

An Unlikely Spy

Excerpt 2



The Camerons stand trial

The trial of the Camerons began on 29 May 1911, at the High Court of Justiciary, sitting at Parliament House in Edinburgh. Only a few days before, the city had gathered to say farewell to the illusionist, The Great Lafayette; he had been killed whilst performing at the city's Empire Theatre; a lamp had caught fire during Lafayette's *pièce de résistance*, *The Lion's Bride*, setting the stage ablaze. The audience sat transfixed, believing it was part of the show, until the safety curtain was lowered and they were told to leave. Whilst they fled to safety, many of the staff and players were trapped behind the curtain and perished. Lafayette himself escaped, but he returned to the inferno to save his horse; he did not reappear. In a

macabre twist, when the illusionist's body was recovered it was sent to Glasgow for cremation; it came as a shock when, two days later, his body was found again laying in the rubble of the theatre. It transpired that the first body was that of Lafayette's stage double. This time, the great man was not sent for cremation, but was treated to an elaborate funeral and burial at Piershill Cemetery, across from the barracks where Lieutenant Cameron was stationed.

The spotlight now fell on the Camerons. The press had been reporting the case since the day of the robbery, and public interest in the story had spread worldwide; many people were outraged that the vulnerable young woman and her gallant husband could have been treated so shoddily by the Edinburgh police and, to the very last, it was expected that everything would be cleared up and the charges dropped. With the trial about to begin, such was the public demand to watch the court drama, that entry to the public galleries was by ticket only, leaving large crowds gathered outside. The Camerons, he wearing a grey suit and Ruby dressed all in blue, with a small blue hat, and finished with a sprig of Lilly of the Valley in her lapel, entered the dock and took their places, a policeman on either side. Every eye was turned on them to detect signs of nerves or any other frailty that could be reported in the press or discussed in the salons of Edinburgh; observers were unanimous, and perhaps disappointed, that the Camerons appeared steady and assured. The other key players in the drama were assembled, with William Hunter KC MP, Solicitor General, on the prosecution bench, and Mr Morrison KC for Lieutenant Cameron sitting alongside Mr Clyde KC, who would represent Ruby, occupying the defence seats. The chatter and rustle of expectation was brought to an abrupt halt as the usher announced the entrance of the judge, Lord Dunedin. After the swearing in of the all-male jury, formalities were concluded with the two defendants standing to answer the charge: 'not guilty'.

The prosecution had assembled an impressive list of witnesses, sixty two in all, and the trial was scheduled to last all week. After his opening speech, the prosecutor produced plans and photographs of the chemist's shop and Shandwick Place; as it had been dark at the time of the robbery, the plans included the position of street lights.

Witnesses from Inman's were the first to be called and generally agreed that, as Ruby entered the shop after the robbery she 'did not seem to be perturbed in the slightest', her clothing was not disarranged and there was no commotion. When cross-examined by defence counsel, shop assistant Andrew Patterson did concede that Ruby seemed excited, very pale and agitated as she told her husband what had just occurred outside the shop. After Ruby had spoken to her husband, they walked towards the door and he was heard to say 'Where, dear?' before they both left the shop.

The next two prosecution witnesses created a real problem for the Camerons. Bearing in mind that the defence case was that Ruby had been robbed in the street, it was unfortunate, and, given the publicity created, perhaps surprising, that no witnesses came forward at the time to say that they had seen the incident. Even more unfortunate was the evidence given by two young ladies, Flora McNeill and her friend Julia Mackay, who claimed that they had been standing only yards from the very spot where the robbery was said to have taken place. They told the court that they had actually been watching the Camerons, and that absolutely nothing untoward had happened to Ruby. They explained how they were walking arm-in-arm and approached Inman's from the opposite direction to the Camerons, arriving outside the shop at about the same moment. They said their attention was drawn to the couple by their appearance, 'especially by that of the gentleman who seemed to us good looking', an observation that caused some amusement in the courtroom. The two women kept watch as the gentleman went into Inman's leaving the lady outside. They testified that at no time did anyone brush past the lady, nor put a hand upon her. It was quite impossible for the alleged robbery to have taken place as described without them having seen it - and they saw nothing of the sort. Damning as this evidence seemed, some might have thought that the testimony from these two witnesses was too good to be true. Did they really study the Cameron's so minutely, or might they be mistaken? They were challenged on why did they not make themselves known to the police constable on the day, when something was clearly afoot, instead of two weeks later. They explained this by saying that they talked it over afterwards and only

