

AN UNLIKELY SPY

The True Story of the Life and Death of a British Spymaster

Excerpt 1



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Introduction

This book is just part of the fascinating story of British Intelligence before, during, and just after, the First World War. We shall follow the fortunes of Cecil Aylmer Cameron from a privileged child of a highly placed military father, to the start of his own promising career in the Royal Artillery, and his marriage to a beautiful woman. Things then began to unravel. In 1911, Cameron and his wife were sent to prison for three years for an elaborate fraud involving a fabulously valuable pearl necklace.

With the outbreak of the First World War, Cameron mysteriously emerges, first as a spy working for MI6, before becoming a Spymaster working directly for Sir Douglas Haig, the Commander in Chief of the British Army on the Western Front. As Cameron creates more and more effective spy networks in occupied France and Belgium, there are moves by his rivals to close down or take over these operations. Cameron’s secret agents send in crucial intelligence, saving the lives of many British and Allied soldiers, but German counter-espionage efforts took their toll; a number of his agents were caught, several being executed by firing squad.

As the war entered its final year, Cameron, by then a highly decorated major in the Royal Artillery, returned to a country that he

loved: Russia. In the throes of a vicious civil war, he was head of intelligence for the officer in charge of the British Military Mission to Siberia, part of an ill-fated Allied intervention that led ultimately to the Cold War. In 1920, Cameron took on another tough assignment as a senior intelligence officer in Dublin. He successfully trained agents to infiltrate the Irish Republican Army, but following the disaster of Bloody Sunday in 1921, he gave up intelligence work to return to mainstream soldiering.

It was whilst he was in command of troops at Hillsborough Barracks in Sheffield that, one evening in August 1924, Cameron was found in his room with a fatal bullet wound to his head. An inquest verdict of suicide whilst temporarily insane was recorded. We review that incident in detail and come to a startling and uncomfortable conclusion.

Part 1 The Soldier, his Wife and a Pearl Necklace

Chapter 1

Being a Cameron

Being born into the Clan Cameron of Inch brought with it many privileges and, for the children of a Victoria Cross winner, high expectations. For his older brothers such expectations were fully realised, with each pursuing promising careers in the British Army and the Royal Navy; for Cecil Aylmer Cameron destiny had prepared a different course, one marked by betrayal and shame, followed by atonement and redemption, but ultimately one that ended in tragedy.

Born on 17 September 1883, Cecil Aylmer Cameron was the youngest of five boys and three girls. Their father was Colonel Aylmer Spicer Cameron who had enjoyed a distinguished army career, including service in the Crimea and the Indian Mutiny. It was in India that he won his Victoria Cross "for conspicuous bravery on 30 March 1858 at Kotah, in having headed a small party of men and

attacked a body of armed fanatic rebels strongly posted in a loop-holed house with one narrow entrance; Lieutenant Cameron stormed the house and killed three rebels in single combat; he was severely wounded having lost half of one hand by a stroke from a tulwar" After promotion to major, Aylmer Cameron transferred from the 72nd Highlanders to the King's Own Scottish Borderers, becoming their Colonel in 1881. In the year that Cecil was born, 1883, his father began a three year posting as Assistant Quartermaster-General, Intelligence Branch at the War Office. During his tenure as head of the Intelligence Branch, Colonel Cameron was 'particularly concerned with the 'Great Game' of Anglo-Russian espionage and counter-espionage along India's north west frontier.'¹ It may be fanciful to believe that his father's interest in Russian affairs later rubbed off on Cecil. For the two years before he retired in 1888, Colonel Cameron was Commandant of the Royal Military College, Sandhurst.

As he grew up the young Cameron was immersed in the family's military traditions and values. His great grandfather had been a general in the East India Company and his grandfather, Lt Col. William Gordon Cameron of the Grenadier Guards, had lost his right arm at the Battle of Waterloo. The boy was sent to boarding school at Eastmans Royal Naval Academy in Portsmouth and, with two brothers in the Royal Navy, a career at sea was on the cards. However, when the time came to make his choice, it was his brother Orford who seems to have had the greatest influence. Lieutenant Orford Somerville Cameron was five years older than Cecil, and had served in the Royal Artillery during the Boer War. In 1899, at the age of seventeen, Cecil Aylmer Cameron was enrolled as a Gentleman Cadet into the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich.

