

Parker shook his head, took out a sheet of paper, and began to write a report. He had breakfasted on coffee and rolls at seven; he had made an exhaustive search of the flat; he had interviewed the concierge, the manager of the *Crédit Lyonnais*, and the Prefect of Police for the *Quartier*, and the result was very poor indeed.

Information obtained from Captain Cathcart's papers:

Before the war Denis Cathcart had undoubtedly been a rich man. He had considerable investments in Russia and Germany and a large share in a prosperous vineyard in Champagne. After coming into his property at the age of twenty-one he had concluded his three years' residence at Cambridge, and had then travelled a good deal, visiting persons of importance in various countries, and apparently studying with a view to a diplomatic career. During the period from 1913 to 1918 the story told by the books became intensely interesting, baffling, and depressing. At the outbreak of war he had taken a commission in the 15th —shires. With the help of the check-book, Parker reconstructed the whole economic life of a young British officer—clothes, horses, equipment, travelling, wine and dinners when on leave, bridge debts, rent of the flat in the *Rue St Honoré*, club subscriptions, and what not. This outlay was strictly moderate and proportioned to his income. Receipted bills, neatly docketed, occupied one drawer of the bureau, and a careful comparison of these with the check-book and the returned checks revealed no discrepancy. But, beyond these, there appeared to have been another heavy drain upon Cathcart's resources. Beginning in 1913, certain large checks, payable to self, appeared regularly

at every quarter, and sometimes at shorter intervals. As to the destination of these sums, the bureau preserved the closest discretion; there were no receipts, no memoranda of their expenditure.

The great crash which in 1914 shook the credits of the world was mirrored in little in the pass-book. The credits from Russian and German sources stopped dead; those from the French shares slumped to a quarter of the original amount, as the tide of war washed over the vineyards and carried the workers away. For the first year or so there were substantial dividends from capital invested in French *rentes*; then came an ominous entry of 20,000 francs on the credit side of the account, and, six months after, another of 30,000 francs. After that the landslide followed fast. Parker could picture those curt notes from the Front, directing the sale of Government securities, as the savings of the past six years whirled away in the maelstrom of rising prices and collapsing currencies. The dividends grew less and less and ceased; then, more ominous still, came a series of debits representing the charges on renewal of promissory notes.

About 1918 the situation had become acute, and several entries showed a desperate attempt to put matters straight by gambling in foreign exchanges. There were purchases, through the bank, of German marks, Russian roubles, and Roumanian lei. Mr Parker sighed sympathetically; when he saw this, thinking of £12 worth of these delusive specimens of the engraver's art laid up in his own desk at home. He knew them to be waste-paper, yet his tidy mind could not bear the thought of destroying them. Evid-

ently Cathcart had found marks and roubles very broken reeds.

It was about this time that Cathcart's pass-book began to reveal the paying in of various sums in cash, some large, some small, at irregular dates and with no particular consistency. In December, 1919, there had been one of these amounting to as much as 35,000 francs. Parker at first supposed that these sums might represent dividends from some separate securities which Cathcart was handling for himself without passing them through the bank. He made a careful search of the room in the hope of finding either the bonds themselves or at least some memorandum concerning them, but the search was in vain, and he was forced to conclude either that Cathcart had deposited them in some secret place or that the credits in question represented some different source of income.

Cathcart had apparently contrived to be demobilized almost at once (owing, no doubt, to his previous frequentation of distinguished governmental personages), and to have taken a prolonged holiday upon the Riviera. Subsequently a visit to London coincided with the acquisition of £700, which, converted into francs at the then rate of exchange, made a very respectable item in the account. From that time on, the outgoing and receipts presented a similar aspect and were more or less evenly balanced, the checks to self becoming rather larger and more frequent as time went on, while during 1921 the income from the vineyard began to show signs of recovery.

Chapter 5

The Rue St Honoré and the Rue de la Paix

I think it was the cat.

