



Eric Ambler
The Mask
of Dimitrios



'A gripping thriller...
still fresh as new'
Guardian

PENGUIN MODERN CLASSICS: CRIME & ESPIONAGE

1. Davis Grubb NIGHT OF THE HUNTER
2. Edogawa Rampo BEAST IN THE SHADOWS
3. Dorothy B. Hughes IN A LONELY PLACE
4. Josephine Tey THE FRANCHISE AFFAIR
5. Eric Ambler JOURNEY INTO FEAR
6. John le Carré CALL FOR THE DEAD
7. Georges Simenon MAIGRET AND THE HEADLESS CORPSE
8. Len Deighton SS-GB
9. Ross Macdonald THE DROWNING POOL
10. Chester Himes COTTON COMES TO HARLEM
11. Dick Lochte SLEEPING DOG
12. Raymond Chandler THE BIG SLEEP &
FAREWELL, MY LOVELY
13. Anthony Price OTHER PATHS TO GLORY
14. Michael Gilbert GAME WITHOUT RULES
15. Georges Simenon MAIGRET'S REVOLVER
16. C.S. Forester PAYMENT DEFERRED
17. Edogawa Rampo THE BLACK LIZARD
18. Eric Ambler THE MASK OF DIMITRIOS
19. Josephine Tey BRAT FARRAR
20. John le Carré TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY

Copyrighted Material

ERIC AMBLER

The Mask of Dimitrios



PENGUIN BOOKS

Copyrighted Material

PENGUIN CLASSICS

UK | USA | Canada | Ireland | Australia
India | New Zealand | South Africa

Penguin Books is part of the Penguin Random House group of companies
whose addresses can be found at global.penguinrandomhouse.com.



Penguin
Random House
UK

First published in Great Britain by Hodder and Stoughton 1939

Published in Penguin Classics 2009

This edition published 2023

001

Copyright © Eric Ambler Literary Management Limited, 1939

All rights reserved

Set in 11.25/14pt Dante MT Std

Typeset by Jouve (UK), Milton Keynes

Printed and bound in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

ISBN: 978-0-241-67225-9

The authorized representative in the EEA is Penguin Random House Ireland,
Morrison Chambers, 32 Nassau Street, Dublin D02 YH68

www.greenpenguin.co.uk



Penguin Random House is committed to a sustainable future for our business, our readers and our planet. This book is made from Forest Stewardship Council certified paper.

The Mask of Dimitrios

Copyrighted Material

Copyrighted Material

I

Origins of an Obsession

A Frenchman named Chamfort, who should have known better, once said that chance was a nickname for Providence.

It is one of those convenient, question-begging aphorisms coined to discredit the unpleasant truth that chance plays an important, if not predominant, part in human affairs. Yet it was not entirely inexcusable. Inevitably, chance does occasionally operate with a sort of fumbling coherence readily mistakable for the workings of a self-conscious Providence.

The story of Dimitrios Makropoulos is an example of this.

The fact that a man like Latimer should so much as learn of the existence of a man like Dimitrios is alone grotesque. That he should actually see the dead body of Dimitrios, that he should spend weeks that he could ill afford probing into the man's shadowy history, and that he should ultimately find himself in the position of owing his life to a criminal's odd taste in interior decoration are breathtaking in their absurdity.

Yet, when these facts are seen side by side with the other facts in the case, it is difficult not to become lost in superstitious awe. Their very absurdity seems to prohibit the use of the words 'chance' and 'coincidence'. For the sceptic there remains only one consolation: if there should be such a thing as a superhuman Law, it is administered with subhuman inefficiency. The choice of Latimer as its instrument could have been made only by an idiot.

Copyrighted Material

During the first fifteen years of his adult life, Charles Latimer became a lecturer in political economy at a minor English university. By the time he was thirty-five he had, in addition, written three books. The first was a study of the influence of Proudhon on nineteenth-century Italian political thought. The second was entitled *The Gotha Programme of 1875*. The third was an assessment of the economic implications of Rosenberg's *Der Mythus des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*.

