An Inspector Farquhar Story

Perhaps the most curiously interesting case in the investigative annals of Inspector E. Farquhar, and certainly one that could never be shaken from his memory, was that sequence of enquiries and encounters that commenced with the unfortunate death of Mr Charles Rupert Durose, a gentleman commoner of Magdalen College, Oxford – for this was towards the end of Farquhar's posting to the old university town. To call it a 'case' is misleading for it was not really a case at all, and might have passed as routine (though tragic for those it touched) had it not been for the Inspector's tenaciously enquiring mind and humane sympathies, which led Farquhar himself to become in a degree one of those touched by it. It was one of those times, which perhaps every policeman has experienced, when like a mystical revelation (or delusion, rather) everything that was happening, whether a missing bicycle or a tragic death, appeared knitted together in some interlocking circumstantial conspiracy. Looking back, the thoughtful detective came to view it more (perhaps) as a tragedy of human foibles, uncovered against a background of coincidences, albeit (he could not help feeling) never fully resolved.

It seemed to start with a coincidence. Farquhar needed a new cravat, but also lingered in the outfitters looking at trilbies, without which he would not on his way out have literally bumped into the glum figure of Dr Fotheringham, who was bringing his suit to be altered ready for the memorial service for Professor Turner. Farquhar was sorry to hear that the genial Professor had died, he was not of particularly advanced years was he? An age of approximately 68 plus-or-minus 2 was the conclusion, after some thought, of the very learnèd doctor, who was the world's leading expert on ancient chronology. Will Mr Bellamy succeed him? Farquhar asked. Oh no no no no no no no (approximately) was Fotheringham's response in accompaniment to plentiful headshaking and even a hint of a smile, evidently one of pity for the policeman's innocence in these matters. No no it is entirely an academic position and requires a mathematical astronomer of distinction. Pausing to allow Farquhar to look earnestly chastened and say Of course of course and Ah well, Fotheringham continued quietly: I shall offer myself – in view of the fewness of candidates here in Oxford at present, you understand. Though I have long had the impression that Turner looked upon me in the light of a successor.

Farquhar wondered – as he continued across town towards his solemn appointment – what modern astronomy was really about, considering that the learnèd Fotheringham was essentially a classicist, who searched for his information in ancient texts, while the late Professor had been a great authority on lighting-up time (his chart was used at the police station), and Mr Bellamy, the person who generally appears to run the Observatory, had (it was well known in Oxford) devoted

much of his life to stamp collecting. Not having been bred and schooled in the special atmosphere of the ancient university allowed Farquhar to contemplate the possibility that, as in other fields of learning, a peculiarly Oxonian effortlessness elevated the subject of astronomy here above the arduous observational activity that it might be expected to consist of anywhere else.

These thoughts carried him to Magdalen College, where a uniformed Constable showed him the stairwell in which the unfortunate Mr Durose had been found suspended the previous evening. Sand had been thrown over a stain at ground level. The ladder – although someone had moved it – had been present at the scene and was presumably used by the young gentleman to gain access to the means of his self-execution: a very curious ceiling fitting from which a curled-up metal wire was hanging, swaying slightly. There was some uncertainty whether the wire was already present, or whether Mr Durose had himself supplied and fitted it (it would be with some considerable difficulty). The lower end, now cut away, he had tied about his neck and, being wire rather than rope, it had cut his throat, whether or not it had (as he more probably intended) also asphyxiated him, or else broken his neck, when he had launched himself, seemingly from the ladder, into his mid-air demise.

The Constable, and (he said) his Sergeant who had earlier been in attendance, were entirely satisfied that the gentleman commoner had acted alone in this enterprise of self-murder, that no indication of coercion or collaboration was to be found, and that the reasons for it, while not known, might be sought in the more intimate areas of Mr Durose's private society, should the Inspector think it worth his while enquiring into them – since, the Constable vouchsafed, he was one of those young gentlemen which in the County Constabulary we used to call Softies, if you know what I mean sir. Farquhar did know, and did think it worth his while to look a little more into the matter, for a crime had been committed, even if it was the uniquely self-punishing crime of suicide, and the Coroner was likely to ask questions that probed somewhat into the area indicated by the Constable.

Mr Durose's room was on the next landing above, and a glance around it sufficed to characterise him, or anyway indicate the circles of society he frequented in Oxford. A tidy clutter of arty things and floral cushions gave the room a feminine feel, Farquhar thought. An Aubrey Beardsley print, possibly a reproduction, hung upon his chimney; a striking full-length female nude, an original oil painting in the colourful and realistic pre-Raphaelite style, looked over his bed; a lightweight pink suit hung in his wardrobe – a very attractive and well-cut suit, of good material which Farquhar went so far as to feel with his fingers. It also smelled very pleasantly. The bookcase contained a good deal of poetry and art, together with several books about astronomy, one of them inscribed to him from a proud ladyfriend or patroness (it looked like). His bureau contained a small drawer of letters, most of

them carefully tied in little bundles, appearing to be from home. No letter of farewell had been found; neither letter nor signs of recent use were upon the flap of his bureau or his blotting paper. Farquhar took all the letters, placing them in the brown paper package with his new cravat.

A young gentleman waiting to speak with him in a nearby room was a friend of the deceased and was distressed and dishevelled after a sleepless night following his ordeal: finding the body upon returning from the Boat Club, making abortive attempts to adjust his friend's trousers, and then summoning help. It was this young gentleman, the Constable informed Inspector Farquhar, what moved the ladder, in an ill-advised attempt to interfere with the evidence, which I have cautioned him is an offence. Mr Durose, whose body Farquhar had not yet viewed, had hung himself in his pyjamas, but the one odd thing, which the Constable could not readily explain – though he ventured to reflect that it may be symbolic – was that the pyjama trousers were around his ankles. Mr Pellegrino, the friend who had found him, a rather pretty young gentleman of Italian parentage but educated entirely in England, in concern for his friend's modesty, had made this attempt from the ladder to adjust the offending apparel, only to find that the bottoms, as he called them, were soiled, making it impossible to elevate them without added embarrassment. He wisely gave up the attempt and summoned help, but felt both remorseful for his failure to ameliorate his friend's appearance, as well as, presumably, apprehensive that the Constable meant to arrest him.

Farquhar was inclined more to sympathy with the young person, whose losses of composure rendered him as childish as his repeated attempts to apologise and recompose himself rendered him manly. Please do not distress yourself, he said, sitting beside him and placing an avuncular hand on his shoulder; at the instant of death an accidental release of bodily waste occurred, it is not uncommon, and the weight of it doubtless lowered the garment, which I assume was but lightly tied in the traditional manner. Your friend knew nothing of it, while the officers and porters who took him down will have seen worse sights. And I doubt if my Constable wishes to exacerbate your ordeal by charging you.

With touching altruism, in spite of his own distress, Mr Pellegrino remained concerned that his friend was fastidious in dress and cleanliness. Be assured, sir, that a professional man accustomed to such little difficulties, I refer to the undertaker, will render your friend at the appropriate time both gentle and respectful attention in regard to his cleanliness and dress. I will speak to him myself on the matter; and if you know which was his favourite suit and would care – if you can bring yourself – to select it from his wardrobe, I will ensure that he is dressed in it. Mr Pellegrino was comforted by the Inspector's kind assurances, and rallied considerably as they visited Mr Durose's room and a very smart and well-tailored black suit, with some velvet

trimmings, was duly selected, and also shirt and collar and a pair of velvet slippers.

The light-coloured summer suit struck me as a most attractive and nicely made piece, Farquhar said, as if extemporaneously. Oh he looked lovely in that, the young friend declared, perhaps in thoughtless haste; and then looked Farquhar in the eye, tearful once more, and said: Rupert and I were ... The dread of words evidently repelled his resolve, as it so commonly does, and he bowed his head and sniffed for a while before resuming. He was accounted an Adonis among the inner circle of the aesthetes, but his friends there were less true and their intimacies less meaningful, if I may be excused for putting it thus. I entirely understand and it is kind of you to tell me, said Farquhar with deliberate casualness. Tell me one more thing sir: why do you think he did this? Might it be to do with these intimacies among the aesthetes? Mr Pellegrino said that he had thought about it overnight, indeed he had agonised over it, and also about Mrs Fenton-Poyle's great possessiveness of him. But in the end his thoughts tended largely towards his friend's university studies. Rupert's greatest worry of late was that, having changed from mathematics to classics on Fotheringham's advice, he had lost all chance of the career he desired in astronomy; and returning to Oxford for the new term to learn of Professor Turner's death had left him convinced that he would not now be allowed to work at the Observatory.

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Although he had not liked to question the brave Mr Pellegrino further, Inspector Farquhar was intrigued by the thought of a possessive patroness, possibly the person who had inscribed the astronomy book. He mentioned the name – Mrs Fenton Boyle, he thought it was – to the young college fellow who seemed to have been delegated to hover about him wringing his hands and saying what an awful thing to happen in 'noughth' week. The fellow thought he had heard this lady mentioned at high table as being a recent benefactress of the college. He admitted Farquhar to the 'new' library (an exceedingly old library, it seemed) to consult reference books, whence he would proceed to the bursary where there were files of information on all students.

Burke's Landed Gentry and other such works, while saying nothing of Duroses, informed him that Lieutenant-Colonel Fenton-Poyle was serving in India, but that his step-mother was living, the widow of Charles Cuthbert Fenton-Poyle, MA, of Fenton Winyates, Wiltshire, and Peterhouse, a considerable landowner and also a well-known art connoisseur. This widow, his second wife (no issue), was Charlotte, youngest daughter of Sir Frederick Henderson Mawdsley-Horner, Bart, JP, of Church Winyates, Wiltshire, and Lincoln's Inn, a barrister. Mrs Fenton-Poyle continued to reside at the family seat of Fenton Winyates Hall, an edifice of some architectural note, having been entirely remodelled in Victorian times in lavish terracotta under Pugin's

supervision, and later decorated internally by William Morris. At one time the house was a famous venue for artistic soirées. So the widow perhaps was one of those well-to-do hostesses (there are not a few about the countryside within ready travelling distance of Oxford) through whom Oxford men often find introductions into society.

College records recorded that Mr Charles Rupert Durose was the only son of the late Reginald Durose, of Tunstall, Staffordshire, a 'colour' manufacturer, and his wife Charlotte, daughter of the late Sir Frederick Mawdsley-Horner, Bart, of Church Winyates, Wiltshire. Colour manufacturing is pursued as an adjunct to the pottery industry, of which Tunstall is one of the centres. Mr Durose had unfortunately died during the early childhood of his son. It was no great feat of detection for Farquhar to conclude that Mrs Durose had remarried and then been once more widowed, and was one and the same with Mrs Fenton-Poyle – a possessive mother, not a possessive patroness.

Farquhar noted in passing that the late Mr Fenton-Poyle was a contemporary of Sir Frederick Mawdsley-Horner, that is, he was approximately the same age as his second wife's father. He had heirs by his first marriage, but had provided (the college file reassured him) very generously for his step-son Durose's education. Mrs Fenton-Poyle continued her late husband's magnanimous patronage of art, a fact of sufficient interest to someone in Magdalen College for several newspaper cuttings in witness thereof to have been placed in the file; she was also (one cutting happened to reveal) a friend of the noted playwright Mr Bernard Shaw. The bursary file also indicated, through an as yet unfinished correspondence which it contained, that she wished to endow a scholarship or something of the kind in astronomy, though the college was suggesting it would be more useful if established on less restrictive terms.

