'Are you, though?' said the Hon. Freddy. 'I say, won't you get a bit stared at, what?'

'Really, Freddy,' said the Duchess, 'does that matter?'

'Well,' said the Hon. Freddy, 'I mean to say, these bounders about here are all Socialists and Methodists....'

'If they are Methodists,' said Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson, 'they will not be at church.'

'Won't they?' retorted the Hon. Freddy. 'You bet they will if there's anything to see. Why, it'll be better'n a funeral to 'em.'

'Surely,' said Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson, 'one has a *duty* in the matter, whatever our private feelings may be—especially at the present day, when people are so terribly *slack*.'

She glanced at the Hon. Freddy.

'Oh, don't you mind me, Mrs P.,' said that youth amiably. 'All *I* say is, if these blighters make things unpleasant, don't blame me.'

'Whoever thought of blaming you, Freddy?' said the Duchess.

'Manner of speaking,' said the Hon. Freddy.

'What do you think, Mr Murbles?' inquired her ladyship.

'I feel,' said the lawyer, carefully stirring his coffee, 'that, while your intention is a very admirable one, and does you very great credit, my dear lady, yet Mr Arbuthnot is right in saying it may involve you in some—er—unpleasant publicity. Er—I have always been a sincere Christian myself, but I cannot feel that our religion demands that we should make ourselves conspicuous—er—in such very painful circumstances.'

Mr Parker reminded himself of a dictum of Lord Melbourne.

'Well, after all,' said Mrs Marchbanks, 'as Helen so rightly says, does it matter? Nobody's really got anything to be ashamed of. There has been a stupid mistake, of course, but I don't see why anybody who wants to shouldn't go to church.'

'Certainly not, certainly not, my dear,' said the Colonel heartily. 'We might look in ourselves, eh, dear? Take a walk that way I mean,

and come out before the sermon. I think it's a good thing. Shows *we* don't believe old Denver's done anything wrong, anyhow.'

'You forget, dear,' said his wife, 'I've promised to stay at home with Mary, poor girl.'

'Of course, of course—stupid of me,' said the Colonel. 'How is she?'

'She was very restless last night, poor child,' said the Duchess. 'Perhaps she will get a little sleep this morning. It has been a shock to her.'

'One which may prove a blessing in disguise,' said Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson.

'My dear!' said her husband.

'Wonder when we shall hear from Sir Impey,' said Colonel Marchbanks hurriedly.

'Yes, indeed,' moaned Mr Murbles. 'I am counting on his influence with the Duke.'

'Of course,' said Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson, 'he must speak out—for everybody's sake. He must say what he was doing out of doors at that time. Or, if he does not, it must be discovered. Dear me! That's what these detectives are for, aren't they?'

'That is their ungrateful task,' said Mr Parker suddenly. He had said nothing for a long time, and everybody jumped.

'There,' said Mrs Marchbanks, 'I expect you'll clear it all up in no time, Mr Parker. Perhaps you've got the real mur—the culprit up your sleeve all the time.'

'Not quite,' said Mr Parker, 'but I'll do my best to get him. Besides,' he added, with a grin, 'I'll probably have some help on the job.'

'From whom?' inquired Mr Pettigrew-Robinson.

'Her grace's brother-in-law.'

'Peter?' said the Duchess. 'Mr Parker must be amused at the family amateur,' she added.

'Not at all,' said Parker. 'Wimsey would be one of the finest detectives in England if he wasn't lazy. Only we can't get hold of him.'

'I've wired to Ajaccio—poste restante,' said Mr Murbles, 'but I don't know when he's likely to call there. He said nothing about when he was coming back to England.'

'He's a rummy old bird,' said the Hon. Freddy tactlessly, 'but he oughter be here, what? What I mean to say is, if anything happens to old Denver, don't you see, he's the head of the family, ain't he—till little Pickled Gherkins comes of age.'

In the frightful silence which followed this remark, the sound of a walking-stick being clattered into an umbrella-stand was distinctly audible.

'Who's that, I wonder,' said the Duchess.

The door waltzed open.