At that time, the general belief was still held that military leaders were born and not made. Nonetheless, it was recognised that there were two areas of military activity calling for some technical knowledge: engineering and gunnery. Despite the reputation of Woolwich for turning out some of the ablest army officers, the cavalry and infantry officers from Sandhurst considered themselves to

be a cut above their comrades. Unperturbed, RMA Woolwich, was proud to be known simply as 'The Shop'.

At the time of Cameron's admission to Woolwich, the Academy was a mixture of the traditional and the modern. With a language of its own, both formal and informal, the first days for the new boys, or 'snookers', presented a steep learning curve. The academic content of the two year course included mathematics, physics and languages, together with military history. The practical syllabus included drill, both with guns and without, plenty of sport, fencing and even dancing lessons. Just before Cameron had entered the Academy the traditional method of teaching future engineers and gunners separately had been radically updated so that there was greater fusion of the courses.

It was whilst at Woolwich that Cecil Cameron left his first, albeit faint, entry in the pages of history. In 1901 he wrote a lighthearted letter to The Strand magazine "I send this photograph of one of the strongest men in the Army, for some time sergeant-instructor at Woolwich. His name is Sergeant Hawthorne. The gun he has on his shoulder, and which has just been fired from there, weighs 400lbs...surely this is a marvelous feat of strength. Mr. CA Cameron, RM Academy, Woolwich."

On 21 December 1901, at the age of eighteen, Gentleman Cadet Cameron passed out of Woolwich with the rank of Second Lieutenant, Royal Artillery. Standing at the dawn of the twentieth century, and with his family pedigree, the future for the young Cameron looked bright, with foreign postings and steady promotions and, if he was lucky, a chance for action somewhere in the British Empire, when he could demonstrate his prowess and catch the eye of a senior officer who might take an interest in his career. The death of Queen Victoria in 1901 and the crowning of Edward VII, heralded an era of fresh national optimism, opening a new chapter in British prosperity, progress and world leadership. The Boer War would soon be over and, although claimed as a victory, it exposed severe shortcomings in the organisation of the British army; these would lead to the major reforms of 1908. For Cameron the more immediate concern was to learn his trade, a process that began with the Royal Field Artillery and a posting on 10 February 1902 to the 96th Battery, then at

Birmingham. He moved with the battery to Aldershot Command on 23 July 1903, and in December 1904 he was promoted to Lieutenant.

In the summer of 1906, an article appeared in several respectable journals, entitled "*The need for social reform in Russia*". This studious and perceptive piece pointed out the differences between the Russian peasant and his counterpart in western Europe and, anticipating the upheavals which Russia would face a decade later, made the point that, "The material prosperity of an immense majority of Russian peasants cannot be assured by their own personal efforts, and consequently the peasant will not be and is not satisfied with the present bureaucratic form of government, but will strive towards the attainment of broad social reforms." The byline read: "Adapted from the Russian by C A Cameron RA". Somewhere along the line, Cecil Cameron had learned the Russian language and had become interested in Russian affairs. In February 1906, he had qualified for an annual army supplement of £125 upon qualifying as a first class interpreter in Russian. Perhaps his father, by then retired, had encouraged this interest; as head of the Intelligence Department at the War Office in the 1880s, Colonel Cameron had taken a particular interest in Russia and the North West Frontier.

After five years of home duties, Lieutenant Cameron embarked for his first overseas tour of duty to India in October 1907, where he joined the 75th Battery Royal Field Artillery at Nowshera (Lahore Cantonment), on the North West Frontier between British India and the tribal lands of Afghanistan.

