall from her lips again as he brought her to the height of ecstasy. Her hands wandered over him and she could feel his heart beating forcefully, in time with her own. When he finally slipped inside her, she grabbed tight to him.

“Look at me,” she said. He locked his eyes on hers and stilled.

“I love you,” she said. “Do you love me?”

“You know that I do,” he answered.

“Tell me, Jack,” she said. “I want to hear you say it.”

“I love you Phryne,” he said. “You are my greatest passion.”

And then he made love to her with uncontrolled ardor and tender devotion. It was like nothing she’d ever felt before and she knew that for her, there would never be another like him. She couldn’t imagine a life that didn’t include him, didn’t consist of days by his side and nights in bed, together, adoring each other.

Jack held Phryne loosely in his arms. Six month’s earlier he’d held her in a similar fashion for the first time. That night he remembered thinking he would hold her as long as she allowed and then gratefully let her go when she wanted to move on.

Now he didn’t know. Would it break him, irreparably, to lose her? Could he continue working alongside her, enjoying her company if he knew he could never again touch her like this? He threw up a silent prayer, to a God he wasn’t sure he believed in, that he would never need to find out.

In the morning she came to find him in the kitchen where he was preparing breakfast for them. She wore one of his pajama tops and nothing else. He smiled at the memory it evoked.
“This is a problem,” she said.

“What is?” he asked.

“I have nothing to put on but my dress from last night and it’s completely inappropriate for this time of day.”

“I’m sure this would not be the first time you’ve met the milkman wearing evening clothes, Miss Fisher,” he said, turning his attention back to the stove top where he was cooking some eggs.

“That is true,” she said. “But I’m not planning on returning home any time soon, Inspector.”

She approached, looping her arms around him from behind. “And I’d look ridiculous walking the streets in my beaded gown at noon.”

He snapped off the burner and turned to face her, wrapping his arms around her and backing her up against the small kitchen table.

“We can’t have that, can we? I’m sure I can keep you occupied until well past noon,” he said, dipping his head to kiss her neck. “Maybe we can even manage to pass the time until the hour your dress is once again considered proper attire.”

“I was only going to suggest you allow me to leave a change of clothes here from now on,” she said, scooting herself up onto the table and wrapping her legs around him.

“Your suggestion is not without merit,” he said. “But let’s try my way first.”

The forgotten eggs grew cold in the pan.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Phryne panics when she hears Jack is injured on the job.

Mr. Butler opened the door to find an agitated Bert and Cec.

"Where's Dot?" Bert asked, moving past Mr. Butler into the kitchen. “There's been an incident at the docks. Word is a copper's been hurt."

Dot and Phryne rushed to the scene. They had been to many crime scenes together, but never before under such anxious circumstances. For Dot's sake, Phryne hoped desperately that Hugh was unharmed, but her own heart ached with fear for Jack. The thought of losing him now was almost more than she could bear.

A small crowd had gathered and Phryne searched for any sign of Hugh or Jack. Dot let out a small cry and Phryne followed her gaze to the spot about 10 feet away where Hugh sat holding a blood soaked cloth to his face. Hugh stood as he saw Dot approaching.

"I'm alright Dotty," he assured her. "It's nothing." His nose was bloodied, but he looked otherwise unharmed.

Phryne looked around. She couldn’t see Jack anywhere. Dot was fussing over Hugh, obviously relieved to find him safe. Phryne didn’t want to interrupt but she was crawling out of her skin. Dot sensed her anguish.

“Hugh, where is Inspector Robinson? Is he alright?” Dot asked her husband.

“I don’t know Dotty,” Hugh said, looking stricken. “He found me after I’d been hit and came to help me. Someone clocked him across the head. They’ve taken him to hospital.”

Phryne felt the world narrow to a small pinprick, everything was going black. She felt Dot’s arm around her.

“Miss? Are you ok?” Dot asked, bringing Phryne back to the present.

“Yes, Dot,” She said, still appearing dazed. “I need to go.”

“Of course miss. I'll come with you”

“What? No Dot. Thank you, but you stay here with Hugh, I’ll be fine.”

Phryne broke every speed law racing to the hospital. She flew through the doors accosting the first nurse she found. She was a stout, stern looking older woman.