after having sought advice from their employer did they attend the police station.

Several police officers were then called who had had dealings with the Camerons on the day of the robbery. The general tenor of their evidence was to the effect that Ruby did not seem unduly shaken or excited, that she neither complained of nor apparently had any injury to her neck; it was also confirmed that there were no known street robbers at work in the city at that time.

Next into the witness box was Alfred Leach, the inquiry agent employed by the insurers. From the outset it was clear that here was a very experienced investigator, and a man who stuck to the facts and could be trusted not to exaggerate. Although Cameron had told Munt that he was disappointed with the way Leach had dealt with the case, he was in fact a retired detective superintendent of the Metropolitan Police, and his steady account of the facts must have impressed the jury. He told how, when he visited the Camerons at their home, the maid had told him that she had put the necklace on Ruby before they went out, and how she noticed the damage to the hooks of Ruby's dress when she returned home, and that she bent them back into shape. Leach had looked at the dress and could detect no sign of any damage to it or the hooks, though he accepted that he was no expert in such matters. Mr Clyde, Ruby's barrister cross-examined Leach, but probably wished he had not: in trying to get him to accept that snatching jewellery in the street was a common crime, Leach agreed, but only where the jewellery was on view and easily accessible, and Ruby's necklace was neither. Clyde persisted by trying to draw a parallel with the recent snatching of the Gold Cup at Ascot, but this drew an acerbic response which not only caused laughter in the court, but must have reflected the thoughts of many at that stage of the proceedings: 'to put one hand on the throat and another down the woman's neck and take the necklace out like sausages, why, it is absurd.'

What must have been an increasingly miserable day for the Camerons was not yet over. If Alfred Leach had expressed surprise that the hooks of Ruby's dress appeared not to have been damaged, he did not claim to be an expert in female garments, and this left open

the possibility that the maid had, as she claimed, bent the hooks back to shape. That slim possibility did not survive the prosaic evidence of the next witness, Mr James Inglis, who described himself as a specialist in ladies tailoring. He was absolutely certain the hooks and eyes of the dress were in pristine condition, and had not been subject to anything other than normal wear and tear. His sixteen years in the business qualified Inglis to state 'I have a good deal of experience in the matter of hooking and unhooking ladies dresses, and I always use two hands', thus rendering the feat of the robber, who used just the one hand to reach inside Ruby's coat and dress and remove the necklace without breaking it, as 'almost unbelievable.'

At the end of the first day of the trial, the Camerons were released on bail to return to their apartment, and the jury was conveyed to the Balmoral Hotel for the night. The following morning, there was again a large crowd gathered outside the court building; the majority of spectators were ladies from Edinburgh high society. For those who did not have a ticket to the public gallery, they might at least catch a glimpse of the couple as they arrived in their carriage. The Camerons returned to their places in the dock. If they were feeling the strain of the proceedings, they hid the fact well, though it was noted that Ruby seemed pale, or was it simply in contrast to the navy blue costume she was wearing, with black straw hat adorned with a white feather and a buttonhole of bright red carnations. All was ready for the second day of the drama of the pearl necklace.

Police witnesses were called to detail the search of the Camerons' apartment and the finding of documents and other items; significantly, it was conceded in cross examination that there had been no apparent attempt to hide or destroy any of this incriminating evidence.

