

# Chief Inspector Blood

## Mystery at Wentworth Park

### Chapter 2

Benedict Blood never took a day off.

But after the Ascot case closed, he broke with precedent and took three full days leave, giving some cock and bull story about an aunt dying so that no one would question him. He needed time; time for his heart to heal. He loved Dodo but she was out of reach. He needed to move on. Forget her.

His mother, Martha, was still living in Southwark, south of the river, a widow with only one child still at home: Terry, his special brother.

As soon as he showed up on her doorstep, his mother knew something was wrong.

“Benny,” she cried, throwing her arms around him. “To what do I owe this honor?” Her smile was too bright, and the anxiety in her eyes did not match the curve of her mouth.

“Can’t a man come to see his own mother without raising eyebrows?” he joked, but his voice was off.

He walked across the tiny room to the wheelchair containing his brother and wrapped him in a bear hug. He could feel his mother’s eyes boring into his back.

“I’ll put the kettle on,” she said, and wandered into the minuscule kitchen.

He sat by his brother. Blood could be his true self with Terry, who never asked awkward questions. Terry just smiled and made Benedict feel like he was the only person in Terry’s world.

Blood had no regrets about going without so that he could purchase the wheelchair for Terry. Nor about his humble bachelor flat that looked out onto a brick wall, so that he could install his mother in this ground floor apartment. Here his mother could take Terry out for long walks along the embankment without having to navigate any stairs.

His mother returned, wiping her hands on her scrupulously clean apron. “How have you been, love?”

"I just wrapped up a big case. You might have read about it?"

"The one involving the MP? I saw your name in the paper." Pride was an insufficient word to describe the sparkle in his mother's chocolate brown eyes. "Who would think a member of parliament would have such a dark secret?"

He huffed. "You'd be surprised at the secrets people have, Mum."

"And what are you doing here on a Wednesday at two in the afternoon? Not that we don't love to see you. We do, don't we Terry?" Terry jerked his head in assent, beaming from ear to ear.

"It was time for a break. I haven't had a day off in four years." His gaze darted around the room, resting on his mother's anxious face for just a second.

She pursed her lips and nodded without saying a word. He was grateful.

The kettle whistled and his mother disappeared into the tiny kitchen again.

"I thought we could take Terry out," he suggested. "It's a lovely day."

"We haven't been out for our constitutional yet, have we, Terry? Let's all go after we've finished our tea."

Blood looked around the cramped room, dotted with photographs of his brothers and sisters amid old coronation memorabilia. A large picture of his deceased father occupied pride of place on the small fireplace.

"Here we are." His mother pushed into the room holding a tray. Blood jumped up to help.

"Sit down, son. When I can't do this by myself, it's time to check out."

He smiled at her fierce independence, watching as she poured him a steaming cup and added two sugars and milk.

"There now." She handed him the cup. "Just how you like it."

He took a sip and memories of childhood crashed about in his brain; reading from a pile of used books his parents scrimped to buy, winning the scholarship at the local grammar school, playing with his brothers and sisters in their old house.

His mother poured a little tea for Terry and moved to help him.

"Let me do it, Mum," he said, intercepting her and taking the cup. He scooted closer to his brother and gently tipped the cup against his mouth. In his excitement, Terry waved his arms and knocked a little of the warm, sweet liquid out of his mouth. Blood took out a handkerchief and gently wiped Terry's chin.

The whole family, including himself when he wasn't in the middle of a case, gathered in that tiny flat for Sunday dinner. His mother would roast four chickens and divide them

between the sixteen of them, which included several grandchildren. There were far too many of them to eat around a table, so they all sat with plates on their knees, elbow to elbow, and then strolled along the river when the weather was fine. The only interruption to this ritual had been during the war when three, then four of Martha Blood's sons were conscripted into the army. All but one had come home.

Every member of his family contributed a little so that their mother could spend all her time with Terry and not have to work. A doctor had once suggested that he be placed in a public nursing facility. He had regretted the words as soon as they were out of his mouth due to the tongue-lashing Martha had given him.

All his brothers worked at the docks like their father and his sisters' husbands were dockhands too. The River Thames was the lifeblood of the Blood family.

After helping wash the cups, they rolled Terry through the door and started on their stroll. Blood could have navigated the route with his eyes closed.

The pigeons and gulls swooped, and Terry hooted with his own brand of laughter.

Pointing to a bench, his mother said, "Let's sit down and enjoy the sun. It will do Terry good. It's the first bright day this week."

Blood positioned the wheelchair and they sat in companionable silence watching the boats and the birds, breathing in the familiar smells. It was one of the things he loved about his mother—she never pried. But he had come to seek her advice and now was as good a time as any.

"I met a girl."

No cry, no change in position, no hands thrown in the air. "A girl? What is she like?" Martha Blood kept her eyes firmly on the water.

"She is beautiful, intelligent, funny...and the daughter of an earl."

"Ah." The single exclamation was loaded with a million nuances.

He threw a pebble into the water. "I've never felt this way. Never wanted to feel this way."

Martha clasped her work-worn hands. "Does she know?"

"If you mean, have I told her? No. If you mean, does she feel the same way? I think so."

His mother rocked the wheelchair back and forth as if it were a pram, as Terry nodded his head and smiled.

Blood picked up another rock. "Of course, it can't come to anything."

The cry of a lone gull pierced the silence.

“Of course,” she finally said, nodding.

Benedict grabbed the hat from his head and turned it in his hands. “But she has made me feel...alive.”

A full five minutes passed as they watched a cargo boat work its way by. Terry waved.

The hat stilled. “I wanted to kiss her more than I have ever wanted anything in my life.”

Out of the corner of his eye he could see his mother frown. “Did you?”

“No.” *But I wish I had.*

His mother’s dry, cracked hand reached out and covered his own. “Perhaps she’s shown you that the time is right, love. You’ve been so devoted to your work that you’ve ignored your personal life. It’s not good for a man to be alone.”

“This is no life for a wife, Mum.”

“Nonsense! It is a respected profession, with a decent wage and good standing in the community.” She touched her finger to his cheek. “And you should not waste that bonny face.”

He chuckled.

“If she loves you, a woman will make any sacrifice. You just need to find the right one, son. And you already know, this earl’s daughter, she’s not the right one.”

They sat for a long time each lost in their thoughts.

As they made the walk back to his mother’s home, his heart squeezing in his chest, Blood made a decision. He would take time to heal and then knock down the emotional wall.

It was time to find *the one*.