“I'm looking for Inspector Robinson”

The woman looked at her curiously.

“Are you his wife?”
Phryne ignored the question.

“Where I can find him?” she demanded. “He’s the police officer recently brought in.”

“And exactly who are you?” the nurse asked brusquely.

“Phryne Fisher, can you tell me if he’s alright?”

“Are you family?”

“No,” she said. “I’m his-”

“I’m sorry I can’t give out information to non-family members.”

“That’s ridiculous! I insist you take me to him immediately.”

“I’m afraid that’s not possible, Mr. Robinson is presently being moved.”

“Moved? To where? Please tell me if he is alright.”

“Miss, I have patients to attend to, if you’ll wait here, I’ll have someone let you know when it is possible to see him.”

The nurse turned and walked off leaving Phryne fuming. She looked around for someone else that might be able to help her find Jack. Mac, she thought. Mac would help her. She ran to a nearby nurses station and asked them to page Dr. MacMillan saying it was an emergency. The young nurse at the desk looked her over. The woman certainly looked ill. She was pale and shaking. The girl picked up the extension.

“Please, tell her Phryne Fisher needs to see her, tell her to hurry.”

The next several minutes passed like hours. Phryne paced restlessly until at last she saw Mac approaching.

“Mac!” she cried. “You have to help me. They won’t tell me where to find Jack.”

She quickly explained what had happened.

“She wouldn’t tell me anything!” she complained about the nurse. “I don’t know if he’s dead or alive!”

“Calm down Phryne. We’ll find him. He’s not dead,” Mac assured her.

“How can you be sure?”

“As coroner, I think I’d have heard,” Mac said dryly.

Phryne’s expression let her know this was no time for jokes. Mac made some inquiries and obtained Jack’s room number. Phryne burst though the doorway to find Jack sitting up in the hospital bed. He looked fairly comfortable. She threw her arms around him.

“Thank God I found you!” She stepped back to take a good look at him. “Tell me, are you alright?”

“I’m fine Phryne,” he said. “It’s nothing to fuss over.”

“No one would tell me anything! If not for Mac I don’t think they’d have let me in here! That
horrible nurse kept asking if I was family. Of course I’m family! I’m your partner!”

She was pacing frantically around the room, her arms flailing. He reached for her. She came to his side, taking his hand and sitting on the bed facing him. He pulled her in and kissed her.

“You’re trying to distract me Inspector,” she said.

“Is it working?”

“Yes. No! I’m quite upset!”

“Calm down Phryne. Of course they’d have let you see me, they were just getting me settled,” he said. “I’m fine, it’s just a little bump on the head.”

“Not so little, really,” said Mac, looking at his chart. “You took quite a blow Jack. You were knocked out for several minutes. You’re staying overnight. We need to keep an eye on you.”

“Is that really necessary?”

“Listen to her, Jack. We don’t want to take any chances. And I’ll stay right here with you.”

“Phryne, there’s no need,” he said.

“I will stay, Jack,” she said, defiantly. “No one will try and stop me, will they Mac?” she asked her friend.

Jack and Mac exchanged a look, he nodded.

“I’ll make sure it’s on Jack’s paperwork that he has requested you remain. No one will bother you,” Mac said, making the notation.

Phryne flopped down into the nearby chair and visibly relaxed. Then she slid it forward on the floor, toward the bed, so she could take Jack’s hand again. Mac left them alone.

“Are you in pain?” she asked.

“I’m sure I can’t tell,” he said. They’ve supplied me quite a lot of medication.”

“They wouldn’t let me see you, Jack,” she said again, quietly. She couldn’t let it go.

“It was just a small delay. You’re here now and I promise, next time I’m hauled to hospital, I will make sure they know you are to be allowed in immediately,” he said with mock seriousness.

“But what if you’re unconscious, or worse?”

“Please Phryne, you are upsetting yourself over nothing. That is not going to happen.”

He grimaced and she knew his head hurt more than he was letting on. She stroked his forehead, pushing his hair back off of his face.

“You’re right of course,” she said, “Don’t worry about me. I just like getting my way.”

“How true. That freight train is not used to running into obstacles.”

