First Chapter:

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OBITUARIES

Louisa, Lady Kellway, OBE, died in hospital after a short illness on November 6 aged 104. She was born on 20 July 1890.

When Louisa, Lady Kellway, died last week, the final hope of solving two of the most celebrated British murder mysteries of the century died with her. Born Louisa Lomax in the Victorian twilight of 1890, Lady Kellway was one of a generation who believed that a lady's name should appear in the newspapers only at birth, marriage and death. Daughter of a country squire, she came from a family whose values were rooted in the certainly of an immutable class system and an empire upon which the sun would never set. In 1920 she married Lord David Kellway, a war hero and the owner of a stately home, a magnificent Italianate garden and several hundred acres of Wiltshire, now administered by the National Trust. It was a happy marriage and there was one child, Caroline, born in 1921. Lady Kellway's was a worthy life, including service as a JP and as the chairwoman as the local W.I. As she herself said in a radio interview in 1977, it was all about 'being sensible and getting on with it – no fuss or divorces or anything like that.'

This was true as far as her own life went, but Lady Kellway knew all about scandal. She was the first cousin of Georgina Gresham, without whose name no true-crime collection would be complete, and it is for her connection with this enigmatic woman that she will be remembered. A water-colour of the two girls by a long-forgotten RA shows two classic profiles with dazzling complexions and alabaster shoulders rising out of clouds of tulle. The portrait gives no clue that although Georgina Gresham, nee Lomax, came from the same four-square county background as her cousin, she stood trial in 1928 for the murder of her husband, millionaire James Gresham, and was acquitted to howls of public fury. In 1955, Georgina's body was discovered in her London home, together with those of her brother, Edmund Lomax, and their housekeeper, Ada Pepper. All three had died from gunshot wounds and the police concluded that one of the trio must shot the others before committing suicide. Despite a lengthy investigation, however, which one and why was never established.

Photographs of Georgina reveal little more than the portrait. One, dating from 1926, shows her arm in arm with her alleged lover, the Hon. Edward 'Teddy' Booth, now Lord Tranmere, watching the cars at the Brooklands motor-racing circuit. Others, taken during her trial, picture her being escorted in and out of the Old Bailey, and one depicts her leaving court after her acquittal, cloche hat pulled down over haughty, heavy-lidded eyes, one gloved hand holding the collar of her fur coat tightly round her neck. Louisa and Georgina's brother Edmund stand on either side of her, fringed by journalists with out-thrust notebooks and flash-bulbs.

The last known photograph of Georgina Gresham was taken in 1952, three years before her death. She is in London's Cromwell Road, with the Natural History Museum in the background. In what looks like the same fur coat, she has a large number of coloured scarves tied round her head and is wearing white ankle socks. At 62, her skin has the stretched, parchment look of someone far older and the surprising lengths of bare arm and leg sticking out of either end of the mangy fur are needle thin.

The questions raised when Georgina's name first appeared in the newspapers almost seventy years ago remain unanswered today. Her husband, James Gresham, died from a massive overdose of sedatives and the prosecution asserted that Georgina had administered them to him, possibly with Edward Booth's connivance, because Gresham refused to grant her a divorce. In other words, it was a *crime passionnel*, scarcely different from the case of Edith Thompson and Frederick Bywaters in 1922, which resulted in the hanging of both – except in two respects: first, the complete absence of love letters or any other physical evidence to tie Georgina and Booth to each other, and the second, class. The gloss of his father Lord Tranmere had clearly rubbed off on Mr Booth, at least so far as the judge, Mr Justice Cudlip, was concerned; twice during the summing up he referred to Booth as Lord Tranmere. Although the newspapers of the day promised mouth-watering revelations about how the other half committed adultery, no evidence ever materialised. Both Georgina and Booth insisted that they had never had 'improper relations' and the judge consistently refused to allow the prosecution to challenge this denial. Booth's word as a gentleman, the judge said, was enough, adding bizarrely that 'no decent man would expect a lady to admit to such a thing, even if it were true.' He may also have been influenced by the appearance of Edward Booth. Portly, ruddy-faced and 54 years old, he seemed an unlikely paramour for chic, beautiful Georgina Gresham.

The public, however, were not convinced, especially when the jury reached a verdict of not guilty. It was ironic, given the mutterings of 'one law for the rich…' in the weeks following the trial, that as soon as her husband died, Georgina abruptly ceased to be one of their number. The Greshams had no children and although James Gresham left a small amount of money to his brother-in-law, the bulk of his fortune went not to his wife, but to a distant cousin, Leo Gresham, who sailed from Canada, claimed his inheritance and turned Georgina out of the Hampstead mansion she and her husband had shared.

Although Lady Kellway, Edward Booth and Edmund Lomax had all stated, on oath, that the Greshams were on good terms, Georgina's replies, when asked about her marriage, were oddly equivocal and unaffectionate. A court reporter recalled that she had a 'shower-bath coldness' which made her unsympathetic. 'All the time, she seemed to be saying "you people cannot judge me".' When Georgina was asked why she thought her husband might have committed suicide, she replied, 'He made a mistake.'