After some legal argument, there then began the attempt by the prosecution to unravel the mystery of the origin of the pearl necklace. In short, Ruby had always claimed that it was a gift from a friend named Billy Walker. It had belonged to Walker's wife and, upon her death, it was left to their young daughter. The child had then fallen ill and Ruby had nursed and comforted the child, who had sadly died. It was the child's wish that the necklace pass to Ruby, a wish honoured by Billy Walker. The necklace had then been insured through Henry

Munt and Ruby had worn it for some months before the daring robbery in February.

It fell to the Procurator Fiscal, Robert Renton, to disprove this account and to reveal what had really happened. He gave evidence about letters found during the search of the Cameron's home, especially a number from a Billie Walker. It was he who, after some reluctance, the Camerons had told the insurers had given the necklace to Ruby after the untimely deaths of first his wife and then his daughter. Renton read out a letter from Walker, dated 14th November 1910, which apparently gave full details of how and why he had given the necklace to Ruby:

'My darling girlie,-I shall bring you the pearls in a day or so. I have kept them for you. India was a risky place to send them to, but you will respect Eileen's request I know. Alas! How often I offered pearls and all else I had to my little ladyship. The pearls are lovely, two rows, and have been years of labour matching, I fancy. I long to see you in them, my Irish girlie. As a child your big grey eyes haunted me, and now they hurt more than ever. I am going out of reach of all this; the wilds of Africa will know me again for months. It is a lonely life, Ruby, out of touch with your pals, and I leave no address, and so forget it all for a while, at least. It is awful hard to pick up the thread of the pearls again. By the bye, except for your husband, whose consent you must get, keep my name out altogether, girlie. I have many good and important reasons. I will ensure them if you like, but perhaps your husband would rather do it with his own man. They are yours, darling, and I am thankful at last, sad as the circumstances are, I can give these at least, my little girl, my brave little Irish colleen. The pearls were given by Genee to a pal to look at, and he declared they are as fine as he has seen anywhere. This was years and years ago now. Ruby, I can trust you so—You are that delightful thing, a close woman. Would to God there were more. Those pearls were the wages of sin, and belonged to the man my wife loved, but on forgiving her I let her keep his things. You know the wretched story and will spare me more. My innocent child left them to you, and it's love alone they carry now. I will meet you anywhere, but alone. I

want no strangers there. Your husband will consent for no man knowing you could but trust you always and anywhere. Billie Walker'

The next Billie Walker letter to be read to the jury was a curious mixture of romance and politics:

'My Darling Ruby, -I was glad to get the valuation and insurance completed. Now you will feel they are, indeed, yours and wear them always as my baby wished for her sake as well as mine; it will be safer. You are such a child in many ways, yet such a woman in others, just one of Erin's daughters – fairest I should say; and God, what that means. I have been over this old world once or twice, eh, Ruby? I am no saint, heaven knows, but you have saved me more than once, eh, many a time. I couldn't be a beast and then come to you. I hardly ought to now. Ireland and you – it's all my world. By the bye, I am for Home Rule all round. I am sure the Income-tax in England will go down 6d in the £1, and it is just a splendid idea. I can't think how any Englishman can vote against it when one sees its splendid possibilities, and your dear distressful country shall have got their rights, and we shall all be happy. I do hope you think so after all the lessons you gave me on the advantages of Home Rule. I am sure the pearls look lovely on you my darling little girl, and that Jock likes them on you too. I am so glad Jock has cheered up. I am sure that now he has got you safely home again, it must be a relief to his feelings. Poor dear, I can understand you being bored with the very name of the Staff College. With love to you, dearest, and Ruby, are you really stronger now? Yours ever. Billie Walker'

Like other documentary evidence used by the police at the trial, the Billie Walker letters were readily found during the search of the apartment, with no attempt having been made to either hide or destroy them. On the face of it, these letters fully accounted for the sudden appearance of the necklace, and were consistent with the accounts given by Ruby to friends and acquaintances, and to Henry Munt and the insurers. But it was the Crown's case that these letters were forgeries, and were evidence of the sophisticated and carefully planned scheme between Ruby and her husband to defraud the insurance companies. To prove this, the prosecution needed to establish three things. Firstly that the letters were forgeries; secondly,

that Billie Walker had not given Ruby the valuable necklace and lastly, to account for the fact that an insurance policy had been taken out by Ruby through Mr Henry Munt to cover an apparently genuine pearl necklace valued at £6500.