For some reason – nothing more than his being an observant policeman perhaps – it had lodged in Farquhar's mind that the painting in Mr Durose's bedroom, a striking if somewhat overly nude nude, bore the signature CFP and a fairly recent date. Otherwise he would have thought it the work of Burne-Jones or one of that group of Victorian painters; though on reflection its degree of realism, or not to be too coy about it, its careful depiction of curly golden hair on the lady's lower abdomen, signalled it as a more modern work. It was obviously going to be something like Charles Francis Palmer or Cuthbert Fortesque Pilkington, and of no import. Yet either intuition or idle curiosity caused the thoughtful detective to spend a little time dipping into art books and catalogues. He did indeed find the name of Mrs C. Fenton-Poyle, but as benefactress rather than as artist. Going back to the pre-war period however he came across several references to a Charlotte Durose; she had even been hung at the Royal Academy. Be that as it may, he felt it hardly probable that one's mother, even possessed of the initials CFP, would give one a painting she had done of a shamelessly nude lady standing by a lily pond, nor that one would display it at the

foot of one's bed like that. It was more likely to be something he had acquired in Oxford, after discovering his attraction to more decadent tastes among the university's community of aesthetes. Farquhar had forgotten to note Mr Pellegrino's forenames or initials.

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His evening's reading took Inspector Farquhar deeply if allusively (there being no copies of letters out) into the personal world of the late Mr Rupert Durose. A few letters from tutors and college officials said next to nothing (come and see me at such-a-time to discuss it), though presumably some were alluding to the change in his course of study which he had effected the previous term. Of a different order were several pretentious effusions from a person residing near to Woodeaton, evidently a frequenter of the long dinings and smokings of (Farquhar could not but suppose) the inner circle of Oxford's aesthetes. They gave the impression that a degree of intimacy that might well be unsavoury pertained to the liaisons formed in that circle, while yet the patronising tone of the correspondent hardly evinced true fondness or friendship. Mr Pellegrino's assessment was perhaps confirmed. The signature looked like Thomas, which Farquhar would have taken to be a surname had he not noticed Mr Pellegrino refer to his friend as Rupert. Farquhar was not sure if the convention had changed among today's students, as regards the use of surnames, and still less what it was among aesthetes and sodomites.

Most of the letters were tied in small bundles with pinkish coloured ribbon. The smallest was a group signed Algie. There was no question, if one were to be tolerantly candid (and Farquhar always endeavoured to be so), that these were love letters. Their tone was quite different from Thomas's. They stated their feelings with disarming openness, yet were worried and earnest, as youthful avowals of love tend to be; but they were very nicely written, and spoke from an honest and tender heart which could not help touch one. There were few only because, it was obvious, the two young men were much in each other's company during term time, and even during the late vacation. Farquhar felt reasonably confident that he had already made the acquaintance of their author.

The rest, in several chronologically sequenced bundles, were a year's worth of letters emanating from Fenton Winyates in Wiltshire – letters from home – numbering one or two per week during term time. They were full of personal insight and quirky detail, far more than Farquhar could linger over, his need being only to divine a broad picture of the young gentleman and his circumstances. Yet there was one distracting feature to them that gave him pause. They read as if they were from two or possibly three different people, except for one thing that Farquhar found unaccountably odd (and never entirely satisfied himself about, though he gave it much thought): they were all in exactly the same handwriting.

If all from one person, their changes of mood must amount, at the risk of dabbling in the dangerous field of psychology (though how can a detective not do that?), to a split personality. Exceedingly warm, witty, intelligently written letters, unashamedly loving, one might almost say unnaturally so, constituted the majority voice, here and there interrupted by a colder, harsher, admonishing voice, formal and humourless; or, occasionally, by a curiously lyrical or poetic one. Not all were signed. But the first category always began Darling Rupert and ended with various, often quite imaginative, loving something-or-others (words like idolater and satellite stayed in his mind for their unusualness) and then the name Lottie, signed large and with an expressive flourish, the L curvaceous and elongated, the e somersaulting back over itself to cross the ts. The sterner tone was usually framed by the cooler Dear Rupert and a terse, neat, businesslike CFP.

The good-natured letters had all the informality and gaiety of youth, beyond any doubt, and their expressions of affection were lavish to excess, not so much (allowing that they were private letters meant for one pair of eyes) in any matter of decency as in their sheer exuberance. They were not love letters in the confessional or tentative sense encountered earlier: they were the letters of someone with whom an intimate relationship of love already existed. The obvious assumption was a young fiancée or wife. Yet the stern letters in the identical ink, paper, and handwriting would be taken in isolation as those of a disapproving matriarch. And the initials on them could hardly be doubted to convey the name Charlotte Fenton-Poyle, the name of Mr Durose's mother.

The only interpretation alternative to a strangely inconstant or fragmented personality that the Inspector could think of was that the widow Fenton-Poyle was too grand or too agèd to write her own letters, and the gay young Lottie, whoever she may be, was taking them down to her dictation. There was no statement to that effect, but of course it would be obvious to Mr Durose. The stern letters invariably expressed concern for his studies, which the others hardly mentioned. He noticed also that the rarer lyrical effusions usually alluded, in high, idealistic tones, to astronomical studies, the subject that Mr Durose had (if Farquhar had understood his dilemma rightly) hoped to study at the Observatory, and perhaps make a career of, but had then worried might no longer be possible after changing his actual degree course to classics, or else after hearing of the astronomy Professor's unfortunate death.

None of the epistolary voices struck Farquhar as unusually possessive. Lottie's sheer ebullience must have conveyed that impression, had she not sometimes acquitted herself by seeming to make a joke of it, while her informality and frivolity likewise undermined it. And also except for one other very queer thing: her letters contained allusions to what

he took (though he was reading only half of the conversation) to be Mr Durose's confessions of his attraction to other men, and his inclination to the practices pertaining to it. Far from possessive, the writer's response was to approve and encourage. Farquhar could not persuade himself of any other reading.

Here are some extracts the Inspector made from these letters, that is, the loving and frivolous ones, brief specimens from among many, including some of those parts that he was given pause by or found his mind irresistibly meditating upon.

My darling Rupert, / Since you ask, I do not particularly care for the usual appellation you employ, & would feel deeply honoured if you could bring yourself to call me Lottie in writing, as you do when you are here & we are being most particularly intime. Whether Dear or Dearest or (may I not hope?) Darling should depend on how you truly feel.

It sounds jolly boring to me! But you know teachers need giving presents. I was thinking of a book of the sayings of Oscar Wilde. But I suppose he would just translate them into Greek, or into equations, or into Greek equations. A saucy carte postale will have to do instead. I'll smuggle one to you.

How very much I miss you at this dark time of year; I suppose you are warm and comfortable and surrounded by your new young friends and their clouds of smoke and chatter, while I shiver about this mildewy house. I daily read art books but frankly long for you to bring back more stimulating conversation.

You're right, & it has pride of place in my chambre. In the hour that I contemplate it (my mind sees perfectly) I imagine myself stepping down from yours & embracing you, & you must imagine yourself doing the same, & I shall feel embraced & not solitary at all.

I don't know what became of the other photos of me. Perhaps Rogers stole them for his altar! Apart from the one Daddy took I didn't like them very much, auntie is far more handsome deshabille (& more like a tall boy than a sideboard!).

Perhaps "Darling" was a mistake was it? Anyway it was a beautiful one, and I read your letter over and over just for that, my dearest darling boy ... Forgive me for wanting so much for you.

I am intrigued by your mysterious new friend & you are right that I am most jealous to know you have shared "our" kiss with another. You must bring her here at the next vacation & I shall stand beside her & effortlessly expunge her from your heart. (Or if I fail she is welcome to you!)

Thankyou for undeceiving me concerning your special amour. I had forgotten it is the custom for men to kiss each other at Oxford. You are silly to think I might disapprove. I like to embrasser the occasional homme myself, though of course I would draw the line at an Italian. (When I was in Italy I limited myself entirely to expatriots!) ... You may still bring him, & if I don't like him I'll make him kiss Charlie.

It is just exactly that special to me too. No one shall ever adore you as I do. But you must not allow yourself to be lonely. Please do not worry, I do not mind Algie at all, you must do whatever you like with him & consult only your own feelings. Your Venus looks over you with unselfish joy: guilt is vanquished in her openness of heart. I would lay down my life sooner than impede your happiness, my own most beloved, my best beloved in this world. Your loving indulgencer, / Lottie.

Several fairly recent letters, from earlier in the summer, referred to the concerns over his change of university course, and were giving strong endorsement to his studying astronomy. These same letters also contained the only example that Farquhar spotted of the plural 'we', implying that the writer did (at least in this instance) speak also for a second person – the fiancée and the mother, he surmised. There was also a further reference to 'auntie' – so it was beginning to look as though Lottie might be Mr Durose's cousin, which would make a good deal of sense.

But dearest is it too late to change your mind about the course? I can tell it is worrying you. Professor Turner's advice seems very sound to me, & Captain Churchill's friend says he's a terribly nice man. Of course I shall support you without reservation in whatever you decide. But should you crave the opinion of those to whom you are dearer than every star in the ciel we would (as Venus) point our Adonis to those stars & send Socrates packing, the old bumble. Oops, Mr FP's portrait just dived off the wall in despair!

To study the stars is a wonderful thing to do in this twentieth century, something past ages could not do, something modern and forward looking; something I cannot do – but you can do it and tell me about them. How many are there? How far away are they really? Do you think they really are (did you read the article I sent you?) moving away and the whole universe growing?

Colour & light are my lifeblood, but how can they tell you what stars are made of? (Auntie knows. She'll explain later & I'll die of boredom.) ... If I betray a teeny bias re your dilemma, you know why. It would mean a very great deal to someone who so loves you. But do as your heart tells you, in that as in the other matter. I am merely its imperceptible satellite, your loving / Lottie.

In contrast the fewer letters in the sterner voice – equal perhaps in their sincerity of concern for the young man's good – were comparatively cold, and persistently yoked to the pursuit of seriousness.

Dear Rupert, / I do wish I could read into your letters some hint that you take seriously the opportunity that Mr Fenton-Poyle's money has given you to build serious foundations for your life and career. Of course you cannot avoid friends and the river and dining; but do please remember that Oxford provides other opportunities, by which a young man may endow himself with that learning and culture so necessary to commence him in a useful life. Do please not neglect your proper studies, and strive to do well in them. Write what your tutor is like – he

is a very distinguished person in the world of scholarship you know, I have looked him up; and let us hear less of these time wasters and poets and worse that you have fallen in with. / CFP.

The working hypothesis had to be of a doting young fiancée or similar, a girl of very modern attitudes, endearingly or incorrigibly flirtatious and gay. Most probably also his cousin. Perhaps she did him the favour of looking in upon his agèd parent, or was employed as a kind of secretary by her. The picture could not entirely dispell a hauntingly queer feeling to the correspondence. It was perhaps something about the intelligence of the girl, her quirky wit and peculiar tolerance. Farquhar felt he should (as maturer people do of the communications of young persons) be appalled at the relaxed style and degenerate attitudes. But how infectious the adoration of this loving satellite. He could not bring himself to condemn her. And how sad – he suddenly remembered why he was reading them – how tragic that she had been deprived of her best beloved under his own merciless hand. How could any immediate, passing worry be so unbearable as to expunge the consolation of one who loved him so very dearly that she vanquished guilt in her openness of heart?

