'We only came up this morning,' added the valet, 'and are not quite straight yet, sir, if you will excuse us. Would you feel inclined for a cup of tea?'

Parker accepted the offer, and sank luxuriously into a corner of the Chesterfield. After the extraordinary discomfort of French furniture there was solace in the enervating springiness beneath him, the cushions behind his head, and Wimsey's excellent cigarettes. What Bunter had meant by saying that things were 'not quite straight yet' he could not divine. A leaping wood fire was merrily reflected in the spotless surface of the black baby grand; the mellow calf bindings of Lord Peter's rare editions glowed softly against the black and primrose walls; the vases were filled with tawny chrysanthemums; the latest editions of all the papers were on the table—as though the owner had never been absent.

Over his tea Mr Parker drew out the photographs of Lady Mary and Denis Cathcart from his breast pocket. He stood them up against the teapot and stared at them, looking from one to the other as if trying to force a meaning from their faintly smirking, self-conscious gaze. He referred again to his Paris notes, ticking off various points with a pencil. 'Damn!' said Mr Parker, gazing at Lady Mary. 'Damn—damn—damn— '

The train of thought he was pursuing was an extraordinarily interesting one. Image after image, each rich in suggestion, crowded into his mind. Of course, one couldn't think properly in Paris—it was so uncomfortable and the houses were central heated. Here, where so many problems had been unravelled, there was a good fire. Cathcart had been sitting before the fire. Of course, he wanted to think out a problem. When cats sat staring into the fire they were thinking out problems. It was odd he should not have thought of that before. When the green-eyed cat sat before the fire one sank right down into a sort of rich, black, velvety suggestiveness which was most important. It was luxurious to be able to think so lucidly as this, because otherwise

it would be a pity to exceed the speed limit—and the black moors were reeling by so fast. But now he had really got the formula he wouldn't forget it again. The connection was just there—close, thick, richly coherent.

'The glass-blower's cat is bompstable,' said Mr Parker aloud and distinctly.

'I'm charmed to hear it,' replied Lord Peter, with a friendly grin. 'Had a good nap, old man?'

'I—what?' said Mr Parker. 'Hullo! Watcher mean, nap? I had got hold of a most important train of thought, and you've put it out of my head. What was it? Cat—cat—cat— ' He groped wildly.

'You *said* "The glass-blower's cat is bompstable,"' retorted Lord Peter. 'It's a perfectly rippin' word, but I don't know what you mean by it.'

'Bompstable?' said Mr Parker, blushing slightly. 'Bomp—oh, well, perhaps you're right—I may have dozed off. But, you know, I thought I'd just got the clue to the whole thing. I attached the greatest importance to that phrase. Even now—No, now I come to think of it, my train of thought doesn't seem quite to hold together. What a pity. I thought it was so lucid.'

'Never mind,' said Lord Peter. 'Just back?'

'Crossed last night. Any news?'

'Lots.'

'Good?'

'No.'

Parker's eyes wandered to the photographs.

'I don't believe it,' he said obstinately. 'I'm damned if I'm going to believe a word of it.'

'A word of what?'

'Of whatever it is.'

'You'll have to believe it, Charles, as far as it goes,' said his friend softly, filling his pipe with decided little digs of the fingers. 'I don't

say'—dig—'that Mary'—dig—'shot Cathcart'—dig, dig—'but she has lied'—dig—'again and again.'—Dig, dig—'She knows who did it'—dig—'she was prepared for it'—dig—'she's malingering and lying to keep the fellow shielded'—dig—'and we shall have to make her speak.' Here he struck a match and lit the pipe in a series of angry little puffs.

'If you can think,' said Mr Parker, with some heat, 'that that woman'—he indicated the photographs—'had any hand in murdering Cathcart, I don't care what your evidence is, you—hang it all, Wimsey, she's your own sister.'

'Gerald is my brother,' said Wimsey quietly. 'You don't suppose I'm exactly enjoying this business, do you? But I think we shall get along very much better if we try to keep our tempers.'

'I'm awfully sorry,' said Parker. 'Can't think why I said that—rotten bad form—beg pardon, old man.'

'The best thing we can do,' said Wimsey, 'is to look the evidence in the face, however ugly. And I don't mind admittin' that some of it's a positive gargoyle.'