“And I may have been less than charming,” she admitted. She kissed him gently. “Sleep now, you need your rest.”
He sighed, and closed his eyes. The drugs he’d been given were taking effect. Before long he was asleep.

Phryne sat watching him. She been frantic when she’d heard he’d been injured. And then, being denied access had been unbearable. She leaned forward, resting her arms on the bed, holding tight to his hand. An hour or so later, he was still sleeping comfortably. She was leaning back in the chair, almost asleep herself when she became aware of a presence. Rosie Sanderson, Jack’s former wife stood in the doorway.

“Rosie,” she said, rising. “Please come in.”

“Don’t get up,” Rosie said, “I heard the news and came by to see how he’s doing.”

“He’s sleeping soundly now. And he seemed fine earlier. The doctors just wanted to keep him overnight as a precaution,” Phryne said.

“It’s terrifying, isn’t it?” Rosie said. “When you hear an officer has been injured.”

“Yes,” Phryne admitted. “And you always had your father to worry about too.”

The subject of Rosie’s father was a sore point. But Phryne knew about difficult father’s and she also knew that deep down Rosie still loved hers and had found a way to some forgiveness.

“Yes,” Rosie said, “but once Father rose high enough in the ranks it was less of a concern. Jack, I’m afraid will always prefer to be in the thick of things,” she smiled, sympathetically. “But that’s where you like to be too, isn’t it?”

“I suppose that’s true,” Phryne said.

“That’s why you are so good together. You understand him much better than I ever did.”

Phryne smiled gratefully. She liked Rosie very much. She really was a remarkable woman, and so resilient. She’d made it through the ugliness with her father and former fiancé and had come out on the other side stronger. It wasn’t hard to see why Jack had loved her. They didn’t see much of her, but Phryne knew that Rosie and Jack stayed in touch.

“I understand you’re to be married again soon,” Phryne said. “That’s wonderful.”

“Yes,” Rosie said, beaming. “And I’m going into it with my eyes wide open this time. Oliver is a good man and he treats me like an equal. Sydney always acted like I was a fragile piece of art. I never knew what he was doing, to my great shame. He always said he didn’t want to worry me with the business. Never again.”

“Good for you,” said Phryne. “I’m really so happy for you.”

“Thank you, Phryne,” Rosie said. “And you and Jack? No plans yet?”

“Oh,” said Phryne, glancing at Jack. “Marriage has never really been my cup of tea. You like it though, don’t you?” She asked, seriously.

She was curious as to what would make Rosie cling to the institution after suffering so much heartache.

“I guess I must,” Rosie laughed. “But I can see why you’d question it. After the divorce and things going so wrong with Sydney. But, you know Jack and my marriage wasn’t so awful. He is a lovely man, as I’m sure you know. But we were very young and the war was so terribly hard on
him. I didn’t know how to help him. I couldn’t bring him back. And as I said, I was young and so very impatient.”

Phryne nodded. She could only imagine Rosie, barely into adulthood, trying to deal with the trauma Jack had been through. She’d been expecting her sweet husband to return and instead got a very wounded man.

“Marriage can be a wonderful thing Phryne, with the right person,” Rosie said.

“And you’ve found the right person?”

“Yes, I believe I have,” Rosie said, smiling. “And I’m glad Jack’s found you. I misjudged you in the beginning. I could see he was very much in love with you and I thought you’d hurt him. But you make him very happy.”

”Thank you, Rosie,” Phryne said sincerely. “I promise I’ll take good care of him.”

The two women looked over at the man both of them, in their own way, loved.

“Well, it looks like sleeping beauty is out for the night,” Rosie said. ”I’m glad he’s going to be ok. I’ll leave you alone now.”

The two women embraced.

“I’ll tell him that you came by. Take care of yourself, Rosie and keep in touch.”

Rosie nodded. Phryne sat back down, looking at Jack. He really was a lovely man. She knew how much he regretted the break down of his marriage. It said a lot about both him and Rosie that they had remained good friends and so loyal to each other. In part because of that, Phryne knew that if she ever ended things between them, Jack would always be there for her.

She wasn’t sure she could be so generous if it were he that wanted to move on. And would he ever want to move on? Did he still yearn for the kind of traditional life he’d sought with Rosie? Marriage? Children?