It was soon after he had finished correcting the bulky proofs of the last work, and in the hope of dispelling the black depression which was the aftermath of his temporary association with the philosophy of National Socialism and its prophet, Dr Rosenberg, that he wrote his first detective story.

A Bloody Shovel was an immediate success. It was followed by 'I,' *said the Fly* and *Murder's Arms*. From the great army of university professors who write detective stories in their spare time, Latimer soon emerged as one of the shamefaced few who could make money at the sport. It was, perhaps, inevitable that, sooner or later, he would become a professional writer in name as well as in fact. Three things hastened the transition. The first was a disagreement with the university authorities over what he held to be a matter of principle. The second was an illness. The third was the fact that he happened to be unmarried. Not long after the publication of *No Doornail This* and following the illness, which had made inroads on his constitutional reserves, he wrote, with only mild reluctance, a letter of resignation and went abroad to complete his fifth detective story in the sun.

It was the week after he had finished that book's successor that he went to Turkey. He had spent a year in and near Athens and was longing for a change of scene. His health was much improved but the prospect of an English autumn was uninviting. At the suggestion of a Greek friend he took the steamer from the Piraeus to Istanbul.

It was in Istanbul and from Colonel Haki that he first heard of Dimitrios.

A letter of introduction is an uneasy document. More often than not, the bearer of it is only casually acquainted with the giver who, in turn, may know the person to whom it is addressed even less well. The chances of its presentation having a satisfactory outcome for all three are slender.

Among the letters of introduction which Latimer carried with him to Istanbul was one to a Madame Chávez, who lived, he had been told, in a villa on the Bosphorus. Three days after he arrived, he wrote to her and received in reply an invitation to join a four-day party at the villa. A trifle apprehensively, he accepted.

For Madame Chávez, the road from Buenos Aires had been as liberally paved with gold as the road to it. A very handsome Turkish woman, she had successfully married and divorced a wealthy Argentine meat broker and, with a fraction of her gains from these transactions, had purchased a small palace which had once housed minor Turkish royalty. It stood, remote and inconvenient of access, overlooking a bay of fantastic beauty and, apart from the fact that the supplies of fresh water were insufficient to serve even one of its nine bathrooms, was exquisitely appointed. But for the other guests and his hostess's Turkish habit of striking her servants violently in the face when they displeased her (which was often), Latimer, for whom such grandiose discomfort was a novelty, would have enjoyed himself.

The other guests were a very noisy pair of Marseillais, three Italians, two young Turkish naval officers and their 'fiancées' of the moment, and an assortment of Istanbul businessmen with their wives. The greater part of the time they spent in drinking Madame Chávez's seemingly inexhaustible supplies of Dutch gin and dancing to a gramophone attended by a servant who went on steadily playing records whether the guests happened

to be dancing at the moment or not. On the pretext of ill-health, Latimer excused himself from much of the drinking and most of the dancing. He was generally ignored.

It was in the late afternoon of his last day there and he was sitting at the end of the vine-covered terrace out of earshot of the gramophone, when he saw a large chauffeur-driven touring car lurching up the long, dusty road to the villa. As it roared into the courtyard below, the occupant of the rear seat flung the door open and vaulted out before the car came to a standstill.

He was a tall man with lean, muscular cheeks whose pale tan contrasted well with a head of grey hair cropped Prussian fashion. A narrow frontal bone, a long beak of a nose and thin lips gave him a somewhat predatory air. He could not be less than fifty, Latimer thought, and studied the waist below the beautifully cut officer's uniform in the hope of detecting the corsets.

He watched the tall officer whip a silk handkerchief from his sleeve, flick some invisible dust from his immaculate patent-leather riding boots, tilt his cap raffishly and stride out of sight. Somewhere in the villa, a bell pealed.

Colonel Haki, for this was the officer's name, was an immediate success with the party. A quarter of an hour after his arrival, Madame Chávez, with an air of shy confusion clearly intended to inform her guests that she regarded herself as hopelessly compromised by the Colonel's unexpected appearance, led him on to the terrace and introduced him. All smiles and gallantry, he clicked heels, kissed hands, bowed, acknowledged the salutes of the naval officers and ogled the businessmen's wives. The performance so fascinated Latimer that, when his turn came to be introduced, the sound of his own name made him jump. The Colonel pump-handled his arm warmly.