'Mornin', dear old things,' said the newcomer cheerfully. 'How are you all? Hullo, Helen! Colonel, you owe me half a crown since last September year. Mornin', Mrs Marchbanks, Mornin', Mrs P. Well, Mr Murbles, how d'you like this bili-beastly weather? Don't trouble to get up, Freddy; I'd simply hate to inconvenience you. Parker, old man, what a damned reliable old bird you are! Always on the spot, like that patent ointment thing. I say, have you all finished? I meant to get up earlier, but I was snorin' so Bunter hadn't the heart to wake me. I nearly blew in last night, only we didn't arrive till 2 A.M. and I thought you wouldn't half bless me if I did. Eh, what, Colonel? Airplane *Victoria* from Paris to London—North-Eastern to Northallerton—damn bad roads the rest of the way, and a puncture just below Riddlesdale. Damn bad bed at the "Lord in Glory"; thought I'd blow in for the last sausage here, if I was lucky. What? Sunday morning in an English family and no sausages? God bless my soul, what's the world coming to, eh, Colonel? I say, Helen, old Gerald's been an' gone an' done it this time, what? You've no business to leave him on his own, you know; he always gets into mischief. What's that? Curry? Thanks,

had gone out of his way to place himself at the man's disposal. Not only had the man been short with him, but he had rudely ordered him out of the conservatory, where he (Mr Pettigrew-Robinson) had been reconstructing the affair from the point of view of Lady Mary.

All these angers and embarrassments might have caused less pain to the company had they not been aggravated by the presence of the detective himself, a quiet young man in a tweed suit, eating curry at one end of the table next to Mr Murbles, the solicitor. This person had arrived from London on Friday, had corrected the local police, and strongly dissented from the opinion of Inspector Craikes. He had suppressed at the inquest information which, if openly given, might have precluded the arrest of the Duke. He had officiously detained the whole unhappy party, on the grounds that he wanted to re-examine everybody, and was thus keeping them miserably cooped up together over a horrible Sunday; and he had put the coping-stone on his offences by turning out to be an intimate friend of Lord Peter Wimsey's, and having, in consequence, to be accommodated with a bed in the gamekeeper's cottage and breakfast at the Lodge.

Mr Murbles, who was elderly and had a delicate digestion, had travelled up in a hurry on Thursday night. He had found the inquest very improperly conducted and his client altogether impracticable. He had spent all his time trying to get hold of Sir Impey Biggs, K.C., who had vanished for the weekend, leaving no address. He was eating a little dry toast, and was inclined to like the detective, who called him 'Sir', and passed him the butter.

'Is anybody thinking of going to church?' asked the Duchess.

'Theodore and I should like to go,' said Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson, 'if it is not too much trouble; or we could walk. It is not so *very* far.'

'It's two and a half miles, good,' said Colonel Marchbanks.

Mr Pettigrew-Robinson looked at him gratefully.

'Of course you will come in the car,' said the Duchess. 'I am going myself.'

because she could not feel sorry for her. When you felt sorry for people you called them 'poor old dear' or 'poor dear old man.' Since, obviously, you could not call the Duchess poor old dear, you were not being properly sorry for her. This distressed Mrs Marchbanks. The Colonel was both embarrassed and angry—embarrassed because, 'pon my soul, it was very difficult to know what to talk about in a house where your host had been arrested for murder; angry in a dim way, like an injured animal, because unpleasant things like this had no business to break in on the shooting-season.

Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson was not only angry, she was outraged. As a girl she had adopted the motto stamped upon the school notepaper: *Quœcunque honesta*. She had always thought it *wrong* to let your mind *dwell* on anything that was not really nice. In middle life she still made a point of ignoring those newspaper paragraphs which bore such headlines as: 'Assault upon a School teacher at Cricklewood'; 'Death in a Pint of Stout'; '£75 for a Kiss'; or 'She called him Hubbykins'. She said she could not see what *good* it did you to know about such things. She regretted having consented to visit Riddlesdale Lodge in the absence of the Duchess. She had never liked Lady Mary; she considered her a very objectionable specimen of the modern independent young woman; besides, there had been that very undignified incident connected with a Bolshevist while Lady Mary was nursing in London during the war. Nor had Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson at all cared for Captain Denis Cathcart. She did not like a young man to be handsome in that obvious kind of way. But, of course, since Mr Pettigrew-Robinson had wanted to come to Riddlesdale, it was her place to be with him. She was not to blame for the unfortunate result.