'My mother turned up at Riddlesdale on Friday. She marched upstairs at once and took possession of Mary, while I drooped about in the hall and teased the cat, and generally made a nuisance of myself. *You* know. Presently old Dr Thorpe called. I went and sat on the chest on the landing. Presently the bell rings and Ellen comes upstairs. Mother and Thorpe popped out and caught her just outside Mary's room, and they jibber-jabbered a lot, and presently mother came barging down the passage to the bathroom with her heels tapping and her earrings simply dancing with irritation. I sneaked after 'em to the bathroom door, but I couldn't see anything, because they were blocking the doorway, but I heard mother say, "There, now, what did I tell you"; and Ellen said, "Lawks! your grace, who'd 'a' thought it?"; and my mother said, "All I can say is, if I had to depend on you people to save me from being murdered with arsenic or that other

Chapter 6

Mary Quite Contrary

I am striving to take into public life what any man gets from his mother.

Lady Astor

On the opening day of the York Assizes, the Grand Jury brought in a true bill, against Gerald, Duke of Denver, for murder. Gerald, Duke of Denver, being accordingly produced in the court, the Judge affected to discover—what, indeed, every newspaper in the country had been announcing to the world for the last fortnight—that he, being but a common or garden judge with a plebeian jury, was incompetent to try a peer of the realm. He added, however, that he would make it his business to inform the Lord Chancellor (who also, for the last fortnight, had been secretly calculating the accommodation in the Royal Gallery and choosing lords to form the Select Committee). Order being taken accordingly, the noble prisoner was led away.

A day or two later, in the gloom of a London afternoon, Mr Charles Parker rang the bell of a second-floor flat at No. 110 Piccadilly. The door was opened by Bunter, who informed him with a gracious smile that Lord Peter had stepped out for a few minutes but was expecting him, and would he kindly come in and wait.

stuff with the name like anemones[1]"—you know what I mean—that that very attractive-looking man with the preposterous beard used to make away with his wife and mother-in-law (who was vastly the more attractive of the two, poor thing), I might be being cut up and analysed by Dr Spilsbury now—such a horrid, distasteful job he must have of it, poor man, and the poor little rabbits, too.' Wimsey paused for breath, and Parker laughed in spite of his anxiety.

'I won't vouch for the exact words,' said Wimsey, 'but it was to that effect—you know my mother's style. Old Thorpe tried to look dignified, but mother ruffled up like a little hen and said, looking beadily at him: "In *my* day we called that kind of thing hysterics and naughtiness. *We* didn't let girls pull the wool over our eyes like that. I suppose *you* call it a neurosis, or a suppressed desire, or a reflex, and coddle it. You might have let that silly child make herself really ill. You are all perfectly ridiculous, and no more fit to take care of yourselves than a lot of babies—not but what there are plenty of poor little things in the slums that look after whole families and show more sense than the lot of you put together. I am very angry with Mary, advertising herself in this way, and she's not to be pitied." You know,' said Wimsey, 'I think there's often a great deal in what one's mother says.'

'I believe you,' said Parker.

'Well, I got hold of mother afterwards and asked her what it was all about. She said Mary wouldn't tell her anything about herself or her illness; just asked to be let alone. Then Thorpe came along and talked about nervous shock—said he couldn't understand these fits of sickness, or the way Mary's temperature hopped about. Mother listened, and told him to go and see what the temperature was now. Which he did, and in the middle mother called him away to the dressing-table. But, bein' a wily old bird, you see, she kept her eyes on the looking-

[1]Antinomy? The Duchess appears to have had Dr Pritchard's case in mind.

glass, and nipped round just in time to catch Mary stimulatin' the thermometer to terrific leaps on the hotwater bottle.'

'Well, I'm damned!' said Parker.

'So was Thorpe. All mother said was, that if he wasn't too old a bird yet to be taken in by that hoary trick he'd no business to be gettin' himself up as a grey-haired family practitioner. So then she asked the girl about the sick fits—when they happened, and how often, and was it after meals or before, and so on, and at last she got out of them that it generally happened a bit after breakfast and occasionally at other times. Mother said she couldn't make it out at first, because she'd hunted all over the room for bottles and things, till at last she asked who made the bed, thinkin', you see, Mary might have hidden something under the mattress. So Ellen said she usually made it while Mary had her bath. "When's that?" says mother. "Just before her breakfast," bleats the girl. "God forgive you all for a set of nincompoops," says my mother. "Why didn't you say so before?" So away they all trailed to the bathroom, and there, sittin' up quietly on the bathroom shelf among the bath salts and the Elliman's embrocation and the Kruschen feelings and the toothbrushes and things, was the family bottle of ipecacuanha—three-quarters empty! Mother said—well, I told you what she said. By the way, how do you spell ipecacuanha?'

Mr Parker spelt it.

'Damn you!' said Lord Peter. 'I *did* think I'd stumped you that time. I believe you went and looked it up beforehand. *No* decent-minded person would know how to spell ipecacuanha out of his own head. Anyway, as you were saying, it's easy to see which side of the family has the detective instinct.'