'Damned pleased indeed to meet you, old boy,' he said.

'*Monsieur le Colonel parle bien anglais,*' explained Madame Chávez.

Copyrighted Material

'*Quelques mots,*' said Colonel Haki.

Latimer looked amiably into a pair of pale grey eyes. 'How do you do?'

'Cheerio – all – the – best,' replied the Colonel with grave courtesy, and passed on to kiss the hand of, and to run an appraising eye over, a stout girl in a bathing costume.

It was not until late in the evening that Latimer spoke to the Colonel again. The Colonel had injected a good deal of boisterous vitality into the party; cracking jokes, laughing loudly, making humorously brazen advances to the wives and rather more surreptitious ones to the unmarried women. From time to time his eye caught Latimer's and he grinned deprecatingly. 'I've got to play the fool like this – it's expected of me,' said the grin; 'but don't think I like it.' Then, long after dinner, when the guests had begun to take less interest in the dancing and more in the progress of a game of mixed strip poker, the Colonel took him by the arm and walked him on to the terrace.

'You must excuse me, Mr Latimer,' he said in French, 'but I should very much like to talk with you. Those women – phew!' He slid a cigarette case under Latimer's nose. 'A cigarette?'

'Thank you.'

Colonel Haki glanced over his shoulder. 'The other end of the terrace is more secluded,' he said, and then, as they began to walk, 'You know, I came up here today specially to see you. Madame told me you were here and really I could not resist the temptation of talking with the writer whose works I so much admire.'

Latimer murmured a noncommittal appreciation of the compliment. He was in a difficulty, for he had no means of knowing whether the Colonel was thinking in terms of political economy or detection. He had once startled and irritated a kindly old don who had professed interest in his 'last book', by asking the old man whether he preferred his corpses shot or

bludgeoned. It sounded affected to ask which set of books was under discussion.

Colonel Haki, however, did not wait to be questioned. 'I get all the latest *romans policiers* sent to me from Paris,' he went on. 'I read nothing but *romans policiers*. I would like you to see my collection. Especially I like the English and American ones. All the best of them are translated into French. French writers themselves, I do not find sympathetic. French culture is not such as can produce a *roman policier* of the first order. I have just added your *Une Pelle Ensanglantée* to my library. *Formidable!* But I cannot quite understand the significance of the title.'

Latimer spent some time trying to explain in French the meaning of 'to call a spade a bloody shovel' and to translate the play on words which had given (to those readers with suitable minds) the essential clue to the murderer's identity in the very title.

Colonel Haki listened intently, nodding his head and saying, 'Yes, I see, I see it clearly now,' before Latimer had reached the point of the explanation.

'Monsieur,' he said when Latimer had given up in despair, 'I wonder whether you would do me the honour of lunching with me one day this week. I think,' he added mysteriously, 'that I may be able to help you.'

Latimer did not see in what way he could be helped by Colonel Haki but said that he would be glad to lunch with him. They arranged to meet at the Pera Palace Hotel three days later.

It was not until the evening before it that Latimer thought very much more about the luncheon appointment. He was sitting in the lounge of his hotel with the manager of his bank's Istanbul branch.

Collinson, he thought, was a pleasant fellow but a monotonous companion. His conversation consisted almost entirely of gossip about the doings of the English and American colonies in Istanbul. 'Do you know the Fitzwilliams,' he would say. 'No?

A pity, you'd like them. Well, the other day . . .' As a source of information about the Gazi Kemal Atatürk's economic reforms he had proved a failure.

'By the way,' said Latimer after listening to an account of the goings-on of the Turkish-born wife of an American car salesman, 'do you know of a man named Colonel Haki?'

'Haki? What made you think of him?'

'I'm lunching with him tomorrow.'