H.M.S. Pinafore

WR Parker sat disconsolate in a small *appartement* in the Rue St Honoré. It was three o'clock in the afternoon. Paris was full of a subdued but cheerful autumn sunlight, but the room faced north, and was depressing, with its plain, dark furniture and its deserted air. It was a man's room, well appointed after the manner of a discreet club; a room that kept its dead owner's counsel imperturbably. Two large saddlebag chairs in crimson leather stood by the cold hearth. On the mantelpiece was a bronze clock, flanked by two polished German shells, a stone tobaccopipe, and an Oriental brass bowl containing a long-cold pipe. There were several excellent engravings in narrow pearwood frames, and the portrait in oils of a rather florid lady of the period of Charles II. The window-curtains were crimson, and the floor covered with a solid Turkey carpet. Opposite the fireplace stood a tall mahogany bookcase with glass doors, containing a number of English and French classics, a large collection of books on history and international politics, various French novels, a number of works on military and sporting subjects, and a famous French edition of the *Decameron* with the additional plates. Under the window stood a large bureau.

had every excuse for it. Well! Mrs G. goes in terror of her husband, who thinks nothing of knocking her down on suspicion. I wish to God—but I'd only have made things worse. Only thing you can do for the wife of a brute like that is to keep away from her. Hope there won't be murder done. One's enough at a time. Where was I?

'Yes—well, Mrs Grimethorpe knows something—and she knows somebody. She took me for somebody who had every reason for not coming to Gridler's Hole. Where was she, I wonder, while I was talking to Grimethorpe? She wasn't in the room. Perhaps the child warned her. No, that won't wash; I told the child who I was. Ah! wait a minute. Do I see light? She looked out of the window and saw a bloke in an aged Burberry. N° 10 is a bloke in an aged Burberry. Now, let's suppose for a moment she takes me for N° 10. What does she do? She sensibly keeps out of the way—can't think why I'm such a fool as to turn up. Then, when Grimethorpe runs out shoutin' for the kennel-man, she nips down with her life in her hands to warn her—her—shall we say boldly her lover?—to get away. She finds it isn't her lover, but only a gaping ass of (I fear) a very comin'-on disposition. New compromisin' position. She tells the ass to save himself and herself by clearin' out. Ass clears—not too gracefully. The next instalment of this enthrallin' drama will be shown in this theatre—when? I'd jolly well like to know.'

He tramped on for some time.

'All the same,' he retorted upon himself, 'all this throws no light on what N° 10 was doing at Riddlesdale Lodge.'

At the end of his walk he had reached no conclusion.

'Whatever happens,' he said to himself, 'and if it can be done without danger to her life, I must see Mrs Grimethorpe again.'

Mr Parker noted down all this information in detail, and, leaning back in his chair, looked round the flat. He felt, not for the first time, a distaste for his profession, which cut him off from the great masculine community whose members take each other for granted and respect their privacy. He relighted his pipe, which had gone out, and proceeded with his report.

Information obtained from Monsieur Turgeot, the manager of the Crédit Lyonnais, confirmed the evidence of the pass-book in every particular. Monsieur Cathcart had recently made all his payments in notes, usually in notes of small denominations. Once or twice he had had an overdraft—never very large, and always made up within a few months. He had, of course, suffered a diminution of income, like everybody else, but the account had never given the bank any uneasiness. At the moment it was some 14,000 francs on the right side. Monsieur Cathcart was always very agreeable, but not communicative—*très correct*.

Information obtained from the concierge:

One did not see much of Monsieur Cathcart, but he was *très gentil*. He never failed to say, '*Bonjour, Bourgeois*,' when he came in or out. He received visitors sometimes—gentlemen in evening dress. One made card-parties. Monsieur Bourgeois had never directed any ladies to his rooms; except once, last February, when he had given a lunch-party to some ladies *très comme il faut* who brought with them his fiancée, *une jolie blonde*. Monsieur Cathcart used the flat as a *piéd-à-terre*, and often he would shut it up and go away for several weeks or months. He was *un jeune homme très rangé*. He had never kept a valet. Madame Leblanc, the cousin of one's late wife, kept his *appartement* clean. Madame Leblanc

was very respectable. But certainly monsieur might have Madame Leblanc's address.