Mr Pettigrew-Robinson was angry, quite simply, because the detective from Scotland Yard had not accepted his help in searching the house and grounds for footprints. As an older man of some experience in these matters (Mr Pettigrew-Robinson was a county magistrate) he

old man. Here, I say, you needn't be so stingy about it; I've been travelling for three days on end. Freddy, pass the toast. Beg pardon, Mrs Marchbanks? Oh, rather, yes; Corsica was perfectly amazin'—all black-eyed fellows with knives in their belts and jolly fine-looking girls. Old Bunter had a regular affair with the innkeeper's daughter in one place. D'you know, he's an awfully susceptible old beggar. You'd never think it, would you? Jove! I am hungry. I say, Helen, I meant to get you some fetchin' crêpe-de-Chine undies from Paris, but I saw that old Parker was gettin' ahead of me over the bloodstains, so we packed up our things and buzzed off.'

Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson rose.

'Theodore,' she said, 'I think we ought to be getting ready for church.'

'I will order the car,' said the Duchess. 'Peter, of course I'm exceedingly glad to see you. Your leaving no address was most inconvenient. Ring for anything you want. It is a pity you didn't arrive in time to see Gerald.'

'Oh, that's all right,' said Lord Peter cheerfully; 'I'll look him up in quod. Y'know, it's rather a good idea to keep one's crimes in the family; one has so many more facilities. I'm sorry for poor old Polly, though. How is she?'

'She must not be disturbed today,' said the Duchess with decision.

'Not a bit of it,' said Lord Peter; 'she'll keep. Today Parker and I hold high revel. Today he shows me all the bloody footprints—it's all right, Helen, that's not swearin', that's an adjective of quality. I hope they aren't all washed away, are they, old thing?'

'No,' said Parker, 'I've got most of them under flower-pots.'

'Then pass the bread and squish,' said Lord Peter, 'and tell me all about it.'

The departure of the church-going element had induced a more humanitarian atmosphere. Mrs Marchbanks stumped off upstairs to tell Mary that Peter had come, and the Colonel lit a large cigar. The

Hon. Freddy rose, stretched himself, pulled a leather armchair to the fireside, and sat down with his feet on the brass fender, while Parker marched round and poured himself out another cup of coffee.

'I suppose you've seen the papers,' he said.

'Oh, yes, I read up the inquest,' said Lord Peter. 'Y'know, if you'll excuse my saying so, I think you rather mucked it between you.'

'It was disgraceful,' said Mr Murbles, 'disgraceful. The Coroner behaved most improperly. He had no business to give such a summing-up. With a jury of ignorant country fellows, what could one expect? And the details that were allowed to come out! If I could have got here earlier— '

'I'm afraid that was partly my fault, Wimsey,' said Parker penitently. 'Craikes rather resents me. The Superintendent at Stapley sent to us over his head, and when the message came through I ran along to the Chief and asked for the job, because I thought if there should be any misconception or difficulty, you see, you'd just as soon I tackled it as anybody else. I had a few little arrangements to make about a forgery I've been looking into, and, what with one thing and another, I didn't get off till the night express. By the time I turned up on Friday, Craikes and the Coroner were already as thick as thieves, had fixed the inquest for that morning—which was ridiculous—and arranged to produce their blessed evidence as dramatically as possible. I only had time to skim over the ground (disfigured, I'm sorry to say, by the prints of Craikes and his local ruffians), and really had nothing for the jury.'

'Cheer up,' said Wimsey. 'I'm not blaming you. Besides, it all lends excitement to the chase.'

'Fact is,' said the Hon. Freddy, 'that we ain't popular with respectable Coroners. Giddy aristocrats and immoral Frenchmen. I say, Peter, sorry you've missed Miss Lydia Cathcart. You'd have loved her. She's gone back to Golders Green and taken the body with her.'

'Oh, well,' said Wimsey. 'I don't suppose there was anything abstruse about the body.'