On the basis that the letters had never been used to either obtain the insurance, nor to support the claim, Ruby's lawyer argued that they were irrelevant, and it mattered not whether they were forgeries. However, the judge ruled that, if the letters could shed light on whether the necklace insured by Ruby was hers or not or, indeed, whether there was ever a necklace at all, they were admissible in evidence. Establishing that the letters were forgeries proved a simple matter. A handwriting expert was called and he proved that the letters had actually been written by Ruby herself. The expert established that the formation of letters and words in the Walker correspondence was identical to that in letters known to have been written by Ruby. He also pointed to the words 'ensure' and 'insurance', misspellings which had also been found in documents undoubtedly written by Ruby. There were a number of other letters, apparently sent to Ruby by Mary Nutting from Paris and Monte Carlo, and these were also proved to have been penned by Ruby. Again, although these had never been used in the taking out of the insurance or in making the claim, they revealed a carefully constructed history of the necklace and how it came into Ruby's possession. It was proved, for instance, that the letters from Paris had been sent by Ruby's maid to a friend of hers in France with a request that she post them back to Ruby. It followed, suggested the prosecution, that if the letters from Walker were actually written by Ruby, then the story of how she had been given the necklace must be untrue. Despite claims by some defence witnesses to know of Billy Walker from times past, the Crown maintained that he did not exist, that he existed only in the imaginations of the defendants.

Having shown that the Billy Walker letters were forged, the prosecution still had to explain how it was the Ruby had not only been seen by many people to have been wearing a pearl necklace, but also that such a necklace had been valued and insured for £6500 by Henry Munt. One witness, Mrs Agnew, claimed that she had seen the

necklace, and that Ruby had told her she had been given it by a Russian friend. There was even a witness who claimed to have seen Ruby wearing the pearl necklace at the function on the afternoon of the robbery. So where did Ruby's necklace originate and what had happened to it? The prosecution prepared to reveal the answers to these questions to the jury and to a world-wide audience which had been avidly following the trial.

This part of the case began with a visit by Cameron and wife to Carrington & Co, who were reputable jewellers and silversmiths with a shop in London's fashionable Regent Street. On 18 November 1910, Ruby and her husband visited the shop and enquired about some earrings. The person who served them was 30 year old Ernest Hayward, who had worked for Carringtons for eight years. It transpired that the Camerons had been recommended by Hayward's brother, who had lodged with Ruby's parents in the recent past. It is of note that this was the one and only time that Cameron had any direct or personal dealings with Carringtons or Hayward; thereafter Ruby acted entirely on her own. She returned to the shop on 24 November and ordered some earrings and a cheap pearl bead necklace, value of about £2. On her next visit on Saturday 26th November, Ruby showed great interest in two single strand pearl necklaces in a display cabinet, commenting to Hayward that she owned a single necklace with two rows of pearls which had been greatly admired, and that if Hayward could have the two necklaces made into a single one of two rows, she believed that she could find a buyer for it. Under Ruby's influence, and with the prospect of commission on the sale, Hayward agreed to restring the two single rows of pearls and fit a new clasp, thereby creating a superb and extremely valuable necklace. So trusting was Hayward that he then agreed to leave it in Ruby's possession for some days to show to the potential buyer.

Next, Ruby arranged for a copy of the new necklace to be made, explaining to Hayward that it must be exact so that she could wear it in public instead of her own valuable necklace. During the time that the genuine necklace was in her possession, Ruby arranged for it to be valued by an independent jeweller and then insured it in her name.

