'Your lordship's man is here, my lord, and says you may wish to be advised of his arrival.'

'Quite right. I'm just coming.' Wimsey took up the blotting-pad to blot his notes. Then his face changed. The corner of a sheet of paper protruded slightly. On the principle that nothing is too small to be looked at, Wimsey poked an inquisitive finger between the leaves, and extracted the paper. It bore a few scrawls relating to sums of money, very carelessly and shakily written. Wimsey looked at it attentively for a moment or two, and shook the blotter to see if it held anything further. Then he folded the sheet, handling it with extreme care by the corners, put it in an envelope and filed it away in his note-case. Coming out of the library, he found Bunter waiting in the hall, camera and tripod in hand.

'Ah, here you are, Bunter. Just a minute, while I see the Secretary.' He looked in at the office, and found Culyer immersed in some accounts.

'Oh, I say, Culyer—"mornin" and all that—yes, disgustingly healthy, thanks, always am—I say, you recollect old Fentiman poppin' off in that inconsiderate way a little time ago?'

'I'm not likely to forget it,' said Culyer, with a wry face. 'I've had three notes of complaint from Wetheridge—one, because the servants didn't notice the matter earlier, set of inattentive rascals and all that; two, because the undertaker's men had to take the coffin past his door and disturbed him; three, because somebody's lawyer came along and asked him questions—together with distant allusions to the telephones being out of order and a shortage of soap in the bathroom. Who'd be a secretary?'

'Awfully sorry for you,' said Wimsey with a grin. 'I'm not here to make trouble. Au contraire, as the man said in the Bay of Biscay when they asked if he'd dined. Fact is, there's a bit of a muddle about the exact minute when the old boy passed out—mind you, this is in strict confidence—and I'm havin' a look into it. Don't

want a fuss made, but I'd like a few photographs of the place, just to look at in absence and keep the lie of the land under my hawk-like optic, what? I've got my man here with a camera. D'you mind pretendin' he's the bloke from *The Twaddler* or the *Picture News*, or something, and givin' him your official blessin' while he totters round with the doings?'

'Mysterious idiot—of course, if you like. Though how photographs of the place to-day are going to give you a line on the time of a death which happened ten days ago, I don't pretend to understand. But, I say—it's all fair and aboveboard? We don't want any— '

'Of course not. That's the idea. Strictest confidence—any sum up to £50,000 on your note of hand alone, delivered in plain vans, no reference needed. Trust little Peter.'

'Oh, right-ho! What d'you want done?'

'I don't want to go round with Bunter. Give the show away. May he be called in here?'

'Certainly.'

A servant was sent to fetch Bunter, who came in looking imperturbably prim and point-device. Wimsey looked him over and shook his head.

'I'm sorry, Bunter, but you don't look in the least like the professional photographer from *The Twaddler*. That dark-gray suit is all right, but you haven't got quite the air of devil-may-care seediness that marks the giants of Fleet Street. D'you mind stickin' all those dark-slides into one pocket and a few odd lenses and doodahs into the other, and rufflin' your manly locks a trifle? That's better. Why have you no pyro stains on the right thumb and forefinger?'

'I attribute it, my lord, principally to the circumstance that I prefer metol-quinol for the purpose of development.'

'Well, you can't expect an outsider to grasp a thing like that. Wait a minute. Culyer, you seem to have a fairly juicy pipe there. Give us a cleaner.'

Wimsey thrust the instrument energetically through the stem of the pipe, bringing out a revolting collection of brown, oily matter.

'Nicotine poisoning, Culyer—that's what you'll die of if you aren't jolly careful. Here you are, Bunter. Judiciously smeared upon the finger tips, that should give quite the right effect. Now, look here, Mr Culyer here will take you round. I want a shot of the smoking-room from the entrance, a close up of the fireplace, showing General Fentiman's usual chair, and another shot from the door of the ante-room that leads into the library. Another shot through the ante-room into the library, and some careful studies of the far bay of the library from all points of view. After that, I want two or three views of the hall, and a shot of the cloak-room; get the attendant there to show you which was General Fentiman's customary peg, and take care that that gets into the picture. That's all for the moment, but you can take anything else that seems necessary for purposes of camouflage. And I want all the detail you can possibly get in, so stop down to whatever it is and take as long as you like. You'll find me knocking about somewhere when you've finished, and you'd better get some more plates in, because we're going on to another place.'