Chapter 2

The Green-Eyed Cat

And here's to the hound
With his nose unto the ground

Drink, Puppy, Drink

Some people hold that breakfast is the best meal of the day. Others, less robust, hold that it is the worst, and that, of all breakfasts in the week, Sunday morning breakfast is incomparably the worst.

The party gathered about the breakfast-table at Riddlesdale Lodge held, if one might judge from their faces, no brief for that day miscalled of sweet refection and holy love. The only member of it who seemed neither angry nor embarrassed was the Hon. Freddy Arbuthnot, and he was silent, engaged in trying to take the whole skeleton out of a bloater at once. The very presence of that undistinguished fish upon the Duchess's breakfast-table indicated a disorganized household.

The Duchess of Denver was pouring out coffee. This was one of her uncomfortable habits. Persons arriving late for breakfast were thereby made painfully aware of their sloth. She was a long-necked, long-backed woman, who disciplined her hair and her children. She was never embarrassed, and her anger, though never permitted to be visible, made itself felt the more.

Colonel and Mrs Marchbanks sat side by side. They had nothing beautiful about them but a stolid mutual affection. Mrs Marchbanks was not angry, but she was embarrassed in the presence of the Duchess,

'No,' said Parker, 'the medical evidence was all right as far as it went. He was shot through the lungs, and that's all.'

'Though, mind you,' said the Hon. Freddy, 'he didn't shoot himself. I didn't say anything, not wishin' to upset old Denver's story, but, you know, all that stuff about his bein' so upset and go-to-blazes in his manner was all my whiskers.'

'How do you know?' said Peter.

'Why, my dear man, Cathcart'n I toddled up to bed together. I was rather fed up, havin' dropped a lot on some shares, besides missin' everything I shot at in the mornin', an' lost a bet I made with the Colonel about the number of toes on the kitchen cat, an' I said to Cathcart it was a hell of a damn-fool world, or words to that effect. "Not a bit of it," he said; "it's a damn good world. I'm goin' to ask Mary for a date tomorrow, an' then we'll go and live in Paris, where they understand sex." I said somethin' or other vague, and he went off whistlin'.'

Parker looked grave. Colonel Marchbanks cleared his throat.

'Well, well,' he said, 'there's no accounting for a man like Cathcart, no accounting at all. Brought up in France, you know. Not at all like a straight-forward Englishman. Always up and down, up and down! Very sad, poor fellow. Well, well, Peter, hope you and Mr Parker will find out something about it. We mustn't have poor old Denver cooped up in jail like this, you know. Awfully unpleasant for him, poor chap, and with the birds so good this year. Well, I expect you'll be making a tour of inspection, eh, Mr Parker? What do you say to shoving the balls about a bit, Freddy?'

'Right you are,' said the Hon. Freddy; 'you'll have to give me a hundred, though, Colonel.'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said that veteran, in high good humour; 'you play an excellent game.'

Mr Murbles having withdrawn, Wimsey and Parker faced each other over the remains of the breakfast.

'Peter,' said the detective, 'I don't know if I've done the right thing by coming. If you feel— '

'Look here, old man,' said his friend earnestly, 'let's cut out the considerations of delicacy. We're goin' to work this case like any other. If anything unpleasant turns up, I'd rather you saw it than anybody else. It's an uncommonly pretty little case, on its merits, and I'm goin' to put some damn good work into it.'

'If you're sure it's all right— '

'My dear man, if you hadn't been here I'd have sent for you. Now let's get to business. Of course, I'm settin' off with the assumption that old Gerald didn't do it.'

'I'm sure he didn't,' agreed Parker.

'No, no,' said Wimsey, 'that isn't your line. Nothing rash about you—nothing trustful. You are expected to throw cold water on my hopes and doubt all my conclusions.'

'Right ho!' said Parker. 'Where would you like to begin?'

Peter considered. 'I think we'll start from Cathcart's bedroom,' he said.

The bedroom was of moderate size, with a single window overlooking the front door. The bed was on the right-hand side, the dressing-table before the window. On the left was the fireplace, with an armchair before it, and a small writing-table.

'Everything's as it was,' said Parker. 'Craikes had that much sense.'