Information obtained from Madame Leblanc:

Monsieur Cathcart was a charming young man, and very pleasant to work for. Very generous and took a great interest in the family. Madame Leblanc was desolated to hear that he was dead, and on the eve of his marriage to the daughter of the English milady. Madame Leblanc had seen Mademoiselle last year when she visited Monsieur Cathcart in Paris; she considered the young lady very fortunate. Very few young men were as serious as Monsieur Cathcart, especially when they were so good-looking. Madame Leblanc had had experience of young men, and she could relate many histories if she were disposed, but none of Monsieur Cathcart. He would not always be using his rooms; he had the habit of letting her know when he would be at home, and she then went round to put the flat in order. He kept his things very tidy; he was not like English gentlemen in that respect. Madame Leblanc had known many of them, who kept their affairs *sans dessus dessous*. Monsieur Cathcart was always very well dressed; he was particular about his bath; he was like a woman for his toilet, the poor gentleman. And so he was dead. *Le pauvre garçon* ! Really it had taken away Madame Leblanc's appetite.

Information obtained from Monsieur the Prefect of Police:

Absolutely nothing. Monsieur Cathcart had never caught the eye of the police in any way. With regard to the sums of money mentioned by Monsieur

'T'es t' master's way wi' them as cooms t'look at t'missus,' he said. 'Tha's best keep away if so be tha wuna' have her blood on tha heid.'

'See here,' said Peter, 'did you by any chance meet a young man with a motor-cycle wanderin' round here last Wednesday or thereabouts?'

'Naay. Wednesday? T'wud be day t' mester went to Stapley, Ah reckon, after machines. Naay, Ah seed nowt.'

'All right. If you find anybody who did, let me know. Here's my name, and I'm staying at Riddlesdale Lodge. Good night, many thanks.'

The man took the card from him and slouched back without a word of farewell.

Lord Peter walked slowly, his coat collar turned up and his hat pulled over his eyes. This cinematographic episode had troubled his logical faculty. With an effort he sorted out his ideas and arranged them in some kind of order.

'First item,' said he, 'Mr Grimethorpe. A gentleman who will stick at nothing. Hefty. Unamiable. Inhospitable. Dominant characteristic—jealousy of his very astonishing wife. Was at Stapley last Wednesday and Thursday buying machinery. (Helpful gentleman at the gate corroborates this, by the way, so that at this stage of the proceedings one may allow it to be a sound alibi.) Did not, therefore, see our mysterious friend with the side-car, *if* he was there. But is disposed to think he *was* there, and has very little doubt about what he came for. Which raises an interesting point. Why the side-car? Awkward thing to tour about with. Very good. But if our friend came after Mrs G. he obviously didn't take her. Good again.'

'Second item, Mrs Grimethorpe. Very singular item. By Jove!' He paused meditatively to reconstruct a thrilling moment. 'Let us at once admit that if № 10 came for the purpose suspected he

Peter cast Public School tradition to the winds, caught up his stick, and went. The brutes were at his heels as he fled. He struck the foremost with his stick, and it dropped back, snarling. The man was still leaning on the gate, and Grimethorpe's hoarse voice was heard shouting to him to seize the fugitive. Peter closed with him; there was a scuffle of dogs and men, and suddenly Peter found himself thrown bodily over the gate. As he picked himself up and ran, he heard the farmer cursing the man and the man retorting that he couldn't help it; then the woman's voice, uplifted in a frightened wail. He glanced over his shoulder. The man and the woman and a second man who had now joined the party, were beating the dogs back, and seemed to be persuading Grimethorpe not to let them through. Apparently their remonstrances had some effect, for the farmer turned moodily away, and the second man called the dogs off, with much whip-cracking and noise. The woman said something, and her husband turned furiously upon her and struck her to the ground.

Peter made a movement to go back, but a strong conviction that he could only make matters worse for her arrested him. He stood still, and waited till she had picked herself up and gone in, wiping the blood and dirt from her face with her shawl. The farmer looked round, shook his fist at him, and followed her into the house. Jabez collected the dogs and drove them back, and Peter's friend returned to lean over the gate. Peter waited till the door had closed upon Mr and Mrs Grimethorpe; then he pulled out his handkerchief and, in the half-darkness, signalled cautiously to the man, who slipped through the gate and came slowly down to him.