The death of James Gresham and his wife's conduct during her trial remain as much of a mystery today as they were in 1928. So, too, does Georgina's own death, twenty-seven years later. After Leo Gresham had taken possession of the Hampstead mansion, Georgina and her brother Edmund moved to 83 Thurloe Street, a small terraced house in South Kensington. This was where her body, together with those of Edmund and the housekeeper, was discovered by the milkman, Ernest Sharpe, on the morning of 16 August 1955. Unable to get a response to his knocking, Mr Sharpe peered through the front-door letter-box and saw the body of the housekeeper, Ada Pepper. 'The very first thing I saw was her eyes,' Sharpe said. 'They were staring straight at me, right on a level with mine. She was only a couple of feet away, sat on the floor with her legs stuck out in front of her and blood all down her overall.'

Mr Sharpe fetched the police. The front door of no. 83 was locked and bolted on the inside, so Constables Robert Hartley and Harry Rowse smashed a pane of glass in the basement door and went down the corridor and up the steps that led to the main part of the house. However, before they could get into the hall, they had first to open the door at the top of the basement steps. This door opened outwards and Miss Pepper's body was leaning against it. Not realising the nature of the obstruction, the two men forced open the door, dislodging the housekeeper's body, which fell on its side on the hall carpet where, due to rigor mortis, it remained in its L-shaped sitting

position. Although Miss Pepper was wearing her overall, her face was heavily powdered, there were several silk flowers in her hair and she was wearing a pair of white gloves.

The next thing the two constables saw was the body of Georgina's brother, Edmund Lomax, in the doorway of the sitting-room they shared. Mr Lomax, dressed in pyjamas and slippers, was lying on his side. He had massive injuries to his face and the skirting boards and the lower parts of the sitting room door were splashed with blood.

There was a lot of blood on the tiled floor of the hall and the end of the threadbare strip of carpet where Ada Pepper's body had been seated was saturated with it. By the time the two policeman had stepped over Miss Pepper's body and around Edmund Lomax's to open the front door, they had added a number of bloody footprints to the original stains, and the sergeant they let in must also have contributed his share as the three officers doubled back and entered the sitting-room. Seated in an armchair in the corner was the body of Georgina Gresham. She was wearing a georgette evening gown of pre-war design, and matching gloves. The back of her head was missing from just above the hairline and the wall behind the chair was covered in blood and brain tissue.

Although all three bodies had gunshot wounds, there was no gun in sight. The only thing that could possibly have been described as a weapon was a heavy kitchen mincer which lay on the floor under Georgina's chair, but this was ruled out because, although it was spattered with blood, there was no forensic evidence to suggest that it had been used to hit anyone.

The house was in a filthy condition and most of the rooms were so cluttered that they were impossible to enter. Eight chandeliers were found packed away in pieces, along with three sets of golf-clubs, thirty-eight clocks, forty-three cigarette cases, a four-foot high electro-plated nickel table centrepiece in the shape of a palm tree and an enormous box of cutlery which had obviously been pilfered from hotels with names like The Metropole and The Grand. There was a collection of women's clothes from designers like Mainbocher, Schiaparelli and Jean Patou, and dozens of boxes of gloves, fans and hair ornaments, plus a trunk of linen with the perfectly mummified body of a cat lying on top of the sheets. When the contents of the house were eventually taken into storage, a total of 614 crates was removed. What was missing was a single clue, either to the deaths of Georgina and Edmund Lomax and

their housekeeper Ada Pepper, or to that of James Gresham twenty-seven years earlier. The police did, however, discover a revolver wedged behind a stack of newspapers under the hall table. Unfortunately, it was too heavily bloodstained to yield any fingerprints. Ernest Sharpe remembered seeing something 'that might have been a gun' on the floor near Miss Pepper's left hand when he looked through the letter-box, so it is possible that the weapon was dislodged when the two constables opened the basement door, knocking over her body. In the weeks that followed, there was much speculation as to whose hand had been nearest the gun – the housekeeper's or Edmund Lomax's.

Lady Kellway was called in to give evidence at the inquest into the deaths, although she had been at her Wiltshire home on the night of the shootings. When she was asked if she knew of any reason why her cousins would have killed each other or committed suicide, she replied that they were becoming depressed because their health was failing. Pestered by journalists, she issued a statement saying that she had nothing further to add. Like Edward Booth, she was to maintain her silence until she died.

It is, of course, possible that Lady Kellway had nothing further to add. But it could also be that this tweedy, matronly figure, with her common-sense Christianity and *noblesse oblige*, knew a good deal more about her cousin than she was prepared to divulge. The hallmarks of the Gresham trial – the bland testimony of Georgina Gresham's friends, the loyalty of her servants, the deferential attitude of the judge and the fact that the defendant herself seemed to expect all this as of right – are those of a different age.

It is too late now to discover the truth. The horses have not been frightened, the boat remains unrocked.

Lady Kellway is survived by her daughter, Caroline Cornford.