Russia – Duty, friendship and love

Young army officers of the late Victorian, early Edwardian period could, if they made satisfactory progress, be rewarded with a sabbatical, usually in the form of an attachment to a foreign army or a leave of absence to learn a language abroad. For Cameron, already a Russian speaker, the opportunity to visit Tsarist Russia was too good to miss. It was there, in 1908, that he met two people who would have the greatest influence on his life. Captain Ormonde de l'Épée Winter was also an officer in the Royal Field Artillery and, although eight

years older than Cameron, the two men became immediate friends when they met in Tsaritsina. Winter later recalled them visiting the palace built by Catherine the Great, and as well as admiring the beauty of the location, they speculated about the antics of the Empress, who reportedly enticed young men of the household into her bed for the night, only to have them killed the next morning.

It was whilst they were in Russia that Captain Winter introduced Lieutenant Cameron to Ruby Mary Shawe who, at twenty four years of age was two years younger than him. Winter had met Ruby in 1903, when he was stationed with an artillery battery in India, and she was a house guest of Captain and Mrs McGrath. From the moment they were introduced, Cameron was spellbound by Ruby. Of Irish descent, the daughter of the manager of the Bank of China and, by all accounts, a very attractive young woman, Ruby was drawn to the tall, dark haired Cameron. In his memoirs, Winter claimed not to have been romantically interested in Ruby but, as we shall see later, this was far from the truth. When they had first met in 1903, Winter thought that Ruby was, “a pretty and attractive girl about eighteen years old.” He was suave, financially secure and well connected, but his premature balding and monocle may not have appealed to Ruby; with his large ego, she may have seen too much of herself in him. In the years since they had last met, Winter had become a regular sight at horse races, as an owner, spectator and rider. He had acquired a reputation as a *bon vivant* and counted amongst his friends an Arab Jew brothel-keeper who ‘was reputed to have committed every crime under the sun’.ⁱⁱ The friendship that Cameron formed with Ruby and Winter in 1908 was complex; they were both ego-centric characters, outgoing and selfish, whilst he was straightforward and naive in comparison.

In August 1904 Ormonde Winter had his own brush with the criminal law in a case that could have had serious consequences for his career and reputation but, unlike Cameron just a few years later, he left the courtroom a free man. It was whilst on home leave that Winter and an army friend were out rowing on the River Ouse at Biddenham in Bedfordshire, when a pleasant afternoon ended in tragedy. Having moored the boat on the river bank, two high spirited

teenage boys took the opportunity to jump in and row it to the opposite shore. After a verbal exchange, one of the boys returned the boat, but fifteen year old Sydney Hawkins remained on the other side of the river. Winter, determined to confront Sydney, then rowed across the Ouse and gave chase, but the boy ran off; unwilling to let the issue rest, Winter picked up two pairs of boots belonging to the boys. Unsurprisingly, Sydney returned and demanded that his boots be returned, and he began to throw mud and stones at Winter. Picking up one of the oars, Winter began to swing it around when, suddenly, it cracked against the side of the boy's head. Sydney Hawkins fell to the ground and lay still. The blow from the oar had broken his neck at the base of the skull and he was dead.

It was reported that Ormonde Winter displayed intense grief at what had happened. He was arrested and taken to Bedford police station for interview, then released on bail pending the findings of a coroner's inquest. That finding was one of manslaughter against Captain Winter, who was then charged and ordered to appear before local magistrates. His lawyers seem to have made short shrift of the case and the charge was dismissed. The police were clearly not happy with the decision and took the unusual step of raising a voluntary bill of indictment, which required Winter to stand trial for manslaughter at the next Assizes.

The trial took place at Bedfordshire Assizes in November 1904; Winter pleaded not guilty. The prosecution had to prove that Sidney Hawkins' death was the result of an unlawful act, in this case, the assault by striking the boy with the oar. Winter's case was that he acted in self defence, in other words that he had used only the minimum of force necessary to defend himself. The case was reported in newspapers across the world, and perhaps the heading in the Los Angeles Herald published on 4 December gives some indication of how Winter's lawyers were able to steer the case towards, perhaps, a surprising outcome:

**MAN PLEADS SELF-DEFENCE FROM BOY
British Officer Kills Rowdy with an Oar and then is
Acquitted**

Because Youth Threw Stones at Him

The verdict must have been devastating for Sidney's parents. By all accounts he was not a troublesome lad. On the day he died, he had been allowed out of his home for the first time in several weeks following being severely burned in an accident, and it was perhaps his euphoria at being able to get out to play with his friend that led to his exuberance. It is difficult to believe that Ormonde Winter needed to wield the oar as he did in the face of some childish mud throwing. He was lucky to avoid conviction, and characteristically he later went on to brag that he had 'got away with murder'.