Obtaining the insurance on the necklace was the difficult part, and here Ruby turned to Henry Munt. She had already had dealings with him after the loss of her belongings between India and England in 1909 and 1910. Quite how she persuaded him to act as he did is less obvious than with Hayward, but it is clear that Munt seriously bent the rules by insuring the necklace. To obtain insurance it is necessary to have an 'insurable interest'; usually this is ownership, but might be some other formal claim to the item to be insured. Ruby had no such claim, she had simply borrowed it for a few days. The evidence gathered by Edinburgh police included a series of letters between Ruby and Hayward and Munt. They reveal what was undoubtedly a significant degree of manipulation of both men by Ruby, but also a willingness by each of them fall in with her scheming. As will be seen, this correspondence focused upon the important question of ownership of the necklace and is followed by, quite frankly, some unconvincing attempts in the statements later made to the police by the two men, Munt in particular, to explain their behaviour.

Firstly, the statement of Ernest Hayward explained how Ruby called on him on 26 November, 2010, when *'she was much attracted by two necklaces in a separate case...She said that she had a two row pearl necklace of very fine pearls very similar...She also said that she could find a purchaser for our necklaces if they were made up as a two row necklace...Although she did not mention any name the impression she left on my mind was that the necklace was to be purchased by a relative of her husband's...and either then or later to be given to her. She also said she would like a copy made of her own necklace, but that it was kept at the bank...but if our necklaces were made up as above described it would so closely resemble hers that a copy of it would practically be a copy of hers...she told me she was going to insure the real pearl necklace...through Mr Henry Munt of Lloyds...and I should take them up to him on Wednesday 30th November...She expected to see the purchaser of the pearls on the 1st December.'*

Hayward then received a letter from Ruby telling him not to take the pearls to Munt on Wednesday, but on Friday; she told him to say nothing other than *'Mrs Cameron wishes Mr Munt to see the pearls*

and have them valued if he wishes before you.' Her letter ended with *'I will come and see you Thursday morning and hope to bring this off for you. Have the pearls copied as soon as possible.'* This final sentence reveals another strand of Ruby's plan: to have a copy of the valuable necklace made, one that looked the same, but was worth a mere fraction of the real one.

Hayward's next letter from Ruby, dated 1 December, instructed him to take the necklace to Munt the next day. Again she gave him strict instructions as to what he should say: *'you value the pearls at £5000 and that I wish them insured at least for £6500...Don't say anything else as I wish him to feel it is quite settled –he then can't suggest any others...Don't mention your name to Mr Munt as my old cousin knows your brother is with us and will think I only want to help a friend.'*

Whilst Ruby was keeping Hayward busy with instructions, she was also in touch with Munt. On 1 December she wrote, *'...I want you to ensure some lovely pearls...Jock's writing to you about them tomorrow...I rather want them to be ensured under the name I used to be known in the Singing World – Miss Ruby O'Brien – I always had luck then...I have been given them on condition that I wear them.'* There is no record of Cameron ('Jock') having spoken or written to Munt at this stage.

On Friday 2nd December Hayward went to see Munt with the pearls. Despite his strict instructions from Ruby, his loose talk nearly ruined Ruby's whole plan; he explained what happened in his police statement: *'I had about half an hour's conversation with Mr Munt and I told him what I understood to be the position, that Mrs Cameron expected to find a purchaser for the necklace and I understood the necklace would then or ultimately be hers.'* This must have left Munt in a quandary; he would have realised immediately that Ruby did not have an insurable interest in the necklace unless and until she owned it. What Hayward had just told him was at odds with Ruby's claim to *'have been given them'*. To compound matters, Hayward wrote to Munt the following day with the formal valuation of the pearls *'which we contemplate selling'* at £6000. Hayward thanked Munt *'for all the trouble you have taken in this matter and trust a sale will result.'*

Meanwhile, Ruby again wrote to Hayward promising to '*do my utmost to accomplish the end I want in getting you the sale...*'