Collinson's eyebrows went up. 'Are you, by Jove!' He scratched his chin. 'Well I know of him.' He hesitated. 'Haki's one of those people you hear a lot about in this place but never seem to get a line on. One of the people behind the scenes, if you get me. He's got more influence than a good many of the men who are supposed to be at the top at Ankara. He was one of the Gazi's own particular men in Anatolia in 1919, a deputy in the Provisional Government. I've heard stories about him then. Blood-thirsty devil by all accounts. There was something about torturing prisoners. But then both sides did that and I dare say it was the Sultan's boys that started it. I heard, too, that he can drink a couple of bottles of Scotch at a sitting and stay stone-cold sober. Don't believe that, though. How did you get on to him?'

Latimer explained. 'What does he do for a living?' he added. 'I don't understand these uniforms.'

Collinson shrugged. 'Well, I've *heard* on good authority that he's the head of the secret police, but that's probably just another story. That's the worst of this place. Can't believe a word they say in the Club. Why, only the other day . . .'

It was with rather more enthusiasm than before that Latimer went to his luncheon appointment the following day. He had judged Colonel Haki to be something of a ruffian and Collinson's vague information had tended to confirm that view.

The Colonel arrived, bursting with apologies, twenty minutes late, and hurried his guest straight into the restaurant. 'We

must have a whisky soda immediately,' he said and called loudly for a bottle of 'Johnnie'.

During most of the meal he talked about the detective stories he had read, his reactions to them, his opinions of the characters and his preference for murderers who shot their victims. At last, with an almost empty bottle of whisky at his elbow and a strawberry ice in front of him, he leaned forward across the table.

'I think, Mr Latimer,' he said again, 'that I can help you.'

For one wild moment Latimer wondered if he were going to be offered a job in the Turkish secret service, but he said, 'That's very kind of you.'

'It was my ambition,' continued Colonel Haki, 'to write a good *roman policier* of my own. I have often thought that I could do so if I had the time. That is the trouble – the time. I have found that out. But . . .' He paused impressively.

Latimer waited. He was always meeting people who felt that they could write detective stories if they had the time.

'But,' repeated the Colonel, 'I have the plot prepared. I would like to make you a present of it.'

Latimer said that it was very good indeed of him.

The Colonel waved away his thanks. 'Your books have given me so much pleasure, Mr Latimer. I am glad to make you a present of an idea for a new one. I have not the time to use it myself, and, in any case,' he added magnanimously, 'you would make better use of it than I should.'

Latimer mumbled incoherently.

'The scene of the story,' pursued his host, his grey eyes fixed on Latimer's, 'is an English country house belonging to the rich Lord Robinson. There is a party for the English weekend. In the middle of the party, Lord Robinson is discovered in the library sitting at his desk – shot through the temple. The wound is singed. A pool of blood has formed on the desk and it has soaked into a paper. The paper is a new will which the Lord was

about to sign. The old will divided his money equally between six persons, his relations, who are at the party. The new will, which he has been prevented from signing by the murderer's bullet, leaves all to one of those relations. Therefore' – he pointed his ice cream spoon accusingly – 'one of the five other relations is the guilty one. That is logical, is it not?'

Latimer opened his mouth, then shut it again and nodded.

Colonel Haki grinned triumphantly. 'That is the trick.'

'The trick?'

'The Lord was murdered by none of the suspects, but by the butler, whose wife had been seduced by this Lord! What do you think of that, eh?'

'Very ingenious.'

His host leaned back contentedly and smoothed out his tunic. 'It is only a trick, but I am glad you like it. Of course, I have the whole plot worked out in detail. The *flic* is a High Commissioner of Scotland Yard. He seduces one of the suspects, a very pretty woman, and it is for her sake that he solves the mystery. It is quite artistic. But, as I say, I have the whole thing written out.'

'I should be very interested,' said Latimer with sincerity, 'to read your notes.'

'That is what I hoped you would say. Are you pressed for time?'

'Not a bit.'

'Then let us go back to my office and I will show you what I have done. It is written in French.'