Cecil Cameron was the complete opposite of Ormonde Winter: cautious, dependable and, most importantly, totally devoted to Ruby. Romance between the two flourished and it was no surprise to friends when they announced their engagement later in 1908, with plans for a wedding the following year. This was a match of true love, but one without a fairytale ending. Although it is clear that they remained deeply committed to each other, their future together was to bring shame and disgrace to him, illness and despair to her.

Family Fortunes

From the very start there was unease in Cameron's family at his choice of a wife. Ruby came from Irish stock, whose father was a bank manager; she simply did not fit into the Cameron family's notion of social acceptability. Cameron had seven siblings, five of whom were still living in 1908, and each of whom had made matches approved by the family. Of particular significance was the fact that his thirty year old brother, Orford Someville, now a Captain in the Royal Artillery, had married in 1907, and Cyril St Clair, his 29 year old naval officer brother was due to marry in August 1909. On the face of it, Cameron's marriage to Ruby in June should not have been a cause for concern, but it has to be seen in the context of the fact that his two brothers had chosen as their wives two sisters, Hestor and

Isobel Horden who were the epitome of good breeding and even lived in the same village, Alverstoke in Hampshire, as the Camerons.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite the lack of approval, amounting to downright hostility, we catch a glimpse of Cecil's character: weaker men would have bowed to family pressure, but not he. The marriage of the youngest Cameron son did not take place at the village church, as had his brothers, but quietly at St George's Church in Hanover Square, London.

The antipathy of Cameron's family was then compounded by the death of Colonel Cameron. He died on the 10th June 1909, just days from Cameron's wedding to Ruby. The obituary in *The Times* recorded the Colonel's distinguished military career, and noted that he had died after a long period of ill health. It is unlikely that his death was hastened by the actions of his youngest son, but no doubt there would have been opprobrium from the rest of the family towards Cameron and Ruby; nor can it have been the best of omens for the young couple as they began married life.

Indian Summer

After two weddings and a funeral, June 1909 was rounded off with Cameron and Ruby being forced to separate; on the 21 June he set off by rail to Marseille and then ship to Bombay. He had orders to return to India to rejoin his battery at Nowshera.^{iv} It would take time to make arrangements for Ruby to follow on, but the young couple were determined to be parted for no longer than absolutely necessary.

The couple's enforced separation was short-lived: at the end of October 1909, Ruby made the long overland and sea journey to join her husband at Nowshera. A blight on their joy at being reunited was the loss of much of their personal property on its voyage from England to India. Whole chests containing clothing and household goods had gone missing but, fortunately, Cameron had insured everything with Mr Henry Munt, a Lloyds broker, and a man who would play a key part in their lives over the next two years.

Arriving in the autumn, Ruby was initially spared the stifling heat of the Indian summer. It was six years since she had last been to India, and it was a happy return; apart from rejoining her husband, she

relished the prospect of the life of leisure and pleasure, made possible by a host of servants. Interspersed with their military duties the days taken up by horse racing, polo and drag hunting for the men, whilst the ladies enjoyed the endless round of afternoon tea parties and evening soirees. There, for a few months, the Camerons enjoyed all the trappings of life under the British Raj. It was during the evenings that Ruby became the centre of attention: 'good looking as she was [she] became very popular there and sang at many concerts and entertainments.'^v These were happy and carefree times for the young couple but, as the days lengthened and the mercury in the thermometer began to climb, their idyll drew to a close.