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Inspector Farquhar was fairly certain that no suspicious circumstances attended upon the death of Professor Turner. His enquiries were limited to the most discreet, for he had no wish to scandalise anyone. He did go so far as to speak briefly to Dr Gibson, the most reliable and well-informed of the medical men, who thought the Swedish doctors entirely competent and Turner's general state of health probably run down. Mrs Mattingly, a friend of Mrs Turner, had heard nothing untoward. Turner had been tired and (she used the same expression) run down, from pressure of work some thought, but she was more inclined to note that his well-known buoyancy of personality had been deflated by the dispute with the Radcliffe Trustees. But surely no one would attach the least plausibility to the idea, contained in a memorandum from one of Farquhar's detective Constables, that some faction of enemies within the university had conspired to cause his death. It was, literally, loose talk overheard in a boisterous public house in Walton Street. Perhaps the inventor of it was a loyal student or servant inspired to the delusion by treating his sorrow with alcohol. Farquhar filed the memo for no action.

Mentioning it to Mrs Mattingly, he remembered how she knew, or knew something about, or knew someone who knew or knew something about, everyone, certainly in the northern hemisphere. Gossip, in other words, was her domain. Duroses? A pottery family, there certainly weren't any in Wiltshire. What about a Mrs Fenton-Poyle? One of Godward's models turned gold-digger, she said without hesitation (Mrs Mattingly was entirely *au fait* with the worlds of art and scandal): could have been a great artist herself but preferred to be

very, very rich by marrying old Fenton-Poyle, you know, the art patron – friend of William Morris. She gave the Ashmolean the pick of his collection when he died; or was that *Miss* Fenton-Poyle? Parker would know all about them. What a tragedy.

Farquhar had told her nothing of Mr Durose, and so knitted his brow with inquisitiveness at her final remark. A woman like that, so talented and surrounded by such beauty – and a great beauty herself, formerly – going blind like that. She's blind? said Farquhar with genuine surprise. I heard she went blind, said Mrs Mattingly; or am I thinking of the old lady at Hampton Poyle?

Farquhar's call on Professor Poulton later that morning was in fact routine – a Constable would have done it had Farquhar's bowling partner not been the husband of a friend of Mrs Poulton. Though it would also be an opportunity to further satisfy his mind with regard to Professor Turner, knowing Poulton to be well-acquainted with him (though himself a Professor of biology). But first things first. He noted down the details of the strange garden ornament that had been stolen: it was actually part of the tube of an old telescope, discarded from the Observatory, in which a plant had been planted, and had disappeared from below their front window two nights ago. About six inches in diameter, the Professor thought. The most likely prognosis was that it would appear in some odd place nearby, atop a spikey fence or finial, the result of a nocturnal student enterprise. Poulton had already mentioned it to the porter of Keble College. Ah well, said Farquhar, it makes a change from bicycles.

He accepted a cup of tea and proceeded to mention that he had but recently heard of your friend Professor Turner's death: during a conference back in August wasn't it? He was surprised when the reaction, though sorry for his colleague's demise, was more to lament the pressures he had been placed under by the controversies within Oxford astronomy. Farquhar understood little of the issues involved, which he assumed were (as usual in such matters) largely financial in origin. So why was he in dispute with the Radcliffe Trustees? No, that's not the complexion of it at all, was the reply. The *university* is in dispute with the Radcliffe Trustees. As Farquhar knew, they owned another observatory in Oxford (not the one at which Turner had been Professor), but wished to close it down, or rather to remove abroad. Turner's dilemma was that he supported this move, in the larger interests of the discipline of astronomy (Poulton felt sure), even while his employer, or powerful factions that presumed to speak for the university, was opposing it vehemently. Farquhar inferred that Turner had been greatly oppressed by this awkward business; the implication that it might thus have hastened his death was not entirely dismissed by the Poultons.

As he was in Museum Road anyway, Farquhar headed for the Observatory, which was a little way behind the Museum on the edge of

the University Parks. Things were very gloomy there, as was only to be expected. Mr Bellamy was unwell but Miss Bellamy – Farquhar was not sure if she was his sister or his daughter – received and promised to pass on his condolences, it was kind of the Inspector to call with them, they were all naturally very saddened. It seemed odd to Farquhar that a lady should hold authority in a department of the university, except of course in the women's colleges, as they are called. Miss Bellamy was in charge of Turner's seismographic department, which studied earthquakes and, from what Farquhar had heard, was considered the Observatory's most important work. As she seemed a reasonably friendly person, Farquhar enquired about the opportunities there for students of astronomy, he realised it was a very specialised pursuit. She confirmed how little it was followed by students, and usually from personal enthusiasm. Mathematics was absolutely essential, though of course both Turner and Fotheringham encouraged historical investigations too. Oh yes, anyone (self financed you understand) earnestly engaged in astronomical work was very welcome to pursue it there while they were in Oxford, the Professor is – or rather was, she reminded herself – exceedingly hospitable and encouraging. Too much so at times.

Farquhar wondered if she had encountered a young gentleman named Durose who had hoped to work there. It did not ring a bell. A pupil of Fotheringham's—. Ah, that must be the Magdalen man I've heard them speak of; no I haven't met him yet. After Mods he changed to classics as he hadn't done all that well with maths, Dr Fotheringham seemed to think that was the best solution to keep him in Oxford. He seems to have felt, interposed Farquhar, that he'd made the wrong decision, and it would deprive him of the chance to study here. I know, silly boy, said Miss Bellamy; he wrote the Professor such an agonised letter, but there's no problem at all really. Do you know if Professor Turner had reassured him on this point? asked Farquhar. He was a little behind with correspondence, said Miss Bellamy. The letter is still on his desk I'm afraid; but Uncle intends dealing with all correspondence as soon as he can. I'm sure he'll tell him he's still welcome to come.

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At Magdalen College Inspector Farquhar had an interview with Dr Fotheringham regarding his late pupil Mr Durose. The doctor had had no idea of it, he said, when they met the other day, hearing the news only over lunch. Why ever might he have done such a thing? My hopes that you would answer that very question are to be disappointed then, said Farquhar. He was not a very good student, the glum don mused; too easily distracted by the social life, as so many of them are nowadays. We changed him from maths to greats, I had hopes he would manage better. Farquhar had difficulty seeing how the demanding classics syllabus could be an easy alternative to mathematics, but knew little enough of the requirements of either. I gather he had his heart set on doing astronomy, he said; might he have

thought on reflection that he had made the wrong decision, altering his course of study I mean? He was no astronomer, Fotheringham sighed; I could never picture him getting up the necessary maths, never mind the physics you need nowadays. I told him it was too late to change back; Turner may have given him a different impression. I thought it best to direct him towards a historical approach. I don't know if it would have taken; we shall never know now.

The tutor said it all glumly enough, but in truth did not seem to Farquhar to be all that concerned. Indeed not, said the thoughtful detective, which is a tragedy, for himself and for his family. He seems to have received encouragement to the study of astronomy from that quarter. Fotheringham had gathered so too, but clearly knew less even than Farquhar about them, speculating (incorrectly) that his father had been an amateur astronomer. Gunther knows them, he had some old instruments from them; the boy said Gunther had recommended Magdalen to his mother. Pity. Farquhar did not seek clarification of the ambiguous appendix, but did wonder whether there could have been a misunderstanding – I mean in relation to his status at the Observatory? Would Turner still have allowed him in, notwithstanding his change of course? It didn't make any difference, Fotheringham muttered dismissively. Did Mr Durose know that? The don shrugged. He had by now assembled some books and papers in front of him as if he knew his interrogator was to leave directly. So Farquhar thanked him for his time and left directly.

He had no sooner emerged into the quadrangle than he was waylaid by the Vice President, who came at him across the grass and seemed determined to usher him into a dark, hidden cloister and sit him on an uncomfortable stone ledge. The elderly academic had a grievous problem, he said: The point is, Farquhar (for he had met the Inspector several times before, usually in relation to bicycles), not to beat too far around the bush, this has come just as we feel college has lived down its unfortunate reputation. Warren, God rest his soul (he was alluding to the college's late President), has worked absolutely miracles with the old place, as regards all that nasty business – you'll remember how it was (Farquhar did not, in fact, remember how it was, but he knew what the Vice President meant; college people assume the trifling affairs of their little enclaves are everyone's chief concern: he was speaking of Magdalen College's reputation at one time as a nest of sodomy, not to mince words) – you remember the old jeer, the Sods of Saint Slut's and all that; we've lived it down splendidly, with all this rowing! It's astonishing how the fascination of buggery dissipates when you give them something energetic to do and make them shower together. The President, I mean Sir Herbert, was just brilliant at that kind of thing. The last thing we want is to find it's all shot, through the inconsiderateness of one nancy-boy.

Farquhar could forgive the flustered and preoccupied don, but half thought that perhaps he oughtn't, so he gave him a mildly disapproving

look. Oh I know, the man continued, I know; but it's the ones who're left behind and all that, don't you agree? And oh the poor mother, they say she dotes on him. She wanted to give us money for a demyship and put him into it but you can't do that sort of thing these days, you just can't do it that way. She's a very fine lady you know, his mother, by all accounts, a great beauty in her day, but also, what she did during the war, it's heroic, I've never heard a story like it. Gunther knows her, he'll tell you, it was that friend he brought to dine once told it, absolutely heroic. The poor poor lady. Of course, we must think of her, that's the way to look at it isn't it? I know you're not a college man yourself.

Curiously enough, Farquhar *was* still following the rambling academic's import, though he found it hard to imagine how a tutor of philosophy got by with such limited capabilities of articulation. He was asking Farquhar to protect the college from salacious and scandalous implications relating to what he (the Vice President) took for-granted was the cause of Mr Durose's suicide, because the former reputation of Magdalen in that respect (from the days of Oscar Wilde and Lord Whatsit and their friends) had been arduously but effectively replaced by a much more robust and sporting image under the recently deceased President; and then, chastened by the Inspector's frown, he had thought of reinforcing this plea, or at least dressing it in better clothes, by appeal to the feelings of the mother. Farquhar was intrigued to learn that the old lady was a war heroine, but disinclined to seek elaboration from his present informant – he would doubtless find a terser account of it from Gunther or some other source. There was however one thing he wanted to ask.

Were you aware of his worries over his studies, and his changing his course in mid stream as it were? The Vice President looked rather as if he had forgotten whom they were talking about. The young gentleman who took his own life? And then suddenly he looked all-comprehending. Ah yes of course, yes, you've hit on it, that's it. I knew I could rely on you Farquhar. You're not like most bobbies, you understand how things work. Brilliant, I think you've hit on the best solution all round. For the mother too, eh? (He patted Farquhar on the arm, conspiratorially.) Good man, knew I could rely on you, glad we bumped into each other. But but is it unusual, Farquhar persevered, to change course like that? I mean does the college often allow it? The old don was already scurrying off towards one of the passages that lead out of the cloister, but paused thoughtfully. Mmm, I don't think that's the line to take: it's quite common actually, after Mods, nothing all that unusual; up to the tutor really. Presumably, said Farquhar, Dr Fotheringham will have advised him soundly and in his best interests, you'd expect? Brilliant – Farquhar you amaze me! That's it! Hang it on Fotheringay, he can stand it, and no one likes him anyway. Only if you absolutely have to, mind. (He gave a chuckle of delight, at a problem so perfectly resolved.) Hang it on Fotherdiddle. And off he scurried.