'Yes,' said Lord Peter. 'Very well. Gerald says that when he charged Cathcart with bein' a scamp, Cathcart jumped up, nearly knockin' the table over. That's the writin'-table, then, so Cathcart was sittin' in the armchair. Yes, he was—and he pushed it back violently and rumpled up the carpet. See! So far, so good. Now what was he doin' there? He wasn't readin', because there's no book about, and we know that he rushed straight out of the room and never came back. Very good. Was he writin'? No; virgin sheet of blottin'-paper— '

'He might have been writing in pencil,' suggested Parker.

Lastly, they must consider whether there was sufficient evidence of malice to justify a verdict of murder. They must consider whether any person had a motive, means, and opportunity for killing deceased; and whether they could reasonably account for that person's conduct on any other hypothesis. And, if they thought there *was* such a person, and that his conduct was in any way suspicious or secretive, or that he had wilfully suppressed evidence which might have had a bearing on the case, or (here the Coroner spoke with great emphasis, staring over the Duke's head) fabricated other evidence with intent to mislead—then all these circumstances might be sufficient to amount to a violent presumption of guilt against some party, in which case they were in duty bound to bring in a verdict of wilful murder against that party. And, in considering this aspect of the question, the Coroner added, they would have to decide in their own minds whether the person who had dragged deceased towards the conservatory door had done so with the object of obtaining assistance or of thrusting the body down the garden well, which, as they had heard from Inspector Craikes, was situate close by the spot where the body had been found. If the jury were satisfied that deceased had been murdered, but were not prepared to accuse any particular person on the evidence, they might bring in a verdict of murder against an unknown person, or persons; but, if they felt justified in laying the killing at any person's door, then they must allow no respect of persons to prevent them from doing their duty.

Guided by these extremely plain hints, the jury, without very long consultation, returned a verdict of wilful murder against Gerald, Duke of Denver.

Unhappily, the alleged letter giving details of the accusation had not been produced to them. Next, they might ask themselves whether it was not more usual for a suicide to shoot himself in the head. They should ask themselves how deceased came by the revolver. And, finally, they must consider, in that case, who had dragged the body towards the house, and why the person had chosen to do so, with great labour to himself and at the risk of extinguishing any lingering remnant of the vital spark,[3] instead of arousing the household and fetching help.

If they excluded suicide, there remained accident, manslaughter, or murder. As to the first, if they thought it likely that deceased or any other person had taken out the Duke of Denver's revolver that night for any purpose, and that, in looking at, cleaning, shooting with, or otherwise handling the weapon, it had gone off and killed deceased accidentally, then they would return a verdict of death by misadventure accordingly. In that case, how did they explain the conduct of the person, whoever it was, who had dragged the body to the door?

The Coroner then passed on to speak of the law concerning manslaughter. He reminded them that no mere words, however insulting or threatening, can be an efficient excuse for killing anybody, and that the conflict must be sudden and unpremeditated. Did they think, for example, that the Duke had gone out, wishing to induce his guest to return and sleep in the house, and that deceased had retorted upon him with blows or menaces of assault? If so, and the Duke, having a weapon in his hand, had shot deceased in self-defence, that was only manslaughter. But, in that case, they must ask themselves how the Duke came to go out to deceased with a lethal weapon in his hand? And this suggestion was in direct conflict with the Duke's own evidence.

[3]Verbatim.

'That's true, old Kill-Joy, so he might. Well, if he was he shoved the paper into his pocket when Gerald came in, because it isn't here; but he didn't, because it wasn't found on his body; so he wasn't writing.'

'Unless he threw the paper away somewhere else,' said Parker. 'I haven't been all over the grounds, you know, and at the smallest computation—if we accept the shot heard by Hardraw at 11:50 as the shot—there's an hour and a half unaccounted for.'

'Very well. Let's say there is nothing to show he was writing. Will that do? Well, then— '

Lord Peter drew out a lens and scrutinized the surface of the armchair carefully before sitting down in it.

'Nothing helpful there,' he said. 'To proceed, Cathcart sat where I am sitting. He wasn't writing; he—You're sure this room hasn't been touched?'

'Certain.'

'Then he wasn't smoking.'

'Why not? He might have chucked the stub of a cigar or cigarette into the fire when Denver came in.'