Latimer hesitated only momentarily. He had nothing better to do, and it might be interesting to see Colonel Haki's office.

'I should like to go back with you,' he said.

The Colonel's office was situated at the top of what might once have been a cheap hotel, but which, from the inside, was

unmistakably a government building, in Galata. It was a large room at the end of a corridor. When they went in a uniformed clerk was bending over the desk. He straightened his back, clicked his heels and said something in Turkish. The Colonel answered him and nodded a dismissal. Latimer looked round him. Besides the desk there were several small chairs and an American water-cooler. The walls were bare and the floor was covered with coconut matting. Long green sun lattices hanging outside the windows kept out most of the light. It was very cool after the heat of the car which had brought them.

The Colonel waved him to a chair, gave him a cigarette and began rummaging in a drawer. At last he drew out a sheet or two of typewritten paper and held it out.

‘There you are, Mr Latimer. *The Clue of the Bloodstained Will*, I have called it, but I am not convinced that that is the best title. All the best titles have been used, I find. But I will think of some alternatives. Read it, and do not be afraid to say frankly what you think of it. If there are any details which you think should be altered, I will alter them.’

Latimer took the sheets and read while the Colonel sat on the corner of his desk and swung a long, gleaming leg.

Latimer read through the sheets twice and then put them down. He was feeling ashamed of himself because he had wanted several times to laugh. He should not have come. Now that he *had* come, the best thing he could do was to leave as quickly as possible.

‘I cannot suggest any improvements at the moment,’ he said slowly. ‘Of course, it all wants thinking over; it is so easy to make mistakes with problems of this sort. There is so much to be thought of. Questions of British legal procedure, for instance . . .’

‘Yes, yes, of course.’ Colonel Haki slid off the desk and sat down in his chair. ‘But you think you can use it, eh?’

'I am very grateful indeed for your generosity,' said Latimer evasively.

'It is nothing. You shall send me a free copy of the book when it appears.' He swung round in his chair and picked up the telephone. 'I will have a copy made for you to take away.'

Latimer sat back. Well, that was that! It could not take long to make a copy. He listened to the Colonel talking to someone over the telephone and saw him frown. The Colonel put the telephone down and turned to him.

'You will excuse me if I deal with a small matter?'

'Of course.'

The Colonel drew a bulky manila file towards him and began to go through the papers inside it. Then he selected one and glanced down it. As he did so the uniformed clerk rapped on the door and marched in with a thin yellow folder under his arm. The Colonel took the folder and put it on the desk in front of him; then, with a word of instruction, he handed over *The Clue of the Bloodstained Will* to the clerk, who clicked his heels and went out. There was silence in the room.

Latimer, affecting preoccupation with his cigarette, glanced across the desk. Colonel Haki was slowly turning the pages inside the folder, and on his face was a look that Latimer had not seen there before. It was the look of the expert attending to the business he understood perfectly. There was a sort of watchful repose in his face that reminded Latimer of a very old and experienced cat contemplating a very young and inexperienced mouse. In that moment he revised his ideas about Colonel Haki. He had been feeling a little sorry for him as one feels sorry for anyone who has unconsciously made a fool of himself. He saw now that the Colonel stood in need of no such consideration. As his long, yellowish fingers turned the pages of the folder, Latimer remembered a sentence of Collinson's: 'There was something about torturing prisoners.' He knew suddenly

Eric Ambler

that he was seeing the real Colonel Haki for the first time. Then the Colonel looked up and his pale eyes rested thoughtfully on Latimer's tie.

For a moment Latimer had an uncomfortable suspicion that although the man across the desk appeared to be looking at his tie, he was actually looking into his mind. Then the Colonel's eyes moved upwards and he grinned slightly in a way that made Latimer feel as if he had been caught stealing something.

He said, 'I wonder if you are interested in *real* murderers, Mr Latimer.'

Copyrighted Material

The Dossier of Dimitrios

Latimer felt himself redden. From the condescending professional he had been changed suddenly into the ridiculous amateur. It was a little disconcerting.

‘Well, yes,’ he said slowly. ‘I suppose I am.’