'I didn't say so— '

'I know. Why didn't you? I think my mother's talents deserve a little acknowledgment. I said so to her, as a matter of fact, and she replied in these memorable words: "My dear child, you can give it a long name if you like, but I'm an old-fashioned woman and I call it

I hadn't really grasped what a fuss it was to try peers. It's only happened about once in every sixty years, and the procedure's about as old as Queen Elizabeth. They have to appoint a Lord High Steward for the occasion, and God knows what. They have to make it frightfully clear in the Commission that it *is* only for the occasion, because, somewhere about Richard III's time, the L.H.S. was such a terrifically big pot that he got to ruling the roost. So when Henry IV came to the throne, and the office came into the hands of the Crown, he jolly well kept it there, and now they only appoint a man *pro tem.* for the Coronation and shows like Jerry's. The King always pretends not to know there isn't a L.H.S. till the time comes, and is no end surprised at having to think of somebody to take on the job. Did you know all this? I didn't. I got it out of Biggy.

Cheer up. Pretend you don't know that any of these people are relations of mine. My mother sends you her kindest regards and what not, and hopes she'll see you again soon. Bunter sends something correct and respectful; I forget what.

Yours in the brotherhood of detection.
P.W.

It may as well be said at once that the evidence from the photographs was wholly inconclusive.

I enclose two photographs—all I can lay hands on for the moment. The one in nursing-kit is rather rotten, and the other's all smothered up in a big hat.

I had a damn' queer little adventure here on Wednesday, which I'll tell you about when we meet. I've found a woman who obviously knows more than she ought, and a most promising ruffian—only I'm afraid he's got an alibi. Also I've got a faint suggestion of a clue about № 10. Nothing much happened at Northallerton, except that Jerry was of course committed for trial. My mother is here, thank God! and I'm hoping she'll get some sense out of Mary, but she's been worse the last two days—Mary, I mean, not my mother—beastly sick and all that sort of thing. Dr Thingummy—who is an ass—can't make it out. Mother says it's as clear as noon-day, and she'll stop it if I have patience a day or two. I made her ask about the comb and the cat. M. denies the cat altogether, but admits to a diamond comb bought in Paris—says she bought it herself. It's in town—I'll get it and send it on. She says she can't remember where she bought it, has lost the bill, but it didn't cost anything like 7,500 francs. She was in Paris from February 2nd to February 20th. My chief business now is to see Lubbock and clear up a little matter concerning silver sand.

The Assizes will be the first week in November—in fact, the end of next week. This rushes things a bit, but it doesn't matter, because they can't try him there; nothing will matter but the Grand Jury, who are bound to find a true bill on the face of it. After that we can hang matters up as long as we like. It's going to be a deuce of a business, Parliament sitting and all. Old Biggs is fearfully perturbed under that marble outside of his.

mother-wit, and it's so rare for a man to have it that if he does you write a book about him and call him Sherlock Holmes." However, apart from all that, I said to mother (in private, of course), "It's all very well, but I can't believe that Mary has been going to all this trouble to make herself horribly sick and frighten us all just to show off. Surely she isn't that sort." Mother looked at me as steady as an owl, and quoted a whole lot of examples of hysteria, ending up with the servant-girl who threw paraffin about all over somebody's house to make them think it was haunted, and finished up—that if all these new-fangled doctors went out of their way to invent subconsciousness and kleptomania, and complexes and other fancy descriptions to explain away when people had done naughty things, she thought one might just as well take advantage of the fact.'

'Wimsey,' said Parker, much excited, 'did she mean she suspected something?'

'My dear old chap,' replied Lord Peter, 'whatever can be known about Mary by putting two and two together my mother knows. I told her all *we* knew up to that point, and she took it all in, in her funny way, you know, never answering anything directly, and then she put her head on one side and said: "If Mary had listened to me, and done something useful instead of that V.A.D. work, which never came to much, if you ask me—not that I have anything against V.A.D.'s in a general way, but that silly woman Mary worked under was the most terrible snob on God's earth—and there were very much more sensible things which Mary might really have done well, only that she was so crazy to get to London—I shall always say it was the fault of that ridiculous club—what could you expect of a place where you ate such horrible food, all packed into an underground cellar painted pink and talking away at the tops of their voices, and never any evening dress—only Soviet jumpers and side-whiskers. Anyhow, I've told that silly old man what to say about it, and they'll never be able to think of a better explanation for themselves." Indeed, you know,' said Peter,

'I think if any of them start getting inquisitive, they'll have mother down on them like a ton of bricks.'