Fortunately, Munt called upon Ruby on Monday afternoon; he must have told her of his concerns. As soon as Munt left, Ruby sent a hurried message to Hayward instructing him to write another letter to Munt. This he did, in a note that simply stated: '*We value the 2 rows of fine Pearls that Mrs Cameron has at £6000 for insurance purposes.*' Munt thanked Hayward for that letter, confirming that: '*It is what I required and quite satisfactory.*' The insurance was put into effect and Hayward delivered the genuine newly created two row pearl necklace to Ruby at 59 Cadogan Square on the 7th December.

It must have dawned on both Munt and Hayward that Ruby was telling them entirely different stories; that neither of them drew back from the web of deceit into which they were being drawn is testament to Ruby's powers of manipulation. For Hayward, there was the prospect of commission on a high value sale. However, as he later told police: 'I was now beginning to feel uneasy in regard to the position and in consequence of certain information received.' He called on Ruby on 19th December and took back the real pearl necklace, despite Ruby's protestations that she hoped to tie up the sale that evening. The imitation necklace, now almost indistinguishable from the real one, was delivered to Ruby the next day. Within the week, for reasons unknown, Hayward was dismissed from Carringtons.

Henry Munt also succumbed to Ruby's charm; apart from his modest commission on arranging the insurance, it is difficult to find any other reason or motive for his actions. The fact remains that he had clear evidence that the necklace had not been given to Ruby by Billie Walker, that she did not own it, and that he should not have insured it. In his statement to the police, Munt goes to great lengths to explain his actions, but his explanations do not sit easily with the case as it was presented to the jury. He claimed to have little recollection of his meeting with Hayward on 2 December and that he did 'not recollect of [Hayward] saying that Mrs Cameron expected to find a purchaser for the necklace...I understood from Mrs Cameron's letter that the necklace was her property...I see from the letter of 3rd

December 1910...at the later part...he refers to the sale of the necklet...but this did not attract my attention at the time...as I was under the belief...that...the pearls were her property.' He continued, 'I am quite certain that Mrs Cameron [did not] represent to me that the necklace did not belong to her and that she was simply looking out for a purchaser for it. Of course if that had been so I would never have insured it in her name as her own property.' After recounting that Ruby had given him the full story of Billie Walker and the wishes of his deceased child, Munt says that, as he did not pay much attention to that story, 'it did not occur to me at the time that there was any inconsistency between her statement and the communications I had received from Carrington & Co.' It will be recalled that Munt had written to Lieutenant Cameron on 22 February, enclosing a note which he asked Cameron to destroy if it were wrong. That note read: *'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.'* To then state to the police that he had paid little attention to the Billie Walker story, was demonstrably untrue.

These contradictions in what Henry Munt did and what he then said to police might have undermined his credibility, but they were of no help to the Cameron's: Cecil's lawyer could not exploit them because to do so would reflect badly on Ruby. Mr Clyde had been given very clear instructions by Cameron that, whatever the consequences for him, the lawyer must say and do nothing that would undermine Ruby's defence. On the other hand, the judge was not so constrained, and he must have also noted these inconsistencies; why did he not seek clarification?

The prosecution had now proved that Billy walker did not exist and had explained how Ruby came to be in possession of a valuable pearl necklace, together with an exact copy. Although she had returned the real necklace to Hayward in mid-December, she still had

kept the imitation; it must have been that copy that Ruby had been wearing in Edinburgh in the weeks before the robbery.

During the course of the trial, very little mention had been made of Cecil Cameron; he had been with Ruby at the very first visit to Carringtons in November, he had also signed the cheque for £38 to insure the pearl necklace, but he had written no letters to Munt or Hayward, nor had he spoken to either of them throughout his wife's dealings. In fact, for much of December, he had been immersed in his preparations for his Russian interpreter's requalification examination. Had this been the extent of the evidence against him, the prosecution would have been hard pressed to prove a case against him. However, the Crown had two additional pieces of evidence which, they claimed, showed that Cameron was up to his neck in planning the fraud with his wife.