'Not a cigarette,' said Peter, 'or we should find traces somewhere—on the floor or in the grate. That light ash blows about so. But a cigar—well, he might have smoked a cigar without leaving a sign, I suppose. But I hope he didn't.'

'Why?'

'Because, old son, I'd rather Gerald's account had some element of truth in it. A nervy man doesn't sit down to the delicate enjoyment of a cigar before bed, and cherish the ash with such scrupulous care. On the other hand, if Freddy's right, and Cathcart was feelin' unusually sleek and pleased with life, that's just the sort of thing he would do.'

'Do you think Mr Arbuthnot would have invented all that, as a matter of fact?' said Parker thoughtfully. 'He doesn't strike me that way. He'd have to be imaginative and spiteful to make it up, and I really don't think he's either.'

'I know,' said Lord Peter. 'I've known old Freddy all my life, and he wouldn't hurt a fly. Besides, he simply hasn't the wits to make up any sort of a story. But what bothers me is that Gerald most certainly hasn't the wits either to invent that Adelphi drama between him and Cathcart.'

'On the other hand,' said Parker, 'if we allow for a moment that he shot Cathcart, he had an incentive to invent it. He would be trying to get his head out of the—I mean, when anything important is at stake it's wonderful how it sharpens one's wits. And the story being so far-fetched does rather suggest an unpractised storyteller.'

'True, O King. Well, you've sat on all my discoveries so far. Never mind. My head is bloody but unbowed. Cathcart was sitting here— '

'So your brother said.'

'Curse you, I say he was; at least, somebody was; he's left the impression of his sit-me-down-upon on the cushion.'

'That might have been earlier in the day.'

'Rot. They were out all day. You needn't overdo this Sadducee attitude, Charles. I say Cathcart was sitting here, and—Hullo! Hullo!'

He leaned forward and stared into the grate.

'There's some burnt paper here, Charles.'

'I know. I was frightfully excited about that yesterday, but I found it was just the same in several of the rooms. They often let the bedroom fires go out when everybody's out during the day, and relight them about an hour before dinner. There's only the cook, housemaid, and Fleming here, you see, and they've got a lot to do with such a large party.'

Lord Peter was picking the charred fragments over.

'I can find nothing to contradict your suggestion,' he sadly said, 'and this fragment of the *Morning Post* rather confirms it. Then we can only suppose that Cathcart sat here in a brown study, doing nothing at all. That doesn't get us much further, I'm afraid.' He got up and went to the dressing-table.

conservatory, near the covered well. There seemed little doubt, from the medical evidence, that the shot which killed deceased had been fired in the shrubbery, about seven minutes' distance from the house, and that the body of deceased had been dragged from that place to the house. Deceased had undoubtedly died as the result of being shot in the lungs. The jury would have to decide whether that shot was fired by his own hand or by the hand of another; and, if the latter, whether by accident, in self-defence, or by malice aforethought with intent to murder. As regards suicide, they must consider what they knew of deceased's character and circumstances. Deceased was a young man in the prime of his strength, and apparently of considerable fortune. He had had a meritorious military career, and was liked by his friends. The Duke of Denver had thought sufficiently well of him to consent to his own sister's engagement to deceased. There was evidence to show that the fiancés, though perhaps not demonstrative, were on excellent terms. The Duke affirmed that on the Wednesday night deceased had announced his intention of breaking off the engagement. Did they believe that deceased, without even communicating with the lady, or writing a word of explanation or farewell, would thereupon rush out and shoot himself? Again, the jury must consider the accusation which the Duke of Denver said he had brought against deceased. He had accused him of cheating at cards. In the kind of society to which the persons involved in this inquiry belonged, such a misdemeanour as cheating at cards was regarded as far more shameful than such sins as murder and adultery. Possibly the mere suggestion of such a thing, whether well-founded or not, might well cause a gentleman of sensitive honour to make away with himself. But was deceased honourable? Deceased had been educated in France, and French notions of the honest thing were very different from British ones. The Coroner himself had had business relations with French persons in his capacity as a solicitor, and could assure such of the jury as had never been in France that they ought to allow for these different standards.