An evening newspaper had carried a brief report of Mr Charles Durose's death, which Inspector Farquhar intended taking little notice of when it appeared on his desk, but then (as is human nature) read it anyway. After reporting the bare facts, it ended: Deceased was the son by her first marriage of Mrs Fenton-Poyle, an artist of some note in her own right and, in her younger day, one of the dazzling beauties who posed for Alma-Tadema. Farquhar was slightly irritated that the newspaper reporter had got further with investigating the mother's artistic associations than he had, and when next in Blackwell's did allow himself to browse a book of reproductions of Alma-Tadema's graceful classical nudes. They and the style of painting reminded him very much of the painting over Mr Durose's bed. However, the fact that they were painted in the 1870s suggested that a mistake had been made, for Mrs Fenton-Poyle would thus be too old to have a twenty year old son – Farquhar pictured her as approaching or certainly not much above sixty.

In fact two evenings later a correction appeared. The editor tendered his apologies to Mrs Charlotte Fenton-Poyle, and was grateful to her for correcting him on this point. The present Mrs Fenton-Poyle is indeed a noted artist, and also modelled when she was a student (and was therefore, the editor had no doubt, a dazzling beauty too); but the dazzling beauty who had posed for Alma-Tadema was in fact the first Mrs Fenton-Poyle, whose Christian name was also Charlotte. The second Mrs Fenton-Poyle is her cousin as well as her namesake.

Since he was in Blackwell's, Farquhar thought he might as well call in at the Old Ashmolean to see if Mr Gunther was free for a chat. He was just inside talking to his janitor. They paced the echoing gallery of the Lewis Evans Collection, an exhibition of sundials of which Mr Gunther was the proud Curator and on which he was (of late) a renowned authority (though in fact Gunther was an authority on something different every time one encountered him: when Farquhar had met him first, a decade earlier, regarding a bicycle, he seemed to be some kind of geologist and talked with unmistakable expertise about Italian volcanoes). Farquhar described as best he could Professor Poulton's telescope tube alias plant pot, and Gunther reacted as if, had he known of its existence at all, he would himself have gone and stolen it. Ah well, said Farquhar, and put away his notebook.

Sad to hear about Turner, I suppose he was a useful ally of yours. The Curator confessed that he and Turner were old friends, and went so far as to say that his public support had been crucial to the resurrection of this great museum (he was presumably speaking of the building, rather than the few makeshift cabinets of old sundials which he had installed in it). And just at a time when there were likely to be upheavals in connection with the closure of the Radcliffe Observatory: vandalism, Mr Gunther called it, and was desperate to be allocated extra space so

that he could rescue the large telescopes before the scrap merchants got to them. Farquhar essayed some jest about the dangers of turning them into plant pots, but Gunther was too earnest on the subject to notice jests. No reason to think anyone wished harm upon a genial chappie like Turner? Gunther looked puzzled. Sorry, I've been a policeman too long, quipped Farquhar, and made himself look interested in the sundials.

I don't doubt the Lindemann people will be glad to see the back of him, Mr Gunther said with seriousness, alluding to the science Professor who was behind the university's current dispute with the Radcliffe Trustees. Apparently Turner's support for the Trustees had earned him a public roasting from this powerful and outspoken colleague. I suppose a nice fellow like Turner was a bit uncomfortable being drawn into such a squabble, speculated Farquhar. Gunther wasn't so sure, sounding as if a good lashing of controversy was what you had to expect. Shall we be seeing continuity at the observatory? I'm thinking really of a young chap who was wanting to work there, thinking perhaps it won't work out now. Gunther looked at him as though he had asked a deeply perceptive question. It depends entirely whom they appoint, he said, logically enough; but you know nothing's sacred in these times. The trend is to bring in outsiders and sweep places with a new broom, and unless your young chap is part of it he'll get swept aside with many another, and the history of the place too. Inspector Farquhar was in the process of saying Ah well again, in that all-purpose manner of his, and beginning to descend the stairs, when he remembered, or affected to remember, another casual little thing.

By the way, I understand you know Mrs Fenton-Poyle? Slightly, was the unconcerned reply. Captain Spencer-Churchill had put him in touch with her, as she had some items of apparatus from a scientifically-inclined kinsman, or a relative of her late husband's I think it was. Nothing very important as it turned out. I recommended Magdalen for her son, but he isn't doing very well there. Funnily enough he wants to study at the Observatory too. Why do you ask?

I'm terribly sorry Gunther, said Farquhar, I've approached the matter with unforgiveable clumsiness. It's the son that's my reason for asking. I'm sorry to tell you he's taken his own life ... Mr Gunther looked shocked; and as the Inspector briefly summarised the events, including the manner of the suicide, the gaunt Curator grew distinctly paler and sat down on the wooden steps of the Old Ashmolean's grand staircase, as if he felt ill. I'm so sorry to have imparted the news to you so clumsily, reiterated Farquhar. It was Manley and myself *did* that, said Gunther, and went on, to Farquhar's utter astonishment (for that was not the reason he broached the matter with Gunther at all), to identify the precise history and purpose of the curious fitting in the ceiling of the stairwell at Magdalen College, with its remnant of deadly wire. It was installed as a suspension for a Foucault's pendulum which Mr Manley, the college laboratory assistant, had helped Gunther and some

other science students set up as an experiment a good many years before. Scientific talk seemed to cheer Gunther up, as he explained the principles and meaning of Foucault's pendulum experiment. Until recently he had himself been the science tutor at Magdalen, but he wasn't involved any more, and in truth hadn't seen Mr Durose more than twice since he came up. Though he was aware that Turner had had dealings with him.

Oh his poor mother, he suddenly said, remembering how the conversation had started. You obviously know how close they were: she quite dotes upon him, in her odd way. I haven't met her, said Farquhar, but I might well need to speak with her; tricky business, not looking forward to it; she'll perhaps be turning up now ... Never comes to town, said Gunther; somewhat reclusive. I heard – but I doubt if it's correct – that she had gone blind, said Farquhar. Well yes, not really, she wears pebble spectacles that terribly emphasise her eyes but allow her to make things out; I suppose it could have deteriorated, it's a couple of years since I met her. It reminded Farquhar, of course, as it had when Mrs Mattingly first mentioned it, of the problem of the letters: She wouldn't be able to correspond then? Oh yes, said Gunther, I had several letters from her about taking the instruments, and another about astrolabes – she's very interested in astronomy, and a couple since about Durose himself. I don't know that she writes them with her own hand, now you come to mention it, but she responds very rapidly and efficiently. The real tragedy is she had to give up her painting; according to Spencer-Churchill, who's her neighbour, she was accounted very talented, and has been exhibited. I'm sure he *has* something of hers. Mr Durose? said Farquhar. No, Spencer-Churchill.

The poor old lady, said Farquhar. Do you suppose the condition adds to her sternness? Mr Gunther looked slightly baffled and did not reply. It's just that I read some of her letters to her son, in attempting to form a picture of his circumstances you understand; exceedingly matriarchal and stern, and rather cool, I thought. Gunther shook his head: That is not the Mrs Fenton-Poyle I met; she is a lady of quite the opposite fabric, quite without anything of the matriarch about her. Really? You amaze me, said Farquhar, angling for more. No no, the lady I met was dotty but charming, sparkled with charm and wit, and when we drifted into conversation about her son – this was a couple of years back, when he was wondering what to do – what struck one was the opposite of cool and stern, she spoke of him with a warmth of attachment that was almost indecent. I half expected her to take up residence in Oxford during term – it has been known. You're saying she was possessive? said Farquhar. No, I wouldn't call it possessiveness at all: too relaxed an indulgence of him perhaps, more like a mischievous sister; she seemed incapable of guiding him. I may be doing her an injustice, but I ended up thinking – pleasant as she was – that pulling free of her and subjecting himself to a stiffer discipline would be the best thing for him. He wasn't getting on terribly well though; yet how would he have

come to such a crisis as to kill himself? The poor woman will be devastated. She had hopes of him being a great astronomer you know.

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Inspector Farquhar had forgotten to ask Mr Gunther, indeed he had probably entirely forgotten, it may not even have found its way into his notebook, about the matter of Mrs Fenton-Poyle being some kind of hero in the war. However, an answer (of sorts) awaited him on his desk at the police station when he returned from seeing the undertaker – for Farquhar was as good as his word, and fulfilled his promise to Mr Pellegrino as soon as he learned whom the family had appointed. His detective Constable, delegated to retrieve anything pertinent from Mr Durose's room, hopefully including wallet and diary (absent from Farquhar's own brief search), had deposited at his desk a small heap of possibly pertinent objects. No diary had turned up, and he seemed, from various surviving specimens, to be one of those who rely upon noting down appointments on odd scraps of paper and the backs of envelopes. The wallet contained, as wallets do, a windowed compartment where a photograph was displayed, and it was the face of an exceedingly pretty young lady. Lottie, said Farquhar aloud, he was so struck by it, and immediately put it together with the provisional image he had formed of the author of the gay and loving letters.

The back of the photograph was blank. But behind it in the compartment were preserved two small folded papers: a newspaper cutting and a letter, or what seemed to be part of a letter, the other pages not present. It could almost have been a poem, had it not been written out prosaically – it shared with poetry an impression that it said something profound without readily yielding to comprehension. Its handwriting was the same as the letters Farquhar had read, but it entirely lacked Lottie's gay and jocular tone; likewise it embodied a passionate intensity alien to the sterner voice. It was still a mystery how this occasional lyrical persona related to the others.

As I think of you, my darling, my only dearest reason for living and having lived, a lovely cool breeze comes in from the verandah, and my coming companion, darkness, folds me gently in his embrace; yet I can picture an evening sky ablaze with your million million stars. Count them for me my love ... And so it went on. Farquhar noted that its writer set very great store by Mr Durose's studying astronomy, and wondered if the 'darkness' alluded to might be blindness, but he could make little of the metaphorical hyperbole that followed. Primarily it was (he supposed) a paean of love. Was this a third person who loved him, or the matriarch lowering her mask of sternness? Or was it the loving Lottie in a mood of poetic reverie, or melancholy?

The newspaper cutting was easier to understand. It was headed: Memorial Service for Captain Durose / Heroism of Miss Fenton-Poyle. An inscription dated it to 1916; it must have been from a local paper.

The family of Sir Frederick Mawdsley-Horner has sustained a second mortal blow, so soon after the loss of Lieutenant-Commander Mawdsley-Horner, RN, with the gallant death of Captain Durose, husband of Sir Frederick's youngest daughter. Captain Durose had been mentioned in dispatches shortly before he fell in action on the Western Front on or about the 14th inst.

In a memorial address at St Michael's church, Church Winyates, on Sunday, the Revd J. C. Barton recollected the young man who came among them and so quickly made himself a useful member of the community and congregation. Many of them would treasure the colourful portraits he had done of them, while others will remember his work as a Sunday-school teacher.

He praised the fortitude of his young widow, who has refused to take compassionate leave from her nursing duties, and would be travelling back to London immediately after the service.

He then referred to another parishioner very much in everyone's thoughts at this time, Mrs Durose's cousin Miss Fenton-Poyle. So determined had she been to play her part that she had joined that sterling vanguard of ladies who defied the War Office and followed our boys as volunteer medical auxiliaries. She was now an ambulance driver near the Western Front. Unfortunately nothing had been heard from her for two months.

Before reading the 23rd Psalm Revd Barton asked, on behalf of Mrs Durose, that their prayers today should be not only for the soul of the gallant Captain, whom no one could doubt was safe in the arms of his Saviour, but also for the well-being of their heroic and beloved cousin.