Although not yet critical, the Camerons had financial problems. Whilst in India, he received an overseas supplement to his pay, and the cost of living was lower than at home, but Cameron's bank account was not in a healthy state. By August 1908, he had accumulated a sizeable overdraft with a local bank, B.D.Oojagar Mull & Son of Nowshera. The bank began to send increasingly pressing demands for settlement of the debt, which stood at just over 1000 rupees, culminating in a final demand with a threat of legal action sent on 20 January 1909. Having seemingly ignored all previous correspondence, this threat spurred Cameron into action and, adopting attack as the best form of defence, he threatened the bank with action for breach of contract and defamation of character. This seemed to halt the bank in its tracks, and all went silent. However, it was not an end to the matter, and the debt would haunt Cameron in the future.

The property that went missing on its voyage to India was never recovered but thanks to Cameron having meticulously listed every single item, the insurers met their claim in full and paid out almost £265.^{vi} Although the loss of their belongings must have been a great inconvenience, there was no denying that this sudden injection of funds into Cameron's bank account was most welcome.

Apart from his regimental pay and allowances, amounting to no more than £150 a year, Cameron's only other source of income, at least whilst his father was alive, was an allowance of £25 per quarter. In June 1909, with Colonel Cameron's death, not only did that source of income cease, but he added the additional expense of a new wife,

and Ruby had expensive tastes. Colonel Cameron had left an estate of £7260.00, a tidy sum, but his widow was the sole beneficiary. Arabella did, in fact, continue to pay an allowance to her son but, at just £12 per quarter, he found himself living on an ever increasing overdraft. The simple fact was that the doting Cameron could refuse nothing to Ruby: furs, jewellery, silver plate, silk underwear, and much more. The problem was that the life to which they aspired was beyond their means. Had they been able to stay in India, they could have managed, but their life in India was about to be cut short.

It was in May 1910 that, as the dust, flies and oppressive heat returned, Ruby suddenly became ill, complaining of excruciating pains. The cause of her affliction eluded the doctors, military and civilian. Cameron took his wife to Rawalpindi to consult a civilian specialist, but again with no diagnosis. The only thing that helped was pain killing injections of morphia, resort to which became increasingly necessary to alleviate her symptoms. To make her more comfortable, it was decided to move Ruby to the hill town of Murree, about 70 miles from Nowshera. This was the centre of the British administration in the province and, because the air was so much fresher, the army had established a sanatorium there. The Camerons booked into the fashionable Rowbury's Hotel in early June.

Learning of their plight, Captain Ormonde Winter, who was also serving with a Royal Artillery battery on the Northwest Frontier, arrived to help. He seems to have had some knowledge of chemistry and tried to analyse blood specimens but, unable to find the cause, he took them to a laboratory where a dubious vaccine was concocted. Although this provided some relief, Ruby's need for more and more morphia to relieve her pain was a clear sign of her growing dependence on the drug. Cameron was desperate to find a solution, and he realised that they must return to England for an answer. In early August he put in a request for leave so that he could travel back to England with Ruby, but it was now that his dealings with the bank in Nowshera resurfaced; the bank had submitted a complaint to Cameron's regiment, and the application for leave was refused pending settlement of the account; Ruby had to travel back to Britain alone. Cameron was outraged and refused to be brow-beaten,

challenging the debt, as well as the rectitude of the army becoming involved in such a private matter. Once again, Ormond Winter stepped in by supporting his friend's claim that the demand was spurious and not enforceable, but also by promising to pay the debt himself if it proved to be payable. The application for leave was eventually authorised and Cameron was able to join Ruby in England as winter was setting in.

Almost unbelievably, the Camerons suffered another catastrophe with their personal belongings. This time, it was whilst their chests were at a hotel in Bombay awaiting shipment to England that the thief struck. As before, Cameron had taken out insurance with Mr Munt, and another detailed inventory led to an insurance payout of £532-16-1d. Without knowing how often such losses were sustained by soldiers travelling to and from India, it is impossible to know just how unlucky the Camerons were, but friends and colleagues thereafter commented on their bad luck, and two years later, when they stood together in the dock accused of fraud, such ill fortune would be used to discredit them.