Colonel Haki pursed his lips. ‘You know, Mr Latimer,’ he said, ‘I find the murderer in a *roman policier* much more sympathetic than a real murderer. In a *roman policier* there is a corpse, a number of suspects, a detective and a gallows. That is artistic. The real murderer is not artistic. I, who am a sort of policeman, tell you that squarely.’ He tapped the folder on his desk. ‘Here is a real murderer. We have known of his existence for nearly twenty years. This is his dossier. We know of one murder he may have committed. There are doubtless others of which we, at any rate, know nothing. This man is typical. A dirty type, common, cowardly, scum. Murder, espionage, drugs – that is the history. There were also two affairs of assassination.’

‘Assassination! That argues a certain courage, surely?’

The Colonel laughed unpleasantly. ‘My dear friend, Dimitrios would have nothing to do with the actual shooting. No! His kind never risk their skins like that. They stay on the fringe of the plot. They are the professionals, the *entrepreneurs*, the links between the businessmen, the politicians who desire the end but are afraid of the means, and the fanatics, the idealists who are prepared to die for their convictions. The important thing to

know about an assassination or an attempted assassination is not who fired the shot, but who paid for the bullet. It is the rats like Dimitrios who can best tell you that. They are always ready to talk to save themselves the inconvenience of a prison cell. Dimitrios would have been the same as any other. Courage!' He laughed again. 'Dimitrios was a little cleverer than some of them, I'll grant you that. As far as I know, no government has ever caught him and there is no photograph in his dossier. But we knew him all right, and so did Sofia and Belgrade and Paris and Athens. He was a great traveller, was Dimitrios.'

'That sounds as though he's dead.'

'Yes, he is dead.' Colonel Haki turned the corners of his thin mouth down contemptuously. 'A fisherman pulled his body out of the Bosphorus last night. It is believed that he had been knifed and thrown overboard from a ship. Like the scum he was, he was floating.'

'At least,' said Latimer, 'he died by violence. That is something very like justice.'

'Ah!' The Colonel leaned forward. 'There is the writer speaking. Everything must be tidy, artistic, like a *roman policier*. Very well!' He pulled the dossier towards him and opened it. 'Just listen, Mr Latimer, to this. Then you shall tell me if it is artistic.'

He began to read.

'Dimitrios Makropoulos.' He stopped and looked up. 'We have never been able to find out whether that was the surname of the family that adopted him or an alias. He was known usually as Dimitrios.' He turned to the dossier again. 'Dimitrios Makropoulos. Born 1889 in Larissa, Greece. Found abandoned. Parents unknown. Mother believed Roumanian. Registered as Greek subject and adopted by Greek family. Criminal record with Greek authorities. Details unobtainable.' He looked up at Latimer. 'That was before he came to

our notice. We first heard of him at Izmir¹ in 1922, a few days after our troops occupied the town. A *deunme*² named Sholem was found in his room with his throat cut: he was a money-lender and kept his money under the floorboards. These were ripped up and the money had been taken. There was much violence in Izmir at that time and little notice would have been taken by the military authorities. The thing might have been done by one of our soldiers. Then, another Jew, a relation of Sholem's, drew the attention of the military to a Negro named Dhris Mohammed, who had been spending money in the cafés and boasting that a Jew had lent him the money without interest. Inquiries were made and Dhris was arrested. His replies to the court martial were unsatisfactory and he was condemned to death. Then he made a confession. He was a fig-packer, and he said that one of his fellow workmen, whom he called Dimitrios, had told him of Sholem's wealth hidden under the floorboards of his room. They had planned the robbery together and had entered Sholem's room by night. It had been Dimitrios, he said, who had killed the Jew. He thought that Dimitrios, being registered as a Greek, had escaped and bought a passage on one of the refugee ships that waited at secret places along the coast.'

He shrugged. 'The authorities did not believe his story. We were at war with Greece, and it was the sort of story a guilty man might invent to save his neck. They found that there had been a fig-packer named Dimitrios, that his fellow workmen had disliked him and that he had disappeared.' He grinned. 'Quite a lot of Greeks named Dimitrios disappeared at that time. You could see their bodies in the streets and floating in the harbour. This Negro's story was unprovable. He was hanged.'