Fortunately news has since arrived that Miss Fenton-Poyle is safe. She states in a letter to her father, Mr C. Fenton-Poyle, that the need for medical assistance there is very great indeed, and she drives her motor ambulance as near to the Front as she dare several times a day, saving many lives.

The Wiltshire Gazette says British Pluck was never better demonstrated. Our editorial office will gladly forward all donations Doubled to the subscription fund for medical supplies announced on our front page.

The blazer or sports jacket that had produced the wallet also contained a letter sealed in an envelope addressed to 'Prof. H. H. Turner / University Observatory / By hand'. It was in the familiar handwriting, but it was the voice of the matriarch.

Dear Sir, / The bearer of this letter is my only and beloved son Mr C. R. Durose. I know that you have been good enough to receive him already, so I now formally introduce him to you and tender you my family's warmest thanks for your kindness to him.

I am authorised by a mutual acquaintance, Mr R. T. Gunther, to say that he suggested I write to you. There are two matters.

I understand you have already expressed willingness to allow Rupert to study at the observatory. His family would very much like him to do so, and will defray without question any and all expenses or

fees that you will be kind enough to inform us are involved. Please do not hesitate.

Secondly, a proferred endowment on behalf of astronomy studies at Magdalen College having to all intents and purposes been refused, we are now keen (and as trustees of the charitable fund established under the will of my late husband are empowered so to do) to disburse this benefaction to your department of astronomy. The amount available is substantial, but will be determined by your specific proposal. We wish it to advance knowledge of the stars in some modern and needful way, whilst also assisting educational purposes.

I assure you that it is not dependent upon the involvement of my son. But he has my confidence so you may discuss it freely with him and he will report informally back to me. At some point in coming months perhaps you could find time to visit us here with a proposal. I regret that impaired vision has curtailed my own visits to Oxford.

I remain Yours faithfully, / Charlotte Fenton-Poyle.

The other thing the Constable had placed on the Inspector's desk was a smallish box, that might have contained cigarettes had the label not read 'Lumière's Autochrome Plates', with a date-stamp of 1912. It was surprisingly heavy, for it held five glass transparencies, photographs in rich colours by a process one seldom encounters now, but which Farquhar had seen examples of before. He realised this was probably what Mr Durose's correspondent, Lottie, had meant when she said in one of her letters that she had found some 'autochromes' taken before the war and was sending them to him in case he recognised anything. They are dark and have to be held up to very bright light to view them adequately. Farquhar took them over to the window.

They were photographs of nudes. Having naturally presumed they were of *paintings* momentarily, close examination made it clear that four of them at least were photographs of a real naked lady, a lady with a slim figure and long dark hair: in the rear view it was plaited into a queue which reached to the small of her back; in a pose outdoors, standing by the edge of a lily pond, it flowed freely over her shoulders and bosom; in the other two she leaned demurely, yet shamelessly nude, against a large sideboard indoors, slightly downcast in one and looking directly at the camera in the other, though they were poorly exposed (that is, they were too dark). Farquhar was not sure whether to consider them amateur work or commercial pornography; they had an innocence and domesticity about them which was awkward and yet disarming at the same time. The fifth plate bore a nude of more classical and artistic appearance, a naked lady with whose short yellow hair and porcelain pale skin Farquhar was already familiar: it was the painting in Mr Durose's bedroom.

Contrary to his initial speculations about this painting, Farquhar was now inclining to associate both painting and photographs with the artistic life of Fenton Winyates Hall, and of the Fenton-Poyles as artists, connoisseurs, and patrons. In which case perhaps the idea of an

artist's model being photographed thus is excused as belonging to these cultivated activities. It was nonetheless uncomfortable (Farquhar felt) to be viewing photographs of an actual lady, in the nude, rather than paintings of a nude – he had not previously considered the distinction. A painting, or indeed a sculpture, however realistic, objectifies its subject – it simply *is not* that person; one can view and admire it, one may even admire its subject, without compunction. While in a photograph one is looking as it were directly at the person, in this case not in a studio but in the ordinary environs of a private house and garden, like a snapshot taken for the family album, yet naked; it had a disturbingly improper, voyeuristic feel to it.

It was equally odd, he thought, if these were the photographs found by Lottie and sent to her young gentleman friend – though no odder, on reflection, than her endorsement of his sodomitical attachments. The naked lady at least was not the delightful Lottie herself, a possibility that had briefly crossed Farquhar's mind in view of the teasing phrase 'see if you recognise anything' (or whatever it was), for the face and the dark hair were entirely different from the photograph in the wallet. Lottie's hair-style more resembled the yellow-haired lady in the final autochrome, the autochrome of the painting. Farquhar lifted it to the light again, and again felt distinctly uncomfortable. The photograph was (as far as his recollection went) *nearly* identical to the painting – but it was not in fact identical.

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The message at the police station seemed to say that Charlotte Fenton-Poyle would arrive on a 2.30 train, and might she come to see Inspector Farquhar shortly thereafter. He sent a car to the station to meet her, briefing the driver as to the charming eccentric bespectacled matriarch he might (possibly) expect. Some doubt had been raised as to her age, as well as her matriarchalness, if she was a 'young widow' in the 1916 newspaper cutting; in revising his notion of her, he supposed that as she was Sir Frederick Mawdsley-Horner's *youngest* daughter (Sir Frederick's dates being 1846-1922) she would have been born when he was in middle life and, with a twenty year-old son, might turn out to be no more than forty or so.

On returning the Constable showed his passenger to a cloak-room and then popped his head around Farquhar's door to remark that he had rounded up someone laying claim to the name, but not answering the description – if she wasn't the right one he'd take her back where he found her. The lady who came through the same door some minutes afterwards seemed to have all faculties in working order, including eyesight without aid of spectacles, was indeed a little younger than formerly expected, perhaps about 45, dressed strictly, like a businesslady or a teacher, and had a countenance the plainness of which was emphasised by a habit of severe expression. Farquhar did

not take to her by first impressions: this was not the person of instant charm he had been told about.

Mrs Fenton-Poyle, said Farquhar, do please accept my deepest condolences and regrets as to the circumstances that bring you here. She accepted his handshake, and quite firmly so for a lady, and before releasing it said straightforwardly and with just the one pronounced emphasis: I am *Charlotte* Fenton-Poyle, I am Rupert's step-sister. *Miss* Fenton-Poyle, I do apologise, said Farquhar. My condolences are due to yourself also. It is kind of you to come and see me, but most regrettable that you have to.

I am confused with my cousin, my step-mother as she now is, all the time, for we are namesakes, but frankly it matters little for I represent her in all matters and am her companion and amanuensis. I *had* been told that Mrs Fenton-Poyle no longer travels, said Farquhar. Am I correct in thinking that she is blind? It is a progressive affliction. But she chooses her seclusion, she is not incapacitated, she is able of body and mind except for her impaired vision. The greater pity, said Farquhar, I mean in the tragedy of her loss; everyone speaks of her great solicitousness for her son. We both loved him intensely, said Miss Fenton-Poyle in a surprisingly unemotional, matter-of-fact way given her peculiar choice of vocabulary. Indeed, although she was cordial, her whole speech was businesslike, bland and insistent in this way, and had a certain disengaged monotony, Farquhar thought, or anyway lacked the intonations that usually hint at one's emotional involvement in what one is saying.

And was there also, Farquhar began saying, if you don't mind me asking, was there also, among those who loved him, a more— (he was intending to amplify, for all his affected hesitancy, and perhaps to mention the letters, but was instantly interrupted). We have assumed of course that you will have enquired into such matters and we are braced for the unpleasantness that may ensue, though one of my commissions from Mrs Fenton-Poyle – which I frankly would not ask you myself, but I carry the message to you from her – is to say that if it should prove possible, without of course requiring anyone's dishonesty, to avoid smearing Rupert's and our family's name with the unpleasantness of associating his death with his sexual life, our family will be greatly consoled and very grateful to you. That is her message.

Farquhar had never heard a lady say the word 'sexual' before, never mind unhesitantly and unblushingly. She had entirely misunderstood his half-asked question of course, but he had better pursue her line now that she had cast it. It may be thought surprising, he said, that a young man's ... (he hesitated for choice of word – the natural 'loved-ones' seemed ill-advised) those nearest him would know of these things and perhaps – am I right in thinking? – not especially disapprove. Miss Fenton-Poyle looked him straight in the eye and said in her entirely plain manner: I loved Rupert, as I told you; when you love someone,

Inspector, you consult only their happiness. As well as wondering why she answered the question so personally, as it was not herself he had in mind, Farquhar also could not help smiling ironically at what she had said, and the lady very perceptively noticed it and understood. One cannot lie to an experienced policeman, she said. Perhaps in our selfishness we preferred to think, each in our way, that no other woman should have him, I in my alienation, Lottie in her indulgence.

Lottie? said Farquhar. He was so suddenly surprised by the name, and re-focused by it, that he neither followed nor yet felt need to clarify the ambiguous and very intriguing sentence that contained it. Miss Fenton-Poyle did not respond. You said Lottie, he elaborated. Who is that? It is a familiar form of the name Charlotte. Mrs Fenton-Poyle and I are namesakes, as I said, indeed we are all Charlottes, it was my mother's name too. So that among our family and close friends we have from childhood been distinguished, she as Lottie and I as Charlie. The pretty one and the plain one, the gay one and the serious one. People used to take us for sisters. You see we grew up together ...

Miss Fenton-Poyle wishing to visit her step-brother's room gave Inspector Farquhar the opportunity of taking another view of it himself, as well as noticing what her concerns there might be. In fact she seemed to gaze around rather vacantly, commenting (not accurately, in Farquhar's opinion): I suppose all young men are the same. Then she busied herself looking into drawers and the wardrobe. There was one particular thing Farquhar himself wanted a second glance at. He took the astronomy book from the bookcase, and read the inscription in it more carefully than he had before: For My Beloved Young Astronomer / I send you to Oxford to bring me back news of the Stars / Your Proud and Loving Charlotte. Miss Fenton-Poyle had meanwhile caressed several of the suits, including the pink one, and was now looking in the bureau. Farquhar thought he had better say that he had removed the letters in case they helped him understand the situation, and had them safely and would of course return them.

You will have noticed that I wrote Mrs Fenton-Poyle's letters for her, to her dictation that is, she said. I am her amanuensis. I never erred one iota from what she dictated, though the temptation to do so was great. Of course I also wrote to Rupert in my own behalf. Sometimes I felt I must, frankly, counter the tendency I felt her letters guilty of, to condone his idleness and his pleasure-seeking. She was not strict at all, could not bring herself to be, she wrote to him like a sister, a fellow-conspirator in his indulgent waywardness. So I assumed the role of the wagging finger. She took a handkerchief to her face for a moment. Of course it increased the coldness between us. I regret that. I loved him so very much ... The handkerchief returned and remained for a little longer. Upon recovery she said, almost as an aside yet quite sharply, what struck Farquhar as a most extraordinary thing: He was *besotted* with Lottie. Then she immediately busied herself again. It was the only occasion he witnessed Miss Fenton-Poyle give way to emotion, and he

might be wrong but it struck him that the emotion she gave way to was jealousy, as much as grief.