In the few days before the robbery, Cameron had written to his bank asking for advice on investing £6000 which, he explained, he would soon receive. The reply from the bank, with its suggestions, was found by police during the search of the Heriot Place apartment. Secondly, the police found paperwork recording that Cameron was looking to buy a car, and they discovered that he had booked a test drive of a £300 vehicle for a few days after the robbery. The prosecution had already produced the Cameron's bank accounts, showing that the couple were far from wealthy, and that they were living beyond their means. So where, asked Mr Hunter, the prosecutor, was this money, almost exactly the same amount as the insurance claim, going to come from? Cecil Cameron declined to answer this question during police interviews, and his silence throughout the trial left the prosecution able to suggest the obvious answer: he was planning how to spend the money from the insurance pay-out.

Defence witnesses were then called by Ruby's lawyers. Doctor Burn Murdoch gave evidence that he had attended Mrs Cameron the morning after the robbery, and found her 'much upset and agitated,' and that her throat appeared to have been compressed. Under cross examination, he conceded that it was possible, 'but highly improbable,' that the marks were self-inflicted. Ruby's maid,

Ernestine Tenca, spoke of her mistress owning a beautiful pearl necklace that she wore every day. On 5 December 1910, another necklace was delivered to her mistress from Carringtons, but this was returned on 19 December. Tenca knew nothing of an imitation necklace from Carringtons. Miss Frances Congreve was at the party at Lady Ruthven's on the day of the robbery, and she spoke with Mrs Cameron commenting on the magnificent pearl necklace that she had worn to a ball the previous week; Mrs Cameron said that at the moment the necklace was under her dress. Though her husband did not, Ruby chose to give evidence in her own defence. Consisting of little more than flat denials and absurd explanations, her account probably did more harm than good.

The evidence complete, it only remained for the advocates to make their final speeches. Important though these were, only the most optimistic observer would have expected any argument by defence counsel to have swayed the jury from finding the Camerons guilty. Then, in a final twist, there suddenly appeared a spark of hope for the couple. As the Solicitor General outlined the salient points of the prosecution case, explaining that at its core was a fraudulent claim upon the insurers, the judge suddenly stopped him. The prosecution had made a massive blunder: they had not proved that any claim had been signed or submitted to the insurers by Ruby Cameron; it would have been a simple matter, but the prosecutor had forgotten to introduce this evidence. This left what the judge described as 'an ugly hole' in their case. How desperately tense must have been the atmosphere in the courtroom as the judge, at the eleventh hour and out of the blue, pointed to what might be a fatal flaw in the case.

Hope, however, was short lived: after hearing what the lawyers had to say, Lord Dunedin made his ruling. The offence was a conspiracy to attempt to defraud the insurers and, whilst the submission of a signed claim form would certainly be an attempt to commit the fraud, actions prior to that might also amount to an attempt. The judge described a distinction between 'mere preparation and perpetration', and he directed that if the facts were accepted, even without the Crown producing the signed claim, the jury should find that Camerons had gone beyond mere preparation and to have

embarked upon perpetration.ⁱ Lord Dunedin then proceeded to sum up the case to the jury. He mentioned the evidence from an independent jeweller, a man called Wellby. He had seen and valued a genuine pearl necklace in Ruby's possession on a date when she did not have the Carrington necklace. Had Wellby been mistaken about the date, or did Ruby have another valuable necklace? 'Whether Mrs Cameron had a pearl necklace,' said the judge, 'or whether she had not was really the crucial question in the case.' He turned to Cameron's letter to his bank, and underlined its significance, especially in the absence of any explanation from its author. Although it failed to balance the negative impact of much of his summing up, the judge did invite the jury to consider whether Cameron had been in league with his wife, or was he simply covering for her after the event, something for which 'few would have the heart to blame him.' Finally, His Lordship felt it necessary to urge the jury to do its duty, 'despite the fact that if a verdict of guilty were returned it would entail the ruin of an officer of brilliant promise, and the sending to gaol of one who was little more than a girl.' They had 'a duty to society, and they were not to shrink or flinch from their duty at the dictates of pity, however natural and insistent these feelings of pity might be.'ⁱⁱ