¹ Smyrna.

² Jew turned Moslem.

He paused. During this recital he had not once referred to the dossier.

‘You have a very good memory for facts,’ commented Latimer.

The Colonel grinned again. ‘I was the president of the court martial. It was through that that I was able to mark down Dimitrios later on. I was transferred a year later to the secret police. In 1924 a plot to assassinate the Gazi was discovered. It was the year he abolished the Caliphate and the plot was outwardly the work of a group of religious fanatics. Actually the men behind it were agents of some people in the good graces of a neighbouring friendly government. They had good reasons for wishing the Gazi out of the way. The plot was discovered. The details are unimportant. But one of the agents who escaped was a man known as Dimitrios.’ He pushed the cigarettes towards Latimer. ‘Please smoke.’

Latimer shook his head. ‘Was it the same Dimitrios?’

‘It was. Now, tell me frankly, Mr Latimer. Do you find anything artistic there? Could you make a good *roman policier* out of that? Is there anything there that could be of the slightest interest to a writer?’

‘Police work interests me a great deal – naturally. But what happened to Dimitrios? How did the story end?’

Colonel Haki snapped his fingers. ‘Ah! I was waiting for you to ask that. I knew you would ask it. And my answer is this: it *didn't* end!’

‘Then what happened?’

‘I will tell you. The first problem was to identify Dimitrios of Izmir with Dimitrios of Edirné.³ Accordingly we revived the affair of Sholem, issued a warrant for the arrest of a Greek fig-packer named Dimitrios on a charge of murder and, with that excuse, asked foreign police authorities for assistance. We did

³ Adrianople.

not learn much, but what we did learn was sufficient. Dimitrios had been concerned with the attempted assassination of Stambulisky in Bulgaria which had preceded the Macedonian officers' *putsch* in 1923. The Sofia police know very little but that he was known there to be a Greek from Izmir. A woman with whom he had associated in Sofia was questioned. She stated that she had had a letter from him a short time before. He had given no address, but as she had had very urgent reasons for wishing to get in touch with him she had looked at the postmark. It was from Edirné. The Sofia police obtained a rough description of him that agreed with that given by the Negro in Izmir. The Greek police stated that he had had a criminal record prior to 1922 and gave those particulars of his origin. The warrant is probably still in existence, but we did not find Dimitrios with it.

'It was not until two years later that we heard of him again. We received an inquiry from the Yugoslav Government concerning a Turkish subject named Dimitrios Talat. He was wanted, they said, for robbery, but an agent of ours in Belgrade reported that the robbery was the theft of some secret naval documents and that the charge the Yugoslavs hoped to bring against him was one of espionage on behalf of France. By the first name and the description issued by the Belgrade police we guessed that Talat was probably Dimitrios of Izmir. About the same time our Consul in Switzerland renewed the passport, issued apparently at Ankara, of a man named Talat. It is a common Turkish name, but when it came to entering the record of the renewal it was found from the number that no such passport had been issued. The passport had been forged.' He spread out his hands. 'You see, Mr Latimer? There is your story. Incomplete. Inartistic. No detection, no suspects, no hidden motives, merely sordid.'

'But interesting, nevertheless,' objected Latimer. 'What happened over the Talat business?'

‘Still looking for the end of your story, Mr Latimer? All right, then. Nothing happened about Talat. It is just a name. We never heard it again. If he used the passport we don’t know. It does not matter. We have Dimitrios. A corpse, it is true, but we have him. We shall probably never know who killed him. The ordinary police will doubtless make their inquiries and report to us that they have no hope of discovering the murderer. This dossier will go into the archives. It is just one of many similar cases.’

‘You said something about drugs.’