She alluded to it after some rummaging, her briskness having revived. I apologise for my ... Farquhar was beginning to say Not at all, when she went on: I do not mean to sound peevish. I should just have liked Rupert and I to have been warmer, but frankly he found me boring and stern alongside Lottie's charm and wit and lightness, and her very very great beauty – ah, I see you've seen that for yourself though. She had wandered into the bedroom as she was speaking. Farquhar followed her, meaning to ask what she meant; but instead his gaze immitated hers and found rest upon the beautifully curving lines and luminous skin-tones of the elegant standing nude that presided over Mr Durose's bed. There she is, said Miss Fenton-Poyle, almost triumphantly, and made a gesture with her hand. You mean she painted it of course, said Farquhar, with a slight note of relief. Oh indeed; but you know she hasn't flattered herself at all, she really is as ravishing as that. Its partner, Rupert in all his glory, hangs in just such a position above her own bed. There was a distinct silence. It is a self portrait? he said eventually, unable to suppress the tone of disbelief. Isn't she beautiful? said the lady, who had stepped closer and was touching the picture, as if her jealousy had now inverted. The title on the bottom of the frame was 'Venus'. That is my competition, she said.

OX  RD

At the brief inquest into the death of Mr Charles Rupert Durose, late of Magdalen College, Oxford, and Fenton Winyates Hall, Wiltshire, the required details were reported to the Coroner by the required experts and witnesses. Inspector E. Farquhar, representing the criminal investigation department of the city police, intimated, whilst giving but little additional detail, that in the absence of evidence to the contrary he had concluded that the young gentleman had taken his own life and acted alone in so doing; and that in the absence of any letter of explanation, such as is often left on such occasions, he had been compelled to conduct an investigation regarding what might have been the causes or aggravations of the young gentleman's self-destructive state of mind. He had learned sufficient about his circumstances to form the view that a growing sense of despair concerning his course of university study, and in particular a decision which he had been advised to make and had then evidently regretted, to change his subject of study, had propelled him into this despondency.

Do you mean he was vacillating over this decision, or that he had in *fact* changed his course of study? the Coroner asked. Farquhar apologised for not making it clear: the young gentleman had made the change after Easter and been informed it was irrevocable; then he had formed some hopes (having regretted it) that in the new academic year just commenced a certain Professor might help him, only to be smitten with the news of that Professor's death. When was this in relation to

Mr Durose's death? the Coroner sensibly asked. The Professor in fact died in August, during the university's long vacation, but Mr Durose will have learned of it only on returning to Oxford for the new term, but three days before his own death. I am afraid, although it is not sensible in the light of day, and although the extent of his dependency on the late Professor may have been misapprehended, the one was a catalyst to the other in the young gentleman's despondent state of mind.

You may have noticed an earlier witness make allusion to the unconventional nature, as it seemed to be thought, of Mr Durose's personal or social life, or conduct. Did this enter into your investigations at all?

Yes sir, I endeavoured to discover what I could about the young gentleman's social and private life, which *had* perhaps some unconventional aspects, but I found nothing that I could connect to his death, nor to the question of why he might think of taking his own life.

It is so, though, is it not, that certain private activities or associations might strike a policeman as rendering a young man like Mr Durose vulnerable to becoming, for example, the victim of persecution, or blackmail, or to being overcome with shame, possibly?

I have kept such possibilities in mind whilst investigating the young gentleman's death and, sir, have found no evidence of them, nor of anything in his private behaviour causing him shame or serious worry, except in relation to his studies.

If you have looked into it and are adamant in that conclusion I think we must accept that.

I am quite firm in the conclusion that I have reached sir.

Thankyou Inspector.

And that was it, the officer of the Crown was satisfied. Mr Durose had taken his own life while of unsound mind, being in a state of despondency regarding his university studies.

A rigidly composed Miss Charlotte Fenton-Poyle thanked Farquhar afterwards as if he had done her family an enormous service, and gave him a firm handshake. He responded with a degree of diffidence, feeling sure he had done nothing really, and also wondering (silently) if the shamefulness attaching to suicide was at all in proportion to its attributed cause. A nervously sweet Mr Algernon Pellegrino also thanked the Inspector for disallowing any thought of he and Rupert's 'being *so*' from entering the matter. He enquired timidly whether the police would wish to speak to him further, regarding his own ... Put it entirely from your mind sir, said the thoughtful detective, offering his hand; we have far too many missing bicycles. A grateful note was subsequently received from the Vice President of Magdalen College.

The report in the *Oxford Chronicle* was rather harsh on Fotheringham (without naming him), rephrasing as newspapers are so adept at doing the worries over the course of study as if to imply that his college tutor

had let him down, which is not at all what Farquhar had meant to say, or thought he had said. Other areas of the deceased's life in which the cause for his self-destructive despondency might be sought had been eliminated by thorough police investigation, the report added. Deceased was the son by her first marriage of the art patron Mrs Fenton-Pole, in her younger day a famous beauty who was painted by Alma-Tadema, and who was represented at the inquest by her daughter Miss C. Fenton-Pole.

Even Farquhar himself suspected that his forgetting to hand the bundle of letters back to Miss Fenton-Poyle, which he had intended to do before she left town, was a deliberate trick played by part of his brain upon the more sensible part. The other things, including the wallet and the autochromes, had been returned earlier by parcel post. For some reason, however, entrusting the letters to the post office never occurred to him. He wrote to Mrs Fenton-Poyle (not Miss) apologising for forgetting to hand them to her representative for safe return, and proposing to bring them in person, if that were convenient. The reply by return of post said it would be nice to see him and suggested a firm date and time, which need not be confirmed so long as it was suitable. The letter was signed Charlotte Fenton-Poyle. An endorsement by way of a PS said: Above dictated by Mrs Fenton-Poyle. I regret I shall not be at home on that day, but have already expressed my thanks to you for your service to our family. CFP.

OX  RD

At last this was she: the legendary – it almost seemed – Mrs Fenton-Poyle. Not so tall as Inspector Farquhar had pictured (nor as her full-length self-portrait in the nude made her seem), indeed slighter over all, though it is a common error to imagine ladies generally bigger than they are likely to be. Not as modern in her attire either (though it is perhaps understandable that, latterly, his mind's eye had not troubled to endow her with attire at all) – she was wearing a dress in the pre-war style, replete with lacey frills; and it was entirely light in colour, cream and white with some pale blue trimmings (and a striking lapis-lazuli brooch). Nothing about it signified a state of mourning.

Her shortish permed hair was a honey yellow, but there may have been a slight lightening towards silvery-grey at the front. Her face was as astonishingly pretty as he had expected, for it was the face in the wallet, and was not spoiled, as he had been told, by unsightly spectacles. Her eyes were the pale blue of the ribbons in her dress, their beauty too great to meditate upon, as apart from some hints of tiredness around them the only defect of vision they demonstrated was their slight inaccuracy of aim when they sought to look directly at him. It was not a particularly faded beauty, either: it was a youthful face, and a youthful figure too. The lady did not even look as old as forty. Her skin was smooth and pale. And this lovely face appeared, so far as Farquhar could judge, not to place reliance upon cosmetics; the lips

were thus also pale, but they were perfect in shape and definition nonetheless. Very perfect indeed. They smiled charmingly, in defiance of the grief they must have felt, and beautiful little creases formed to either side of them as they did so.

A small pretty hand extended towards him as the butler announced Inspector Farquhar ma'am. Mr Farquhar, she said, in a quiet and soft voice, I am so pleased to meet you at last. And I you, my dear madam, returned Farquhar, taking the hand gently, more as if to kiss it than to shake it, though he did not do either. They sat on closely adjacent chairs, and she leaned somewhat towards him. She thanked him for his attentiveness to the matter of her son, said that it had been a comfort to the family, and also (which struck Farquhar most poignantly) thanked him for his compassionate treatment of Mr Pellegrino, who had written her a very long letter. He is a very nice young man, said Farquhar, realising why it mattered to her. Yes, she said, my Rupert was very fond of him. She went on to indicate quite plainly that she deemed what he had said at the inquest to have saved her son's memory from scandalous association and tasteless calumny which, she said she was sure, Farquhar had most thoughtfully appreciated would serve no purpose in being laid bare in such a forum.

Tea arrived before Farquhar could do more than merely acknowledge these thanks, and Mrs Fenton-Poyle offered him the choice of the maid remaining to wait upon them, or himself being mother, as she put it, in respect of pouring the tea – for, she said, as if it needed to be excused, I have an affliction of my vision which has been growing a little worse of late, and have found it advisable to forego the dangerous activity of pouring hot liquids in the direction of my guests. Farquhar opted to take on the role himself and the maid was dismissed. Since he did not have a great deal to say this was a useful undertaking. But as he busied himself with it Mrs Fenton-Poyle commenced upon a narrative which, after seeming merely idle reminiscence at first, came to sound as it progressed, both in the earnestness of the lady's delivery and in the revelations it seemed to contain, more in the character of a confession.

In some senses Farquhar was borne along by the sweep of her story, and the surrealness of it, or of her telling it thus, unsolicited and barely apropos, and did not make the mental notes (nor take actual notes, of course) that his detective's mind would in different circumstances have made. Towards the end, he even somewhat lost the thread of it. Mrs Fenton-Poyle's reminiscences are therefore recorded here as best they could be recollected.

OX  RD

A widow with a young son after the war, she had deferred to her father's wishes, in part, in marrying his friend Mr Fenton-Poyle, her thoughts being primarily for the future of her son, financially, Mr Durose (his father) having been, to be candid, impecunious – though

terribly dashing (she allowed herself a lovely smile). My other blessing was the intimate companionship of my lifelong friend and cousin (or anyhow her late mother the first Mrs Fenton-Poyle was my father's cousin), with whom you are acquainted, my companion and dearest friend still. I know you will have discerned, Mr Farquhar, though most people do not notice it, the extraordinarily fine person beneath that severe veil of self-effacement she wraps herself in. Her father – I'd known him as Uncle Bertie all my life, and here I was, married to him (she gave a sweet little giggle) – he was unfailingly kind to me, and he adored Rupert. We'd trained as nurses – the needs of the war you understand – and so ourselves cared for him through his last years. I think we made them pleasant for him. May I regard you, if it's not presumptuous of me, as one whose natural sympathy and tolerance will not incline him to condemn me? (Inspector Farquhar had no thought whatever of condemning her, nor reason to.) Mr Fenton-Poyle was not deceived by me: we were happy in our arrangement.

After he passed away I was lonely. Our marriage had been full of warmth and tenderness, including (at times Mrs Fenton-Poyle drifted into reverie, clearly speaking to herself, and of very private things) including the tenderness of touch belonging to the nursing of him, *les petits soins*, a special cherishment of its own, and then of course our own embrace – it will perhaps seem strange to you (and then she would recollect Farquhar's presence and steer herself back to earth), I'm sure my whole life seems strange to you, but in caring for Bertie in his advanced years we were expressing a physical love every bit as real as ... (and then sometimes she would just drop into silence, into a moment of true privacy, often at points in her monologue when Farquhar was glad she did).

I had prevailed upon Rupert, who was becoming, like his father, a strikingly handsome figure of a man – he was about sixteen – I had persuaded him to pose for me. For female figures I used myself – you are welcome to think me a narcissist, Mr Farquhar, I've gazed into my studio mirror and caressingly imitated those curves and lines and textures and flesh-tones for many enough hours to be defenceless against the charge – Charlie had posed for me in earlier years, but hated doing so, even though in fact she is more beautiful, in the figure I mean, the perfect nude, like her mother – of course you won't know but Aunt Charlotte was an artist's model, she was one of Morris's 'stunners', as he called them – yes, Charlie was always, still is, far more attractive *déshabillé* than her assumed plainness signals – but then you have seen her for yourself. Where was I? I think I have lost my thread.