'Thanks very much,' said Wimsey, putting money into his hand. 'I'm afraid I've done unintentional mischief.'

The man looked at the money and at him.

Parker, if monsieur would give him the numbers of some of the notes, efforts would be made to trace them.

Where had the money gone? Parker could think only of two destinations—an irregular establishment or a blackmailer. Certainly a handsome man like Cathcart might very well have a woman or two in his life, even without the knowledge of the concierge. Certainly a man who habitually cheated at cards—if he did cheat at cards—might very well have got himself into the power of somebody who knew too much. It was noteworthy that his mysterious receipts in cash began just as his economies were exhausted; it seemed likely that they represented irregular gains from gambling—in the casinos, on the exchange, or, if Denver's story had any truth in it, from crooked play. On the whole, Parker rather inclined to the blackmailing theory. It fitted in with the rest of the business, as he and Lord Peter had reconstructed it at Riddlesdale.

Two or three things, however, still puzzled Parker. Why should the blackmailer have been trailing about the Yorkshire moors with a cycle and side-car? Whose was the green-eyed cat? It was a valuable trinket. Had Cathcart offered it as part of his payment? That seemed somehow foolish. One could only suppose that the blackmailer had tossed it away with contempt. The cat was in Parker's possession, and it occurred to him that it might be worthwhile to get a jeweller to estimate its value. But the side-car was a difficulty, the cat was a difficulty, and, more than all, Lady Mary was a difficulty.

Why had Lady Mary lied at the inquest? For that she had lied, Parker had no manner of doubt. He disbelieved the whole story of the second shot which had awakened her. What had brought her to the conservatory door at three o'clock in the morning? Whose was the suit-case—if it was a suit-case—that had lain concealed among the cactus plants? Why this prolonged nervous breakdown,

with no particular symptoms, which prevented Lady Mary from giving evidence before the magistrate or answering her brother's inquiries? Could Lady Mary have been present at the interview in the shrubbery? If so, surely Wimsey and he would have found her footprints. Was she in league with the blackmailer? That was an unpleasant thought. Was she endeavouring to help her fiancé? She had an allowance of her own—a generous one, as Parker knew from the Duchess. Could she have tried to assist Cathcart with money? But in that case, why not tell all she knew? The worst about Cathcart—always supposing that card-sharping were the worst—was now matter of public knowledge, and the man himself was dead. If she knew the truth, why did she not come forward and save her brother?

And at this point he was visited by a thought even more unpleasant. If, after all, it had not been Denver whom Mrs Marchbanks had heard in the library, but someone else—someone who had likewise an appointment with the blackmailer—someone who was on his side as against Cathcart—who knew that there might be danger in the interview. Had he himself paid proper attention to the grass lawn between the house and the thicket? Might Thursday morning perhaps have revealed here and there a trodden blade that rain and sap had since restored to uprightness? Had Peter and he found *all* the footsteps in the wood? Had some more trusted hand fired that shot at close quarters? Once again—*whose was the green-eyed cat?*

Surmises and surmises, each uglier than the last, thronged into Parker's mind. He took up a photograph of Cathcart with which Wimsey had supplied him, and looked at it long and curiously. It was a dark, handsome face; the hair was black, with a slight wave, the nose large and well shaped, the big, dark eyes at once pleasing and arrogant. The mouth was good, though a little thick, with a hint of sensuality in its close curves; the chin showed a cleft. Frankly, Parker confessed to himself, it did not attract him;

'Get out o' t'house,' said Mr Grimethorpe sullenly. 'Certainly,' said Peter. 'I have to thank you for a very enter-tainin' evenin', Mr Grimethorpe. I'm sorry you can give me no news of my friend—'

Mr Grimethorpe sprang up with a blasphemous ejaculation, and made for the door, shouting 'Jabez!' Lord Peter stared after him for a moment, and then stared round the room.