He never said so, but it must still be in the back of his mind. Would he come to regret her if she cost him all that?

And would that life be so awful if it were with Jack? She wasn’t sure how it would differ from what they had now. After all, she didn’t feel as though she’d relinquished her freedom to be with him. It might even be better in some ways.

They could live together in the same place without judgement. And no mean-eyed nurse would ever again look at her and say she had no place by his side. She sat back and felt exhaustion take hold of her. She closed her eyes.
Jack was released from hospital the next day. By the time he’d been seen by doctors and given the go ahead to leave, it was afternoon. He’d still need to rest a day or two, but it appeared there had been no serious consequences to his concussion. Phryne wanted to take him to her home, where she could look after him, but he protested.

“I don’t want you or Mrs. Collins, or God forbid Mr. Butler, fussing over me. Besides, all my things are at my house. I’ll just sit quietly and read.”

“Alright, I’ll take you home,” she said, with every intention of staying there with him.

When they got there, she shut off the engine and moved to exit the car.

“There’s no need for you to come in,” he said. “I can make it up the walk.”

“I just want to see you settled. Humor me,” she said.

They went inside and she pushed him into his favorite chair.

“Let me start some tea,” she said. “And what book can I get you?”

“Phryne, stop fussing,” he said, rising and heading to his bookcase.

“I’m entitled to fuss a bit,” she said.

He let her go to the kitchen and put on the kettle. When she returned with the tea, he was settled in his chair with a thick volume in his hands.

“Thank you, my love,” he said, accepting a cup. “I’m quite comfortable now, you should go home. I know you have things to do.”

“I don’t,” she said. “Nothing important anyway. Why are you trying to get rid of me?”

“I’ve no desire to be rid of you, but don’t you have a meeting of one of your Aunt’s charity boards this afternoon? Which one is it this time? Abandoned dingos?”

Phryne pulled a face.

“Widows and Orphans, Jack. A good cause.”

She’d forgotten the obligation. Her aunt did sit on an alarming number of charity boards and had persuaded Phryne to join her on more than one. Today’s meeting was an important one. Aunt Prudence would be very put out should Phryne miss it.

And what excuse could she possibly give? That her lover had just been released from hospital and she didn’t want to leave him? Aunt P had recently begun to grudgingly accept Jack in Phryne’s life. She didn’t want to resurrect any objections, but it was annoying.

“I don’t like this Jack,” she said. “I should be here, not at some useless gathering of talking heads.”
“I’m not a child Phryne. I’ll be fine on my own.”

Her mind starting churning. The previous day had been emotionally revealing. She had seen him in danger before, but usually she was nearby, ready to assist him and keep him safe. Yesterday, he’d simply been doing his job, while she was at home doing nothing of importance, and she could’ve lost him.

Then, though it had been only a small delay in the scheme of things, not being admitted immediately to see him or being told anything about his condition had vexed and infuriated her.

And now she had to leave him to go to some stupid meeting to keep Aunt P happy and then probably return to her own home, without him. Or, if she wanted to be with him, she’d need to go home first, pack a bag and inform her staff.

She was tired of running back and forth between homes. Tired of introducing him as her partner and seeing the confused looks on other’s faces. Tired of nights without him. She wanted to be with him always. And Phryne Fisher did what made her happy, got what she wanted.

“Marry me,” she said.

He looked at her and blinked.

“What did you say?” he asked.

She smiled coyly. “It was a proposal.”

She was replaying their scene at the airfield, with a new twist. He played along.

“Say it again.”

“Marry me, Jack Robinson.”

The sheer joy on her face made him bleed inside. He knew she believed herself to be sincere, but it had been a long and difficult two days.

“All teasing aside Phryne,” he said, taking her hand and pulling her into his lap. “I have sustained a blow to the head, be gentle with me.”

She deflated.

“I’m serious Jack. And, I thought it was what you wanted.”

“It is,” he confessed. “But I want you more and it has never been what you’ve wanted. I would be devastated should you ever came to regret saying this. Regret me.”

“I won’t,” she insisted. “I love you Jack. I want you in my life always and it seems not being married to you is creating nothing but obstacles.”