Rupert now regularly posed for me. *Nu*, of course. I'm afraid not a single figure in any painting I've done possesses anything that could pass in polite society for a garment. I was in the habit of taking my own clothes off too – before you say it, I concede it was not calculated to put him at his ease, poor dear. I had often had him with me when he

was little, in the studio I mean, he spent many an hour watching me paint from my mirror. But it was unfair on him now, of course, how could he not be affected? A boy at that sort of age ... Yet what I'd least expected was the effect on myself, or anyhow my lack of resistance to it ... Can I be blamed? I was still fairly young. Rupert certainly thought me beautiful, I'm afraid I demolished his fixation with long dark hair – that's one thing I know will surprise you, that his heart's first choice had been Charlie. (She gave a little nostalgic laugh.) Like father like son. Speaking of which, for my part, resurrected before me was Reggie, in all his glory, in all his magnificent ... I think you know the rest, Mr Farquhar. I felt I owed you my explanation of how it came to be. I'm not excusing it. I would not even regret it except, heaven help me, for the consequence to which it has brought us. And I must make my own amends for that, and shall.

Her pale blue eyes – their colouring was distinct even from a slight distance – gazed, perhaps blindly or perhaps, presumably, they could see the light, it was hard to tell how blind she really was, towards the French window, which framed a large lawn sloping towards a landscape of winter trees, slightly misty. I took my beautiful son to my bed, she said, as if it were the most everyday thing to mention. And until he departed for Oxford we shared the embrace of a ... (she went through another of her occasional blanks, to Farquhar's relief). At the time I told myself he had mother enough in Charlie, and auntie and sister too. Did you know she's his godmother? She in truth had always – you know her manner, though the kindest and bravest of hearts lies beneath it, I of all people know that, there is no one alive with such capacity for love and sacrifice; you think I'm romantic, Mr Farquhar, for I wear it on my sleeve, but you wouldn't believe the depth of passion within the bosom of my *impénétrable* companion – she had long been more like a mother to him, a fussing and demanding mother, strict, for his own sake, ambitious for him, proud of him, scolding him for the slightest fault she adored him so much. And naturally so. I'd never been like that, it wasn't in me to be. I was worse than indulgent: I revelled in his waywardness, his outrageousness, his hedonism. Those things he inherited ...

Oxford obviously put things in a different perspective for him. And so it must be, there is life beyond Fenton Winyates. Much beauty as we have here, there are other beauties. There are – as he discovered – other loves, other ways of loving. I was glad to encourage him to open out, attach himself to new company, explore different experiences. Though I suppose I'd prepared his tastes, or spoiled them. When he wrote to us about ... you know what it is they do, the young men: Charlie tut-tutted, but I, I looked forward to him coming home and giving me a tutorial in Oxford *derrière*. Do you think Oxford let him down Mr Farquhar? (He treated the question as rhetorical, being rendered speechless by its preamble anyway.) I'd spoiled him ready for them, I know, and now we have all lost him. But I'm still unsure how much blame Oxford should take from my shoulders. But then Oxford

has its lovely Mr Farquhar, and you have defended us all extremely well, I fear.

Poor Rupert. The beautiful lady wept, quietly and gently. Although Mrs Fenton-Poyle was not dressed for mourning, and although it was only now, and only briefly, that she resigned her composure, and although her charm and pleasantness were manifest throughout the Inspector's visit, she smiled often, she even made several jokes, and although she had given him this intimate account of so surprising and improper a relationship, in as matter-of-fact a manner as one might any teatime topic – yet, something about her throughout, something about the quiet dignity with which she spoke it all and the dreamy, bittersweet look on her pretty face, or so Farquhar thought, signalled unambiguously an utter grief, a bafflement and bereftness, to such a degree unassuageable that one simply could not censure, one could feel nought but deep pity for her. It was even impossible not to be affected, by some irresistible empathy, with a sense that within her world of morality and passion she had acted in a state of innocence, not reprehensibly but, as she might deem it, in submission to the ruling principles of her world: which were beauty and love, presumably.

In fact she seemed to be saying something of this sort, latterly, but Farquhar's attention had wandered, and he had lost any sense of distinction between what she was saying and what he himself was thinking. He had said very little except in acknowledgement or pseudo-agreement. But now she was standing up and thanking him for bringing the letters, and apologising for distracting him with her selfish talk and confessions, and hoping he could forgive her, one day, in his heart, and remember her unblemished by the disgust she knew he must feel, albeit his great kindheartedness disguised it. He brushed her remarks aside, as if it were inconsequential politeness, and assured her that it had been a very great pleasure to make her acquaintance, very kind of her to take him into her confidence as she had, and a very sad business all round, in which apportioning blame is pointless. She enclosed his hand tenderly with both of her small, warm, pretty hands, and caressed the back of his knuckles twice with her fingertips.

On the way out he noticed that the room they had been in, though by no means a library, had rather grand bookcases either side of its door, where the butler was now waiting. Farquhar allowed himself to veer to one side, and saw titles relating to astronomy. We have one side each, Mrs Fenton-Poyle said; my art books are over here. I cannot look at them any more, but my darling Charlie, my lifelong friend – did I tell you our birthdays are but weeks apart? and I'm the younger, ironically, the step-mother (she made another of her sweet little laughs) – my lovely Charlie reads to me every day, she is kindness itself to me; and this side is all her boring astronomy books. Rupert caught his interest from her, she always had the more serious influence on him; I encouraged him for her sake, but I can't say I minded what he did if he was happy. Charlie worshipped him you know, and has been so

dreadfully depressed since he went to Oxford, she's missed him so. I encouraged him in astronomy to please her. I love them both you see.

OX  RD

Inspector Farquhar took his departure with mixed feelings, and rode back towards Oxford in deep thought, the complexion of the matter he had been considering (not perhaps investigating) transformed in a most unexpected way. Having testified to a pedestrian cause for Mr Durose's suicide, in no sense disingenuously, he had received the gratitude of sodomy, which believed him to have protected it from blame and scandal. Of course he felt chivalrous to have shielded an amiable young man and a lady of high repute; he may even have taken satisfaction in confounding the enemies of sodomy in their indiscriminate hunger for a *cause célèbre*. But now he had received the gratitude of incest, which believed him to have protected *it* from blame and scandal, a service he had rendered wholly unconsciously, except in so far as its representative was the same lady.

Mrs Fenton-Poyle evidently believed him to have made the deduction of her unnatural relationship with her son – from the letters presumably, but in truth he had not interpreted them that way, or had not reconsidered them once the identity of 'Lottie' was revealed – her detailed confession of it being a response to her assumption of his knowing. She may even have thought his pointedly returning the letters by hand a gesture, a silent demand for explanation. The other matter barely concerned her: she seemed almost unaware that affection between men was scandalous and buggery unlawful – it was as if she thought it a convention accepted in Oxford colleges. She believed that her son had killed himself not because of anxiety over his studies, *nor* because of his sodomitical commerce with aesthetes or with Algie, but because of an incestuous relationship with herself – she believed he had killed himself because of her.

Stop the car! Farquhar called out, surprising himself as much as his driver. I'm so terribly sorry. In cogitating over the matters under investigation my mind has hit upon something that makes me urgently concerned for Mrs Fenton-Poyle's safety. I fear we must turn around and go back in haste. Please use your klaxon.

They had been away almost an hour before the police car crunched back into its former position on the gravel before the house. The front door was open. The maid came out as Farquhar hurried towards it: he was not the person she was expecting. As she led him upstairs she explained that Mr Rogers (the butler) had telephoned the local doctor as he felt sure Madam was took ill – she had gone into her breakfast room (a room adjacent to her bedroom) immediately after the Inspector's departure and by chance Mr Rogers had come to speak with her on a domestic matter, to find no response and the room locked from both doors. He was trying his master keys at this very minute.

The door in fact was open. Within, Rogers was standing on a chair embracing with both arms the body of Mrs Fenton-Poyle, which hung by the neck from a rope attached to a chandelier. Farquhar asked the maid if there was a knife nearby, and pulled another chair near to the hanging body. He had to ask again, the maid was so horrified; she opened a drawer in a large sideboard that was full of breakfast cutlery. He took what seemed a fairly sharp breadknife, for there were no meat knives, mounted the chair, and sawed at the rope just above the honey-blond hair. What Rogers was doing was taking the weight from the lady's neck and hoping some assistance would arrive. He had said Help me very quietly when Farquhar entered the room. Farquhar seemed to saw furiously for minutes before the rope gave; the butler clung to his burden unflinchingly, stepped from the chair, and laid her tenderly, like something so very precious, on to a soft rug.

The poor man looked forlornly up at Farquhar, who was lowering himself to his knees beside what he could see was an irretrievable corpse. The butler had made so valiant an effort, and looked at Farquhar with so eloquent an unspoken plea, tears upon his face, that Farquhar commenced attempting nonetheless to revive her. His fingers touched her lips. He opened her mouth, depressed her tongue, pinched her nose, and lowered his own lips on to those perfectly-shaped pale lips, the lips of the extraordinary Mrs Fenton-Poyle, the gay and loving Lottie, whom he had come to visit out of fascination at the beauty of her personality and the reported – and real – beauty of her person. He had come on a pilgrimage; he had come in a degree infatuated. He paused from breathing into her mouth and briefly instructed the butler in depressing her chest: the butler's large hands spread timidly over her bosom. Farquhar resumed his kiss. They continued their actions, with pauses in which he affected to look pessimistic and shook his head very slightly, for perhaps ten minutes, at which point both Miss Charlotte Fenton-Poyle and a doctor entered the room.

The doctor examined the corpse briefly, asked Farquhar how long they had been attempting to revive her, whether any signs of success or of life at all had manifested themselves in that time, and whether she was so cool as this when they had brought her down. Of course he concluded that there was no hope. He proceeded to make some further examinations, tearing her dress below her neck to do so, and also took her temperature. I should think death occurred about an hour ago, he said. The butler at this showed audible signs of grief, kneeled down again and grasped the cold hand of his mistress. The doctor placed a hand on his arm and said You were right to try, you did everything you could have done; and he looked up at Farquhar. Farquhar was gazing blankly at the pale beautiful corpse. Miss Fenton-Poyle meanwhile had not advanced beyond the doorway, she stood there with one hand held to her face.

It was some hours later that Miss Fenton-Poyle asked Inspector Farquhar what it was that had made him come back. He explained – without mentioning any great mortal sin, he had no idea whether or not she was complicit in it – how upon running over the things Mrs Fenton-Poyle had said it had dawned upon him that she blamed herself for Mr Durose's death. He had even wondered if his own responses to what she had said may have been taken by her as confirming that he thought so too, albeit unintentionally so, for he assuredly did not. Realising which, the probability that she intended to join her son in the self-punishment of suicide had struck him like a bolt, he said, and compelled his return. He hurried back to tell her that he did not think she was responsible for her son taking his life. He hurried back to say what he wished he had had the presence of mind to say immediately, but as is so common, only thought of later.

Miss Fenton-Poyle had dealt stoically with the making of various necessary arrangements, including helping to lay out Mrs Fenton-Poyle's body on her bed, overlooked by a nude portrait of her handsome son. Farquhar had given a statement to a local policeman, reassuring the young Constable that he was not at all offended at being asked to do so; though he gave it very falteringly. Now Miss Fenton-Poyle had asked him into her private sitting room for a drink before he left. The drink in question was whisky. Farquhar, who in all honesty had not liked her, now felt immense sympathy for this sad lady, who had lost the two people whom he knew in her own particular way she loved very much. Indeed, her own word 'intensely' was doubtless apt. He was full of admiration for the fortitude she was showing, though still not entirely sure of her place in the plot of this complicated tragedy. She in turn was solicitous of his state of mind, having discerned how shaken he was by the death of her step-mother cum cousin, cum friend. Indeed, he had knelt back down beside the body himself, until the doctor physically urged him up, and even offered (which was declined) to administer a sedative as he had to the butler, Mr Rogers.