'Something fishy here,' he said. 'Fellow knows somethin'. Murderous sort of brute. I wonder—'

He peered round the settle, and came face to face with a woman—a dim patch of whiteness in the thick shadow.

'You?' she said, in a low, hoarse gasp. 'You? You are mad to come here. Quick, quick! He has gone for the dogs.'

She placed her two hands on his breast, thrusting him urgently back. Then, as the firelight fell upon his face, she uttered a stifled shriek and stood petrified—a Medusa-head of terror.

Medusa was beautiful, says the tale, and so was this woman; a broad white forehead under massed, dusky hair, black eyes glowing under straight brows, a wide, passionate mouth—a shape so wonderful that even in that strenuous moment sixteen generations of feudal privilege stirred in Lord Peter's blood. His hands closed over hers instinctively, but she pulled herself hurriedly away and shrunk back.

'Madam,' said Wimsey, recovering himself, 'I don't quite—' A thousand questions surged up in his mind, but before he could frame them a long yell, and another, and then another came from the back of the house.

'Run, run!' she said. 'The dogs! My God, my God, what will become of me? Go, if you don't want to see me killed. Go, go! Have pity!'

'Look here,' said Peter, 'can't I stay and protect—'

'You can stay and murder me,' said the woman. 'Go!'

see, I've only just got over from Corsica—interestin' country and all that, Mr Grimethorpe, but a trifle out of the way—and from what my friend said I think he must have turned up here about a week ago and found me out. Just my luck. But he didn't leave his card, so I can't be quite sure, you see. You didn't happen to come across him by any chance? Tall fellow with big feet on a motor-cycle with a side-car. I thought he might have come rootin' about here. Hullo! d'you know him?

The farmer's face had become swollen and almost black with rage.

'What day sayst tha?' he demanded thickly.

'I should think last Wednesday night or Thursday morning,' said Peter, with a hand on his heavy malacca cane.

'I knew it,' growled Mr Grimethorpe. '—the slut, and all these dommed women wi' their dirty ways. Look here, mester. The tyke were a friend o' thine? Well, I wor at Stapley Wednesday and Thursday—tha knew that, didn't tha? And so did thi friend, didn't 'un? An' if I hadn't, it'd 'a' bin the worse for 'un. He'd 'a' been in Peter's Pot if I'd 'a' cor 'un, an' that's where tha'll be thesen in a minute, blast tha! And if I find 'un sneakin' here again, I'll blast every boon in a's body and send 'un to look for thee there.'

And with these surprising words he made for Peter's throat like a bull-dog.

'That won't do,' said Peter, disengaging himself with an ease which astonished his opponent, and catching his wrist in a grip of mysterious and excruciating agony. 'Tisn't wise, y'know—might murder a fellow like that. Nasty business, murder. Coroner's inquest and all that sort of thing. Counsel for the Prosecution askin' all sorts of inquisitive questions, and a feller puttin' a string round your neck. Besides, your method's a bit primitive. Stand still, you fool, or you'll break your arm. Feelin' better? That's right. Sit down. You'll get into trouble one of these days, behavin' like that when you're asked a civil question.'

he would have been inclined to dismiss the man as a 'Byronic blighter', but experience told him that this kind of face might be powerful with a woman, either for love or hatred.

Coincidences usually have the air of being practical jokes on the part of Providence. Mr Parker was shortly to be favoured—if the term is a suitable one—with a special display of this Olympian humour. As a rule, that kind of thing did not happen to him; it was more in Wimsey's line. Parker had made his way from modest beginnings to a respectable appointment in the C.I.D., rather by a combination of hard work, shrewdness, and caution than by spectacular displays of happy guesswork or any knack for taking fortune's tide at the flood. This time, however, he was given a 'leading' from above, and it was only part of the nature of things and men that he should have felt distinctly ungrateful for it.