Homecoming

On her arrival back in England in August, Ruby had stayed with her parents and then with friends in Cadogan Square, London. For his part, Cameron realised that returning to India with Ruby was out of the question, so he applied for a transfer to home duties. His posting to the 56th Battery, Royal Field Artillery at Piershill Barracks in Edinburgh was not at all to Ruby's liking; she had escaped the heat of India only to be consigned to the cold and damp of Scotland. It was perhaps as a consolation that Cameron secured the rental of an apartment on the second floor at 2 Heriot Row, in a particularly fashionable part of the city. There was no denying that the handsome young officer and his charming wife were welcome additions to the social life of Edinburgh but, no matter how attractive Ruby was, she had to face the fact that she did not automatically qualify for admission to Edinburgh society. Her husband certainly had the right family background, but with a father who was a bank manager,

however senior, Ruby had to find some way to establish her credentials, to earn her place in society.

What Ruby needed was something with which to impress those around her, to demonstrate her financial and social worth, a key to unlock the doors of Edinburgh's fashionable drawing rooms. She had already burdened Cameron with the cost of an expensive apartment and a French maid and she knew that she could expect nothing more ostentatious from her husband. The solution materialised out of the blue in the form of a beautiful and extremely valuable piece of jewellery: a pearl necklace. Not only did it emphasise her décolletage and beauty, but it would make her the centre of attention, even envy. But with no money of her own, and with her husband's income having reverted to the home rate of just £15 per month, barely enough to cover their living expenses, how did Ruby come by such an object?

Chapter 2

The Pearl Necklace

It was towards the end of 1910 when it was noticed that Ruby was wearing a double row pearl necklace; anyone could see that this was no ordinary necklace, and to those who admired it, Ruby was quick to explain that it was worth a staggering £6500 (equivalent to nearly £500,000 today), and that it had been given to her in circumstances both romantic and mysterious. Ruby had been unexpectedly bequeathed the necklace, and with it came a new social status. As Christmas approached, with its round of dinner parties, soirées and other social functions, Ruby was confident that her name would be added to many of the seasonal invitations; she was not disappointed.

But the bad luck for which the Camerons had acquired a reputation, waited for an opportunity to strike again. On 8 February 1911, they had attended an afternoon engagement, a lecture on French literature, at Mrs Graham's home at 22 Palmerston Place. When they left at just after 6pm, Ruby was dressed in her seal skin fur coat, with her hands tucked inside a muffler as protection against the winter chill. As it was not far, the couple decided to walk home, a journey which took them into Shandwick Place; at number 48 was one of the new branches of Boots Cash Chemists, although most people still tended to call it Inman's. Here they paused, as Cecil said that they should buy a new syringe with which to administer Ruby's daily injections of morphia. Ruby complained of a headache and said that she would wait outside in the fresh air. Cameron entered the shop and walked to the far counter where he was explaining to a shop assistant what he wanted when Ruby suddenly came through the front door. Seeing that something was wrong, Cameron rushed to her side; breathlessly, she explained that, in the few moments that she had been waiting outside, she had been robbed of her necklace. Cameron dashed for the door to look for the culprit, but none could be seen.

The thief, it seemed, had made a clean getaway. Ruby seemed unharmed, though clearly upset at the audacious snatch of her jewellery. Taking his wife's arm, Cameron noticed a police officer a short distance away and beckoned to him, and the couple explained what had just happened. The pearl necklace Ruby had been wearing had not been visible; it had not only been beneath her fur coat, which was buttoned up to her neck, but it had also been worn under her dress. Clearly, the thief must have known she was wearing it, and he had shown remarkable dexterity in removing it so easily without the necklace breaking and shedding pearls over the pavement. The policeman asked whether Ruby had seen the robber, or where he went. She pointed vaguely across the road, and said the man had been tall and dark haired, but she could add little else. She also thought that there was a second man. Ruby took pains to emphasise to the policeman just how valuable the necklace was.