Rogers has been with us many years, Miss Fenton-Poyle said. He has always been greatly smitten by Lottie, we used to make a joke of it, but since her eyesight went he has attended her with absolute devotion. After a silence she sighed and said: I think everyone who ever knew Lottie fell in love with her. Farquhar looked up with half an intention of saying something; but instead he was caused to tilt his head in surprise at the display that caught his eye on the opposite wall, which he had not noticed on entering. Either side of an oriel window hung two paintings, in the colourful, realistic Pre-Raphaelite style: a full-length shamelessly nude lady, standing beside a lily pond, looking slightly to the right; and a full-length shamelessly nude man, or youth, standing beside a lily pond, looking slightly to the left.

Venus and Adonis, said their proprietor, noticing Farquhar's attention had been attracted by them. They are copies, but by her own hand; they're not as good as the first ones, as they're the last she did before her eyesight failed. You see Inspector, I love them both. She said it unemotionally, or almost with a note of pride, and then reiterated it. I cannot help it – I adored them both. In recent years they were wrapped in each other, they had each other. They formed the habit of making a joke of me – Farquhar tried to interrupt, but Miss Fenton-Poyle was one of those persons whose businesslike way of speaking broaches no interruption – I know you've read the letters: if I don't like him I'll make him kiss Charlie; here's a picture of Charlie in the altogether standing by the sideboard – the sideboard's the wooden one (you'd never guess). I wrote to her dictation the letters in which she made a joke of my plainness, my dourness. I read her the letters in which he described how he preferred disgusting practices with men to the natural, loving embrace that we offered him. He never came to me again after she ... I suppose Lottie told you all about it. He was not disappointed, yet he rejected me after ...

The speaker paused and stared out of a large window for some minutes. It was the same view as from the French window downstairs, its pale winter light now fading into evening. She seemed quite calm still, not tearful at all. It was as though she was giving a police statement about something trivial such as a stolen bicycle, Farquhar thought. He himself felt speechless, though he was contemplating clearing his throat to remark, for he had noticed she was under a tragic misapprehension, how unreservedly Mrs Fenton-Poyle had expressed to him her love and devotion for her lifelong friend, and her high estimation of her character. He could himself begin to discern qualities in her which fitted that assessment (it had sounded much exaggerated when Mrs Fenton-Poyle said it): he certainly knew now that she was a finer sort of person than he had initially judged her; there may even be a distinct handsomeness to her features, which she was so fond of saying were plain. If her tightly wound dark-brown hair were released, it would enhance her appearance greatly, for there must be a considerable length of it taken up in her usual bun – it crossed his mind that she would resemble the nude model with long dark hair in the colour photographs. Farquhar caught his breath in surprise: the penny dropped about the sideboard, at the same instant that she turned back towards him and resumed.

Eventually I told him about Lottie and I. He didn't believe at first. But you see, we grew up together. We were like twins, twins yet opposites. We *were* each other's first loves, she and I, as I'm sure she told you, in those years when you discover yourself that way. Then, after Italy, we both fell for Reggie, Rupert's father, and of course like everyone, he thought me plain and intense beside Lottie. After the war we resumed, Lottie and I, and my father married her so that I could have her here as companion without depriving our beloved son of his inheritance. *Our* son, Inspector. It was curious how when we returned from the war and

they came to live with us he fell naturally into treating me as a mother and Lottie, vivacious and pretty, like a sister, or a girlfriend. But it was I, who frankly had more right, who loved him in that way. And it was I whom first he fell in love with. But of course, for we are so alike, she loved him too; and as before, exactly as with his father, she effortlessly usurped me. And how could he resist her? He turned from me to worship Lottie, whom he believed to be his own mother. Even though he believed her to be his mother. In fact, as Lottie will have told you, *I* am Rupert's mother. Hers was stillborn. So it was better for her to have mine, and give him legitimacy. And his father's name. He never knew, we never told him. You see, I can live joyless; but Lottie would not be Lottie without joy burning all around the lovely edges of her. It was best for them both.

And then Oxford made a homosexual of him, and he turned from us both to worship at a different shrine, he preferred that wop's bumhole to our ... And as for misdirecting his education—. Farquhar interrupted, for the only time, saying quietly but insistently: I formed the opinion that Mr Pellegrino's affection for Mr Durose was very genuine and tender, I don't know if it helps you to know that. The lady was perhaps more surprised by his interrupting her than by what he said. He wrote us a long letter, she said; I read it to Lottie several times. You will have realised that she had not an ounce of jealousy or meanness in her. I have it all. Like sisters you see, the dark and the light. But I will make amends, Inspector, your Mr Pellegrino shall have whatever he will, I will offer it as a penance. I did not mean it that way, Miss Fenton-Poyle, please believe me. Or he is welcome to the money, if it will help him. *They* wouldn't accept it, if it had to be for astronomy. I meant to give it directly to Turner instead.

Farquhar must have given her a surprised or inquisitive look, for she went on to explain: It was mine and my brothers', except of course the money for Rupert, my father was devoted to Rupert. Lottie had a home and a living, and was a trustee for life, and of course it was proper to conduct the trust's business in her name. But the capital was not hers. When she married my father – a penniless widow, still tainted by the scandal of our going off to Italy with Jack – society assumed she was a gold-digger ... but money did not interest her, as you know ... I fear, Inspector, our story has impinged upon you in an unfair degree; I am sorry that you have been drawn into it. It is over. Do not look concerned: I shall not hang myself, not now. I shall punish myself more severely by living a long and solitary life, thinking constantly of the two people I love. And who loved me, plain and peevish as I am. I know they did.

All this extraordinary confession was spoken with the lady's customary straightforwardness, not especially emotionally at all. Her composure hardly flinched; each statement was unabashed. The two people I love and have destroyed, she added, after a pause, and extended her hand. Her bemused listener, who had mostly allowed his

face to assume a downwards cast, now looked directly at her in surprise. He looked directly into two beautiful, soft brown eyes. From the long, elegant fingers of Miss Charlotte Fenton-Poyle's hand he took a piece of paper, a letter, in unfamiliar handwriting. It arrived the day after we got the news, she said. I could not read it to her; I could not bring myself. She knew nothing of its existence. I meant to protect her from it, and take all the pain into myself. But she has gone to him anyway. Her eyes had become moist when Farquhar looked again. Anyway, it is a letter to me really, she said, with some emotion now. He did not know, we never told him. But he was really writing to me.

Dearest Darling, / I have got myself into a ghastly pickle. I cannot go back to the maths but I just despise classics. Turner is dead, who might at least have let me work at the observatory. There's no hope now, your dream is in ruins. I've let you down awfully. And I always shall. The only thing I can do is come with you into that darkness. I know you don't like me to be negative, so I'll surprise you by being strong and decisive this once: I'm coming into your darkness ahead of you. I'll be waiting for you. If we arrive at the same place I don't care if it's heaven or hell so long as you're there with me. Your adoring / Rupert.

OX  RD

It is thought that Inspector Farquhar requested, shortly afterwards, the move which inaugurated the final phase in his career, even though there was no promotion in it. Colleagues noticed that he was never quite himself after the business of Mr Durose's suicide, followed by that of Mrs Fenton-Poyle. There are times, in the delicate dealings that are the lot of senior policemen, when one can brush a little too closely against other people's tragedies. In his new posting, as always, his experienced investigative intuition was worn very lightly, and it was his quiet tolerance and kindliness that were most valued by those who enjoyed the thoughtful detective's acquaintance, whether as a policeman or as a crown green bowler. On his retirement from the force Farquhar was rightly described as one of the most well-liked men in Ipswich.

A footnote to the Durose case came to his attention a good many years later, after the next war began to revive the art world's regard for styles of English painting which the age of Picasso had considered outmoded. An exhibition called something like 'The Late-Flowering Pre-Raphaelites' toured some provincial galleries. Farquhar visited it in Cambridge several times (and also made a trip to Wolverhampton) after Mrs Mattingly kindly sent him the catalogue, having spotted a familiar name. A sepia reproduction, nice enough of itself but losing so much without the attractive colours that he remembered in the original, faced the following catalogue entry.

"Venus" by Charlotte Fenton-Poyle, English (1887-1930), signed and dated CFP 1927. The artist was a pupil and model of J. W. Godward,

spending some time in Italy with him in her youth. She is believed to have used herself as model in this work, one of a pair which formed her last major work before being afflicted by glaucoma. Its counterpart "Adonis" is in the United States, in the collection of Professor A. W. Pellegrino. An earlier version of the same theme was also one of a pair, but under the titles "Light" and "Dark", the other figure being a female nude with long dark hair. The latter were exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1913 under the artist's maiden name of Charlotte Durose, and are in the collection at Fenton Winyates Hall (National Trust), Mrs Fenton-Poyle's home, where there are also slightly inferior copies of "Venus" and "Adonis". The present work was presented to the Ashmolean Museum by the artist's Executors in 1930, but has never been exhibited. In any reassessment of the late Pre-Raphaelites and the Classical School of Alma-Tadema, held in such derision in the inter-war years that several of its greatest exponents, including the present artist, took their own lives, the cool, photographic realism of the portrayal and the fine surface execution and colour control in this magnificent work, and of other Fenton-Poyles, such as the stunningly modern "Woman & Sideboard" (Wolverhampton Art Gallery), will merit close attention.

It was a long time – though perhaps leaving Oxford helped – before Farquhar could wrestle his mind from its inclination to ponder the mysteries of this strange affair. The Venus who vanquishes guilt in her openness of heart. It was like an unsolved case that haunts one for ever after. Her blue eyes gazing towards light as she prepares to enter darkness, leaving, for her votary to kneel to, her pale perfect lips, and 'our' kiss, an intimate farewell. It was like the memory of a bittersweet love affair. Her brown eyes overflowing with tears as she releases her endless dark hair and absorbs into herself a guilt as boundless as her love. He found himself come into the habit of looking at the sky on starry nights. He looked at the brilliant beautiful stars; and he looked at the beautiful darkness between them. Perhaps astronomy was just stamp collecting, he would think; but something much more was going on out there. In thirty-four years in the force he hadn't even begun to fathom it. It was the pitiless vastness of the human heart. He took a little piece of paper from his pocket, half a letter, an unsolved mystery, and in the inadequate light half-read and half-recited the words written upon it.

As I think of you, my darling, my only dearest reason for living and having lived, a lovely cool breeze comes in from the verandah, and my coming companion, darkness, folds me gently in his embrace; yet I can picture an evening sky ablaze with your million million stars. Count them for me my love. And as you do so leave the darkness go, and drench your life in the beauty of lightness and colour; they are my bequest to you. Immerse yourself in the study of the light, make it your passion and pilgrimage, and never look back; but all the time you relish and revel in the light, know that every inch and light-year between is filled by me, the velvetty blackness that holds everything,

that embraces your being and your life with love, that begins the night-time and ends it. I am always always with you. I am what you are made of. Your existence creates the very universe for me. But the universe is not yet big enough to contain my love for you.

OX  RD

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