He finished his report, replaced everything tidily in the desk and went round to the police-station to arrange with the Prefect about the keys and the fixing of the seals. It was still early evening and not too cold; he determined, therefore, to banish gloomy thoughts by a *café-cognac* in the Boul' Mich', followed by a stroll through the Paris of the shops. Being of a kindly, domestic nature, indeed, he turned over in his mind the idea of buying something Parisian for his elder sister, who was unmarried and lived a rather depressing life in Barrow-in-Furness. Parker knew that she would take pathetic delight in some filmy scrap of lace underwear which no one but herself would ever see. Mr Parker was not the kind of man to be deterred by the difficulty of buying ladies' underwear in a foreign language; he was not very imaginative. He remembered that a learned judge had one day asked in court what a camisole was, and recollected that there had seemed to be nothing particularly embarrassing about the garment when explained. He determined that he would find a really Parisian shop, and ask for a camisole. That would give him a start, and then mademoiselle would show him other things without being asked further.

Accordingly, towards six o'clock, he was strolling along the Rue de la Paix with a little carton under his arm. He had spent rather more money than he intended, but he had acquired knowledge. He knew for certain what a camisole was, and he had grasped for the first time in his life that crêpe-de-Chine had no recognizable relation to crape, and was astonishingly expensive for its bulk. The young lady had been charmingly sympathetic, and, without actually insinuating anything, had contrived to make her customer feel just a little bit of a dog. He felt that his French accent was improving. The street was crowded with people, slowly sauntering past the brilliant shop-windows. Mr Parker stopped and gazed nonchalantly over a gorgeous display of jewellery, as though hesitating between a pearl necklace valued at 80,000 francs and a pendant of diamonds and aquamarines set in platinum.

And there, balefully winking at him from under a label inscribed '*Bonne fortune*' hung a green-eyed cat.

The cat stared at Mr Parker, and Mr Parker stared at the cat. It was no ordinary cat. It was a cat with a personality. Its tiny arched body sparkled with diamonds, and its platinum paws, set close together, and its erect and glittering tail were instinct in every line with the sensuous delight of friction against some beloved object. Its head, cocked slightly to one side, seemed to demand a titillating finger under the jaw. It was a minute work of art, by no journeyman hand. Mr Parker fished in his pocket-book. He looked from the cat in his hand to the cat in the window. They were alike. They were astonishingly alike. They were identical. Mr Parker marched into the shop.

'I have here,' said Mr Parker to the young man at the counter, 'a diamond cat which greatly resembles one which I perceive in your window. Could you have the obligingness to inform me what would be the value of such a cat?'

The young man replied instantly:

'None,' said Mr Grimethorpe, with decision.

'Well, perhaps it's as well,' pursued Lord Peter. 'Makes one appreciate one's home circle more, what? Often think one sees too many strangers in town. Nothing like one's family when all's said and done—cosy, don't you know. You a married man, Mr Grimethorpe?'

'What the hell's that to you?' growled the farmer, rounding on him with such ferocity that Wimsey looked about quite nervously for the dogs before-mentioned.

'Oh, nothin',' he replied, 'only I thought that charmin' little girl might be yours.'

'And if I thought she weren't,' said Mr Grimethorpe, 'I'd strangle the bitch and her mother together. What hast got to say to that?'

As a matter of fact, the remark, considered as a conversational formula, seemed to leave so much to be desired that Wimsey's natural loquacity suffered a severe check. He fell back, however, on the usual resource of the male, and offered Mr Grimethorpe a cigar, thinking to himself as he did so:

'What a hell of a life the woman must lead.'

The farmer declined the cigar with a single word, and was silent. Wimsey lit a cigarette for himself and became meditative, watching his companion. He was a man of about forty-five, apparently, rough, harsh, and weather-beaten, with great ridgy shoulders and short, thick thighs—a bull-terrier with a bad temper. Deciding that delicate hints would be wasted on such an organism, Wimsey adopted a franker method.

'To tell the truth, Mr Grimethorpe,' he said, 'I didn't blow in without any excuse at all. Always best to provide oneself with an excuse for a call, what? Though it's so perfectly delightful to see you—I mean, no excuse might appear necessary. But fact is, I'm looking for a young man—a—an acquaintance of mine—who said he'd be roamin' about this neighbourhood some time or other about now. Only I'm afraid I may have missed him. You