“Phryne, if I thought this was want you truly wanted, I’d marry you tomorrow. Today even. But this is not a decision to be made lightly, when you’ve had a scare and haven’t slept.”

“Then let’s discuss it, but I’m not going to change my mind,” she said.

Here she goes, he thought. Will I make the train or end squashed on the tracks? She glanced at her watch and popped to her feet.

“Damn,” she said. “But, now I have to go home and change if I’m to make that meeting. You see
Jack? If I were your wife no one would question that I need to stay here with you in your time of need.”

“I’m not dying Phryne. I’ll be here tomorrow. If you still want to discuss this, I’m more than happy to. But should you decide never to bring it up again, I will understand.”

“I’m not waiting until tomorrow. You rest up while I’m gone, darling. I’ll go to do my duty by Aunt Prudence. Then I will come right back here and we will discuss our future,” she said definitively.

She kissed his forehead and hurried out the door, leaving him reeling and more hopeful, but confused than he’d ever been in his life.

After stopping at home to change, pack a bag and inform Mr. Butler she wouldn’t be home that night, Phryne was late getting to her Aunt’s home. All the other board members were gathered and Aunt P was visibly annoyed. She made her apologies but continued to disappoint her Aunt by being inattentive, twice failing to respond when directly addressed.

She had other things on her mind and was anxious to return to Jack and continue their conversation. The more she thought on it, the more convinced she was that getting married was the right move. The session ran long and by the time it ended Phryne was more than ready to depart. She tried to make her exit with the other members of the board but Aunt Prudence held her back.

“Phryne, is something the matter. You look so tired and seem distracted. Are you ill?”

“No, I’m not ill, I’ve had a late night with Jack.”

Her Aunt made a face. Phryne rolled her eyes.

“Jack was injured yesterday and spent the night in hospital,” she explained.

“Oh, I’m sorry to hear that. But I assume in his line of work it is not uncommon.”

“Thankfully not too common,” said Phryne.

“Is he alright?”

“He will be, after a days rest. But I do need to get back to him now, I don’t like to leave him alone.”

Prudence Stanley was fond of Inspector Robinson and she could tell that Phryne was very much in love with the man, but she had her concerns. Partly due to the nature of his work. It was an honorable career, but it was not a high paying profession. Not that Phryne needed the money, but that was not the point.

Even more pressing than the difference in their status, was her concern over Phryne's lifestyle and the fact that the Inspector did not seem to mind. They carried on with no sign whatsoever that they intended to marry.

“Phryne, what are you doing? This is no way to live your life,” Aunt Prudence said.

“Not now Aunt P, this is not the day to start with me.”
“Then when is? Since your own mother is so far away, it is incumbent upon me to stand in for her. You are young and charming and able to get away with some outrageous behavior, but it will not last forever. I just wish to see you settled.”

“I am settled. As settled as I will ever be,” Phryne said.

She had half a mind to tell her Aunt that she and Jack were engaged. It was nearly official after all. She knew Jack would come around once they spoke again and he saw she was serious. She smiled thinking that marrying Jack would have the additional benefit of getting her Aunt off her case.

Jack sat in his chair repeatedly reading the same page in his book without comprehending any of it. Finally he gave up and sat staring, deep in thought until the room began growing dark.

He got up to make himself a sandwich when he noticed he was hungry, but ate without tasting.

_Had she been in earnest?_ he wondered. It was his fondest wish to make her his wife, but he’d barely let himself think it. In his wildest dreams he’d never imagined she’d suggest it. She certainly knew how to keep him on his toes.

He’d wait for her to return and take his cue from her. If she brought it up again, he thought she might convince him it was what she really wanted, thus making him the happiest man on earth.

Phryne had finally gotten free from Aunt P and let herself back into Jack’s house, anxious to pick up where they’d left off. She found him sleeping in his chair, a plate with a half eaten sandwich and a glass of milk on the table by his side. A rush of affection came over her. She took the dishes to the kitchen, ate what remained of the sandwich and washed up.

Then she returned to sit in the chair next to his, watching him sleep. The doctor had said he might tire easily the next few days, while he healed. She shouldn’t have been so impulsive with her proposal. She should have waited until he was more himself. Sometimes she moved too quickly, thinking only of what she wanted. She’d take care of him tonight and wait until morning to continue the conversation.