Colonel Haki began to look bored. ‘Oh, yes. Dimitrios made a lot of money once I should think. Another unfinished story. About three years after the Belgrade affair we heard of him again. Nothing to do with us but the available information was added to the dossier as a routine matter.’ He referred to the dossier. ‘In 1929, the League of Nations Advisory Committee on the illicit traffic of drugs received a report from the French Government concerning the seizure of a large quantity of heroin at the Swiss frontier. It was concealed in a mattress in a sleeping car coming from Sofia. One of the car attendants was found to be responsible for the smuggling, but all he could, or would, tell the police was that the drug was to have been collected in Paris by a man who worked at the rail terminus. He did not know the man’s name and had never spoken to him, but he described him. The man in question was later arrested. Questioned, he admitted the charge but claimed that he knew nothing of the destination of the drug. He received one consignment a month which was collected by a third man. The police set a trap for this third man and caught him only to find there was a fourth intermediary. They arrested six men in all in connection with that affair and only obtained one real clue. It was that the man at the head of this peddling organization was a man known as Dimitrios. Through the medium of the Committee, the Bulgarian Government then revealed that they had found a clandestine

heroin laboratory at Radomir and had seized two hundred and thirty kilos of heroin ready for delivery. The consignee's name was Dimitrios. During the next year the French succeeded in discovering one or two other large heroin consignments bound for Dimitrios. But they did not get very much nearer to Dimitrios himself. There were difficulties. The stuff never seemed to come in the same way twice and by the end of the year, 1930, all they had to show in the way of arrests were a number of smugglers and some insignificant pedlars. Judging by the amounts of heroin they did find, Dimitrios must have been making huge sums for himself. Then, quite suddenly, about a year after that, Dimitrios went out of the drug business. The first news the police had of this was an anonymous letter which gave the names of all the principal members of the gang, their life histories and details of how evidence against every one of them might be obtained. The French police had a theory at the time. They said that Dimitrios himself had become a heroin addict. Whether that is true or not, the fact is that by December, the gang was rounded up. One of them, a woman, was already wanted for fraud. Some of them threatened to kill Dimitrios when they were released from prison, but the most any of them could tell the police about him was that his surname was Makropoulos and that he had a flat in the seventeenth *arrondissement*. They never found the flat and they never found Dimitrios.'

The clerk had come in and was standing by the desk.

'Ah,' said the Colonel, 'here is your copy.'

Latimer took it and thanked him rather absently.

'And that was the last you heard of Dimitrios?' he asked.

'Oh, no. The last we heard of him was about a year later. A Croat attempted to assassinate a Yugoslav politician in Zagreb. In the confession he made to the police, he said that friends had obtained the pistol he used from a man named Dimitrios in

Rome. If it was Dimitrios of Izmir he must have returned to his old profession. A dirty type. There are a few more like him who should float in the Bosphorus.'

'You say you never had a photograph of him. How did you identify him?'

'There was a French *carte d'identité* sewn inside the lining of his coat. It was issued about a year ago at Lyons to Dimitrios Makropoulos. It is a visitor's *carte* and he is described as being without occupation. That might mean anything. There was, of course, a photograph in it. We've turned it over to the French. They say that it is quite genuine.' He pushed the dossier aside and stood up. 'There's an inquest tomorrow. I have to go and have a look at the body in the police mortuary. That is a thing you do not have to contend with in books, Mr Latimer – a list of regulations. A man is found floating in the Bosphorus. A police matter, clearly. But because this man happens to be on my files, my organization has to deal with it also. I have my car waiting. Can I take you anywhere?'

'If my hotel isn't too much out of your way, I should like to be taken there.'

'Of course. You have the plot of your new book safely? Good. Then we are ready.'

In the car, the Colonel elaborated on the virtues of *The Clue of the Bloodstained Will*. Latimer promised to keep in touch with him and let him know how the book progressed. The car pulled up outside his hotel. They had exchanged farewells and Latimer was about to get out when he hesitated and then dropped back into his seat.

'Look here, Colonel,' he said, 'I want to make what will seem to you a rather strange request.'

The Colonel gestured expansively. 'Anything.'

'I have a fancy to see the body of this man Dimitrios. I wonder if it would be impossible for you to take me with you.'