'What do you really think yourself?' asked Parker.

'I haven't come yet to the unpleasantest bit of the lot,' said Peter. 'I've only just heard it, and it did give me a nasty jar, I'll admit. Yesterday I got a letter from Lubbock saying he would like to see me, so I trotted up here and dropped in on him this morning. You remember I sent him a stain off one of Mary's skirts which Bunter had cut out for me? I had taken a squint at it myself, and didn't like the look of it, so I sent it up to Lubbock, *ex abundantia cautelæ*; and I'm sorry to say he confirms me. It's human blood, Charles, and I'm afraid it's Cathcart's.'

'But—I've lost the thread of this a bit.'

'Well, the skirt must have got stained the day Cathcart—died, as that was the last day on which the party was out on the moors, and if it had been there earlier Ellen would have cleaned it off. Afterwards Mary strenuously resisted Ellen's efforts to take the skirt away, and made an amateurish effort to tidy it up herself with soap. So I think we may conclude that Mary knew the stains were there, and wanted to avoid discovery. She told Ellen that the blood was from a grouse—which must have been a deliberate untruth.'

'Perhaps,' said Parker, struggling against hope to make out a case for Lady Mary, 'she only said, "Oh! one of the birds must have bled," or something like that.'

'I don't believe,' said Peter, 'that one could get a great patch of human blood on one's clothes like that and not know what it was. She must have knelt right in it. It was three or four inches across.'

Parker shook his head dismally, and consoled himself by making a note.

'Well, now,' went on Peter, 'on Wednesday night everybody comes in and dines and goes to bed except Cathcart, who rushes out and stays out. At 11:50 the gamekeeper, Hardraw, hears a shot which may

on grubbing about over here, can you get hold of a photograph of Lady Mary Wimsey, and find out if possible about the diamond comb and the green-eyed cat—also at exactly what date Lady Mary was in Paris in February. Does she speak French as well as you do? Let me know how you are getting on.

Yours ever,
CHARLES PARKER.

He re-read the letter and report carefully and sealed them up. Then he wrote to his sister, did up his parcel neatly, and rang for the valet de chambre.

'I want this letter sent off at once, registered,' he said, 'and the parcel is to go tomorrow as a *colis postal*.'

After which he went to bed, and read himself to sleep with a commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews.

Lord Peter's reply arrived by return:

DEAR CHARLES,—Don't worry. I don't like the look of things myself frightfully, but I'd rather you tackled the business than anyone else. As you say, the ordinary police bloke doesn't mind whom he arrests, provided he arrests someone, and is altogether a most damnable fellow to have poking into one's affairs. I'm putting my mind to getting my brother cleared—that *is* the first consideration, after all, and really anything else would be better than having Jerry hanged for a crime he didn't commit. Whoever did it, it's better the right person should suffer than the wrong. So go ahead.

'We can see by the day-book,' put in Monsieur Briquet, 'on what occasion a diamond comb was sold with a diamond cat.'

'Of course,' said Parker hastily. 'Let us go back.'

They went back and turned to the January volume, where they found no help. But on February 6th they read:

Peigne en écaille et diamants *f.7,500*
Chat en diamants (Dessin C-5) *f.5,000*

'That settles it,' said Parker gloomily.

'Monsieur does not appear content,' suggested the jeweller.

'Monsieur,' said Parker, 'I am more grateful than I can say for your very great kindness, but I will frankly confess that, of all the twelve months in the year, I had rather it had been any other.'

Parker found this whole episode so annoying to his feelings that he bought two comic papers and, carrying them away to Boudet's at the corner of the Rue Auguste Léopold, read them solemnly through over his dinner, by way of settling his mind. Then, returning to his modest hotel, he ordered a drink, and sat down to compose a letter to Lord Peter. It was a slow job, and he did not appear to relish it very much. His concluding paragraph was as follows:

> I have put all these things down for you without any comment. You will be able to draw your own inferences as well as I can—better, I hope, for my own are perplexing and worrying me no end. They may be all rubbish—I hope they are; I daresay something will turn up at your end to put quite a different interpretation upon the facts. But I do feel that they must be cleared up. I would offer to hand over the job, but another man might jump at conclusions even faster than I do, and make a mess of it. But of course, if you say so, I will be taken suddenly ill at any moment. Let me know. If you think I'd better go