“Jack,” she said, shaking him gently. “Wake up sweetheart.”

“Hello,” he said, opening his eyes. “You’re back.”

“Of course,” she said. “I told you I’d return. Let’s get you out of those clothes and into bed.”

“Is that all you think of woman?” he teased, getting up from his chair. “I am recovering from a serious injury you know.”

“What a pity,” she said. “Perhaps I’ll go find better company.”

He kissed her and headed down to the bath to wash up. When he came out she was in his room, having turned down the bed and set out a pair of pajamas. She remained fully dressed.

“Are you coming to bed?” he asked. He’d seen the overnight bag and assumed she planned to stay.

“Not just yet. I missed dinner and the half sandwich you left didn’t satisfy. I’ll just grab a bite before joining you.”
She left him to change and get into bed. He was disheartened. She wasn’t going to say anything. He thought he’d prepared himself, but until this moment he hadn’t realized how badly he’d wanted it to be true. When she returned a short time later and crawled in next to him, he pretended to be asleep. Very soon after, he was.

In the middle of the night, he awoke and reached for her. Finding her near, he moved to her side, wrapping an arm around her and snuggling in close. His breathing fell in step with hers and he thought about what he’d told her earlier that day, that as much as he wanted to marry her, he simply wanted her more. And he did want her. More than anything. To be at her side, to have her love and be able to love her in return was enough. He would forget her emotional outburst and go back to what they had. After all, what they had was very good.

In the morning, he awoke to find her watching him.

“How do you feel?” she asked.

“Good,” he said, pulling her to him and nuzzling her neck. “But not as good as you feel.”

“I thought you were recovering.”

“I’ve recovered enough,” he said.

She was delighted to find evidence of just how recovered he was pressing into her thigh.

“One moment,” she said, popping up from bed. “Family planning.”

She rushed across to the bath. When she returned they spent a long while testing the effectiveness of her device.

“Are you happy, Jack?” she said, laying in his arms.

“Mmm hmm.”

“I thought this might be a good time to continue our discussion from yesterday,” she said. He exhaled sharply.

“You don’t need to Phryne, it’s alright.”

“What do you mean? We said we’d discuss it.”

“There’s no need. I told you I’d understand if you never again mentioned it.”

“But I am mentioning it!” she said, sitting up and looking at him.

“And I’m saying you don’t need to. You were emotional when you spoke, but you haven’t obligated yourself in any way.”

“I was emotional, but I wasn’t speaking on a whim. I still think it’s a good idea.”

He was silent. She’d always made it clear she’d never marry. What was driving this? He hadn’t been injured that badly and this seemed an extreme reaction. Maybe she thought it was what he needed. He knew she loved him, maybe this was all for him.

But it would never last if she didn’t truly want it too. Marriage was work and he’d want it to be forever. And If he went along, only to have her change her mind, would it ruin everything they have? He thought it might.
“Let’s not talk about this now. I have a rare day off. I’d just like to spend it with you without any concerns. Is that alright?” he asked.

“You don’t believe me,” she said, stunned. “You think me impulsive.”

“I believe you think it is what you want, Phryne. And I don’t believe you insincere. But in a day or two you may feel differently.”

“I won’t Jack,” she said. “And, I’m a little insulted. But if you need two days to see that my mind will not change, so be it.”

“Then we’ll speak no more of it today?” he asked, this was killing him.

“If that’s what you want,” she said unhappily.

They managed to move on and have a relatively happy day, but things were a bit strained. The next day he returned to work and they fell into their familiar routine. Phryne tried several times to revisit the subject, but Jack would become uncomfortable and withdrawn. Things were off balance and it was taking a toll.

One night, about a week later, Jack had to work a late shift and Phryne asked Mac to come by. She needed some straight advice.

“OK,” Mac said, after hearing Phryne’s story. “That’s what I love about you Phryne. No one could ever say you’re predictable. A marriage proposal. Who’d have thought.”

“Apparently not Jack,” Phryne sulked. “And I don’t understand. I thought he wanted to get married.”

“Is that why you asked? To make him happy?”