In Scottish criminal law, like that south of the border, judges are arbiters of the law: a jury must accept and follow the judge's direction on the interpretation and meaning of any legal principle. With the jury, on the other hand, lies the sole responsibility of deciding issues of fact. However, anyone familiar with criminal trials will know that judges, through their language and presentation during summing up, can convey their thoughts on what the verdict should be. Among those following the case was Ormonde Winter; on 10 March 1911, Cameron had sent him a telegram: 'Both arrested come home at once your evidence essential.' At the time, Winter was in Umballa, hoping for success on the horse racing track. He dropped everything and returned to help his friends, remaining with them throughout the weeks before and during the trial. Winter was scathing in his assessment of Lord Dunedin's summing up to the jury. 'It cannot be said that the Lord Justice General's exordium to the jury, verbose as it was, could have left much doubt in their minds as to what he thought

their verdict should be. It would have been much shorter and less fatiguing had he told them at the outset to bring in a verdict of “Guilty.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The jury retired to sift through and discuss five days of evidence. It is impossible to know how Ruby and Cecil Cameron felt as they waited for the verdict. Had they prepared themselves for the worst? They did not have to wait long to learn their fate: with almost indecent haste, after a mere twenty four minutes of deliberation, the jury returned. ‘The intense anxiety expressed on the two careworn faces of the prisoners, on which the gaze of the entire court was fixed, was terrible to behold. It seemed that Mrs Cameron could not go on bearing the awful strain...every onlooker momentarily expected to see her fall fainting to the floor. As for Lieutenant Cameron, he stood erect, with eyes fixed on the judge.’^{iv}

The jury foreman stood and confirmed that the decision was unanimous: Guilty. The tense silence of the courtroom was suddenly broken by barely suppressed gasps and a buzz of conversation; Lord Dunedin allowed a few moments to pass before calling for quiet. He was about to pronounce sentence. Looking at the Cameron’s, he said ‘You have been found guilty of this serious crime,’ and that with the utmost leniency he could extend, ‘the sentence of the Court is that you be taken from this place and be confined in penal servitude for three years each.’ Newspapers reported that the judge seemed to exhibit signs of distress and that, from Ruby, was heard a faint cry before she sank down. Both were then led away to the cells by police officers to begin their imprisonment. Ormonde Winter saw no signs of distress in Lord Dunedin, and Ruby and her husband ‘retained that degree of sang-froid that had characterised their appearances in court throughout.’ As to the leniency of the sentence, Winter pointed to the controversy that followed, especially in the English press and among legal professionals, who branded it a ‘hard and bitter sentence.’^v

The feelings of Ruby and Cecil Cameron as they began their prison sentences can hardly be imagined. As will be seen, Ruby was released within a matter of weeks, but her husband had to face the prospect of serving his sentence. Cameron seems to have had no difficulty settling into the routine at Carlton prison; together with the

rest of the nation, the inmates there celebrated the Coronation of King George V. At the open air concert in the prison grounds on 23 June, 1911, Cameron was spotted among the other convicts apparently enjoying the music which he enthusiastically applauded. It was noted that he had grown a beard.^{vi}

ⁱ The law report of the case can be found at: His Majesty's Advocate v Camerons (1911) 6 Adam 456 (HC)

ⁱⁱ New Zealand Herald. 22 July 1911, p2

ⁱⁱⁱ Winter's Tale p214

^{iv} New Zealand Herald. 22 July 1911, p2

^v Winter's Tale p215

^{vi} The Edinburgh Evening News. Friday 23 January 1911.

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