very well have been fired in the clearing where the—well, let's say the accident—took place. The time also agrees with the medical evidence about Cathcart having already been dead three or four hours when he was examined at 4:30. Very well. At 3 A.M. Jerry comes home from somewhere or other and finds the body. As he is bending over it, Mary arrives in the most apropos manner from the house in her coat and cap and walking shoes. Now what is her story? She says that at three o'clock she was awakened by a shot. Now nobody else heard that shot, and we have the evidence of Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson, who slept in the next room to Mary, with her window open according to her immemorial custom, that she lay broad awake from 2 A.M. till a little after 3 A.M., when the alarm was given, and heard no shot. According to Mary, the shot was loud enough to waken her on the other side of the building. It's odd, isn't it, that the person already awake should swear so positively that she heard nothing of a noise loud enough to waken a healthy young sleeper next door? And, in any case, *if* that was the shot that killed Cathcart, he can barely have been dead when my brother found him—and again, in that case, how was there time for him to be carried up from the shrubbery to the conservatory?'

'We've been over all this ground,' said Parker, with an expression of distaste. 'We agreed that we couldn't attach any importance to the story of the shot.'

'I'm afraid we've got to attach a great deal of importance to it,' said Lord Peter gravely. 'Now, what does Mary do? Either she thought the shot— '

'There was no shot.'

'I know that. But I'm examining the discrepancies of her story. She said she did not give the alarm because she thought it was probably only poachers. But, if it was poachers, it would be absurd to go down and investigate. So she explains that she thought it might be burglars. Now how does she dress to go and look for burglars? What would you or I have done? I think we would have taken a dressing-gown, a

stealthy kind of pair of slippers, and perhaps a poker or a stout stick—not a pair of walking shoes, a coat, and a cap, of all things!'

'It was a wet night,' mumbled Parker.

'My dear chap, if it's burglars you're looking for you don't expect to go and hunt them round the garden. Your first thought is that they're getting into the house, and your idea is to slip down quietly and survey them from the staircase or behind the dining-room door. Anyhow, fancy a present-day girl, who rushes about bare-headed in all weathers, stopping to embellish herself in a cap for a burglar-hunt—damn it all, Charles, it won't wash, you know! And she walks straight off to the conservatory and comes upon the corpse, exactly as if she knew where to look for it beforehand.'

Parker shook his head again.

'Well, now. She sees Gerald stooping over Cathcart's body. What does she say? Does she ask what's the matter? Does she ask who it is? She exclaims: "O God! Gerald, you've killed him," and *then* she says, as if on second thoughts, "Oh, it's Denis! What has happened? Has there been an accident?" Now, does that strike you as natural?'

'No. But it rather suggests to me that it wasn't Cathcart she expected to see there, but somebody else.'

'Does it? It rather sounds to me as if she was pretending not to know who it was. First she says, "You've killed him!" and then, recollecting that she isn't supposed to know who "he" is, she says, "Why, it's Denis!"'

'In any case, then, if her first exclamation was genuine, she didn't expect to find the man dead.'

'No—no—we must remember that. The death *was* a surprise. Very well. Then Gerald sends Mary up for help. And here's where a little bit of evidence comes in that you picked up and sent along. Do you remember what Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson said to you in the train?'

'About the door slamming on the landing, do you mean?'

cat and paid for it—no, I am wrong. It was the lady who bought it, and I remember now to have been surprised that she should pay like that at once in money, because ladies do not usually carry such large sums. The gentleman bought too. He bought a diamond and tortoiseshell comb for the lady to wear, and then she said she must give him something *pour porter bonheur*, and asked me for a mascot that was good for cards. I showed her some jewels more suitable for a gentleman, but she saw these cats and fell in love with them, and said he should have a cat and nothing else; she was sure it would bring him good hands. She asked me if it was not so, and I said, "Undoubtedly, and monsieur must be sure never to play without it," and he laughed very much, and promised always to have it upon him when he was playing.'

'And how was she, this lady?'

'Blond, monsieur, and very pretty; rather tall and svelte, and very well dressed. A big hat and dark blue costume. *Quoi encore? Voyons*—yes, she was a foreigner.'

'English?'

'I do not know. She spoke French very, very well, almost like a French person, but she had just the little suspicion of accent.'

'What language did she speak with the gentleman?'

'French, monsieur. You see, we were speaking together, and they both appealed to me continually, and so all the talk was in French. The gentleman spoke French *à merveille*, it was only by his clothes and a *je ne sais quoi* in his appearance that I guessed he was English. The lady spoke equally fluently, but one remarked just the accent from time to time. Of course, I went away from them once or twice to get goods from the window, and they talked then; I do not know in what language.'

'Now, mademoiselle, can you tell me how long ago this was?'

'*Ah, mon Dieu, ça c'est plus difficile. Monsieur sait que les jours se suivent et se ressemblent. Voyons.*'