“No,” she said. “Well of course I’d hoped it would make him happy, but I was mostly thinking of my own happiness.”

“So you think you’d be happy married to Jack?”

“I don’t think it, I know it,” she said emphatically. “What is it with you people thinking I don’t know my own mind? Jack seems to believe this is a flight of fancy. But when have I ever acted impulsively?”

Mac gave her an incredulous look.

“When it’s important, I mean.” Phryne said, irritated.

“Let’s try to see this from Jack’s point of view, shall we?” suggested Mac.

“Yes, that’s what I need help with,” Phryne said, leaning forward eagerly. “Why suddenly, has my ‘marrying man’ as you’ve called him, changed his mind about marriage?”

“I’m not sure it’s all that sudden Phryne. Jack made a lot of compromises to be with you. He’s a traditional man who bucked tradition and his own moral compass to have what he could with you. What you’d told him was all he could have.”

“But now I’m saying he can have more,” she argued.

“True. But for the last decade you’ve made it widely known that you would never be pinned
down, never marry. Perhaps that’s just how he sees you. As someone that can never truly be contained. Maybe the excitement of obtaining the unobtainable, holding you without chains, is part of the appeal for him.”

Phryne thought for a moment, then rejected the idea.

“No, Jack loves me. Not the chase. And we’re bound to each other regardless, chain or no chain.”

“Well then maybe he just needs time to adjust to the idea. Give him time. After all, it did take awhile for you two to get where you are now.”

“That took ages!” she cried. “I can’t wait that long again.”

Mac shrugged. Phryne schemed.

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**Epilogue**

Phryne lay in the large feather bed, staring at her hand, stretched out above her. She wiggled her fingers and smiled. The ring sparkled. Only he could have made such a perfect choice for her. The small, square-cut diamond sat alone, centered on the delicate platinum band. It was understated but elegant and she would never take it off.

They’d married quietly. Aunt Prudence insisted that the ceremony take place at her residence. Phryne and Jack enforced a very limited guest list. Dot and Jane stood up for Phryne. Hugh stood proudly at Jack’s side. Mac, Cec and Bert, Mr. Butler and Aunt P were all in attendance. A telegram of blessings arrived from England. After the ceremony, there was a small celebration.

Jack had allowed Phryne to have a new suit made for him for the occasion. It was dark, charcoal grey and tailored expertly to fit him. He wore a deep blue, patterned tie. He’d never looked more handsome.

Phryne wore a modern and sophisticated gown of dove grey with a matching fascinator adorned with feathers. Her only jewelry were the earrings Jack had given her and his first gift to her, the blue swallow brooch.

Dot had fashioned a bouquet for her of white lilies from Jack’s garden. In recent weeks they’d taken cuttings of many of his plants or dug them up and split them for transfer to Phryne’s garden. Jack would sell his little house and reside at Wardlow going forward.

It had taken nearly two weeks to convince Jack she sincerely wanted to marry him and wasn’t just being stubborn and reluctant to admit she’d spoken in haste. There had been several discussions that could most kindly be described as lively.

Dot fretted to see Miss Phryne upset. Hugh said nothing at work, but commiserated with his wife at night. His boss’s mood had been volatile.

Mac told Jack bluntly he was an idiot and Mr. Butler stayed diplomatically silent on the subject.
For all his uncertainty, Jack found himself outside the jeweler's quite often. One morning, after working late and having spent the night alone, staring at the small photo she’d framed for him, he went inside.

Even after that, he’d insisted on a long engagement in case she should change her mind. He suggested six months. They were married in three.

After the party, Jack and Phryne headed for a short, two day honeymoon at Hotel Windsor. Next year, he would take a leave from work and they would have a months long holiday overseas, funded by the sale of his house.

“You’re awake, Mrs. Robinson,” he said, returning from the suite’s private bath. His hair was wet and he wore nothing but a towel around his waist.

“I am, Inspector, but now that I look at you, I don’t feel like rising just yet. Come back to bed, my husband.”

She stretched out her hand. He saw the light glint off the ring and swallowed the lump in this throat. Jack let the towel drop. He would give her anything she ever wanted. Everything it was in his power to give.

And whenever Phryne reached for him, Jack would always be there.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading through to the end!

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