It should be noted that, whilst the Camerons were describing the incident to the policeman, no one came forward to say they had witnessed the robbery, a fact that would be remarked upon later. For now, however, the police constable wanted the Camerons to accompany him to the nearby Torpichen Police station to make a full written report of the incident. Believing that his wife was too distressed to walk, Cameron hailed a cab for the short journey. Upon arrival at the police station, written statements were taken, after which the cab took the Camerons back home. Cameron took Ruby's arm to steady her and guided her inside, before returning to pay off the cab driver.

During the days following the robbery, there was a flurry of activity; the police began their investigation, newspaper reports appeared not only throughout Britain but also abroad. This was a story which could not fail to ignite the interest of the public – the charming young couple being the victims of such a daring crime in the middle of Edinburgh. The police came in for some criticism, not only for failing to catch the perpetrators immediately, but also the fact that law abiding citizens could be attacked in the streets with such apparent ease.

As for the Camerons, they were trying to come to terms with their predicament. Although Ruby seems to have suffered some delayed reaction, and took to her bed in the days after the robbery, Cameron lost no time in taking firm action. For a couple who were far from wealthy, the loss of such a valuable possession must have been devastating; even persons of wealth could ill afford such a loss. It was at least some consolation that the Camerons had had the good sense to insure the necklace and that the insurance had been effected through none other than Mr Henry Munt. It was to Munt that Cameron turned at this distressing time: within minutes of returning home from Torpichen Police Station on 8 February, he dashed off a telegram to Munt.

'Edinburgh C

7.25pm.Regret to report pearl necklace snatched off wife's neck in street 6.15pm to night local police informed immediately. Will you set your own detectives to work. Advisable send special man up here immediately.

Cameron 2 Heriot Row.'

The telegram was followed by a letter which Cameron also posted that evening, in which he enclosed a copy of his and his wife's police statements, and in which he confided to Munt that *'We are fearfully upset and my wife is prostrated by it.'* Munt sent a consoling reply, and confirmed that loss adjusters had been appointed, and that they were sending a detective immediately to look into the incident. Quite why Cameron felt it necessary to ask for a detective to be sent up is unclear; perhaps it was because he was not impressed with the attitude of the Edinburgh police who, almost from the outset, seem to have treated the incident with disbelief. Unfortunately, when the private detective arrived, Cameron felt he also was not taking the claim seriously. So concerned was he that he wrote again to Munt on 14 February.

'We are disappointed at the result of your man's visit. He only stayed one day and seemed even sceptical because the thing seemed so wonderful...My poor little wife has been fearfully knocked out by this shock and her throat is giving her a great deal of pain. There are distinct marks of the man's finger and thumb. I only wish to God I had

been with her. She sends her kindest regards to you and your family...'

After a placatory and friendly reply from Henry Munt, Cameron soon had worse to report. The police seemed to think that the whole thing could be a hoax. The Chief of Police had asked Cameron if he had money difficulties; *'It did not seem to occur to him that we could have sold the necklace if we had wanted to.'* The police officer then put it to Cameron that it was not possible, surely, to remove the necklace in the way described without causing some injury, and at the same time preventing Ruby from screaming. This was just too much for Cameron who protested that Ruby had suffered injury to her neck; he also who offered to demonstrate on the Police chief how, using just his finger and thumb he could apply pressure to his neck so as to prevent him from screaming or making any other sound. The loss adjusters were also asking for details of how Ruby came to own such a valuable necklace, to which Cameron made the perfectly reasonable point to Munt that if it was relevant they could have asked this before accepting the insurance. Cameron's letter closed with:

'But enough of this. My poor little wife has been most seriously ill & is still suffering acutely from the shock & violence used... It is all too cruel & I am sure you as our friend will help us in this matter which is so very unpleasant.'

Two weeks had passed since the robbery and Ruby had hardly stirred from her bed. Munt continued to offer his support to the Camerons, as in his letter of 22nd February 1911. After explaining that such large claims invariably involved detailed investigation and *'a lot of unpleasantness'*, his words must have been reassuring to Cameron:

'Take my advice & try & forget what has been said: but under no circumstances agree to accept any compromise in the way of payment...Do nothing like this without first consulting me & be sure of one thing, & that is that I am looking after your interests as if they were my own...I have already told the Underwriters and [the loss adjusters] that you and your wife are well known to me & that you are both personal friends...'

Munt then suggested that Cameron should disclose the circumstances in which Ruby came to own the necklace, as he could not see that it would harm the claim. Somewhat mysteriously, Munt then enclosed another short letter, to confirm that he correctly understood the history of the necklace.

'I understood your wife to say that she was very fond of a young daughter of Mr Walker's and that she died quite young, & that your wife constantly used to go and see her when she was ill, & just before she died. The child expressed a wish shortly before she died that the necklace that was her mother's, & would have been hers if she had lived, should be given to Mrs Cameron, and that wish was carried out by her father.'

With the proviso that if he had wrongly understood the story of the necklace, Cameron should destroy this letter he offered, if it was correct, to pass the information to the loss assessors. Quite why Munt felt it necessary to confide these remarks to a separate sheet, and to ask that it be destroyed if not accurate, is difficult to fathom. Perhaps he did not want Ruby to be revealed as untruthful, or was he thinking of his own skin? This letter is significant in that it shows the basis upon which Munt arranged for the necklace to be insured; it had been a gift to Ruby, and was therefore her property. Later developments call into question Munt's actions and state of knowledge. For the time being, however, Cameron was once again reassured, and replied to Munt on the 23rd February confirming the facts as outlined, and sending him copies of letters from Mr Walker to Ruby. The letter ended with effusive expressions of gratitude to Munt for his help.

Then, on 24th February, Munt sent another brief letter to Cameron. The tone had changed; gone were the promises of support and friendship. It was little more than a simple acknowledgment and ended with the prophetic message:

'I think at present we had better not write letters as if this leads to trouble it is as well that neither of us should have private correspondence.'

If Munt's note sounded ominous, the Camerons only had to wait for two more days to discover that his premonition of trouble was well founded. On Sunday 26th February, as the Camerons left their

home to get into a cab, Detective Officer James Ingram approached and arrested Ruby on suspicion of fraud; Cameron insisted on going with his wife to the police station. During the journey to Edinburgh Central police station, Ruby became very animated, almost hysterical: ‘God damn it! Are you all mad? Don’t you know I’m a lady. This is all a plot. Oh you Scottish devils I wish I had never come to Scotland.’ Cameron sat silently, and Ruby turned to him ‘Oh Jock, you would not take my advice. I expected something of this kind. Why did we not go to London?’ Soon after their arrival at the police station Cameron was also arrested, following which they were both questioned and then charged with attempted fraud. The allegation was that, acting together, they had taken out insurance on a necklace pretending that it belonged to Ruby and then making a claim on that insurance, pretending that Ruby had been robbed. Cameron remained silent, but Ruby screamed: ‘All I say is it’s a downright lie’.^{vii} Both were held overnight in the cells to appear at the Sherriff Court next morning, where they were granted bail to await trial in due course at the High Court.

Chapter 1 Being a Cameron

ⁱ Geography, Cartography and Military Intelligence: The Royal Geographical Society and the First World War Michael Heffernan Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers Vol. 21, No. 3 (1996), pp. 504-533 at p 506 @

ⁱⁱ Winter, Ormonde de l’Epee. Winter’s Tale. Richards Press London 1955 page 90

ⁱⁱⁱ The disapproval of Ruby by Cameron’s family is reflected in a letter from Ormonde Winter to Ruby dated 21 October 1910: ‘I couldn’t have anything to do with Jock’s people – they cannot make up for the way in which they have treated you.’ Trial Papers National Library of Scotland; Exhibit bundle page 91.

^{iv} Now in Pakistan.

^v Winter’s Tale p184

^{vi} Worth approximately £35000 today: National Archives Currency Calculator.

Chapter 2 The Pearl Necklace

^{vii} From the statement of Lieut William Moodin, Edinburgh Police. Trial papers.

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