'Very good, my lord.'

'Oh, and, Culyer, by the way. Dr Penberthy sent a female in to lay the General out, didn't he? D'you happen to remember when she arrived?'

'About nine o'clock the next morning, I think.'

'Have you got her name, by any chance?'

'I don't think so. But I know she came from Merritt's, the undertakers—round Shepherd's Market way. They'd probably put you on to her.'

'Thanks frightfully, Culyer. I'll make myself scarce now. Carry on, Bunter.'

'It's certainly possible. I can imagine that he might behave hysterically, or even violently, and force the knee-joint back with some unbalanced idea of straightening the body out and making it look more seemly. And then, you know he might just run away from the thing and pretend it hadn't happened. Mind you, I'm not saying it was so, but I can easily see it happening. And that being so, I thought it better to say nothing about it. It would be a very unpl—distressing thing to bring to people's notice. And it might do untold harm to the nervous case to question him about it. I'd rather let sleeping dogs lie. There was nothing wrong about the death, that's definite. As for the rest—our duty is to the living; we can't help the dead.'

'Quite. Tell you what, though, I'll have a shot at finding out whether—we may as well say what we mean—whether George Fentiman was alone in the smoking-room at any time during the day. One of the servants may have noticed. It seems the only possible explanation. Well, thanks very much for your help. Oh, by the way, you said at the time that the rigour was passing off when we found the body—was that just camouflage, or does it still hold good?'

'It was just beginning to pass off in the face and jaw as a matter of fact. It had passed away completely by midnight.'

'Thanks. That's another fact, then. I like facts, and there are annoyin'ly few of them in this case. Won't you have another whisky?'

'No thanks. Due at my surgery. See you another time. Cheerio!'

Wimsey remained for a few moments after he had gone, smoking meditatively. Then he turned his chair to the table, took a sheet of paper from the rack and began to jot down a few notes of the case with his fountain-pen. He had not got far, however, before one of the Club servants entered, peering into all the bays in turn, looking for somebody.

'Want me, Fred?'

'Unpleasant,' said Wimsey. 'If you knew how often I'd heard that word in the last two days! Well, let's face it. Let's admit, straight away, that, once rigour sets in, it stays in till it starts to pass off, and that, when it *does* start to go it usually begins with the face and jaw, and not suddenly in one knee-joint. Now Fentiman's jaw and neck were as rigid as wood—I felt 'em. But the left leg swung loose from the knee. Now how do you explain that?'

'It is extremely puzzling. As no doubt you are aware, the obvious explanation would be that the joint had been forcibly loosened by somebody or something, after rigour had set in. In that case of course, it wouldn't stiffen up again. It would remain loose until the whole body relaxed. But how it happened— '

'That's just it. Dead people don't go about jamming their legs into things and forcing their own joints. And surely, if anybody had found the body like that he would have mentioned it. I mean, can you imagine one of the waiter-johnnies, for instance, finding an old gentleman stiff as a poker in the best arm-chair and then just givin' him a dose of knee-jerks and leavin' him there?'

'The only thing I could think of,' said Penberthy, 'was that a waiter or somebody had found him, and tried to move him—and then got frightened and barged off without saying anything. It sounds absurd. But people do do odd things, especially if they're scared.'

'But what was there to be scared of?'

'It might seem alarming to a man in a very nervous state. We have one or two shell-shock cases here that I wouldn't answer for in an emergency. It would be worth considering, perhaps, if any one had shown special signs of agitation or shock that day.'

'That's an idea,' said Wimsey, slowly. 'Suppose—suppose, for instance, there was somebody connected in some way with the General, who was in an unnerved state of mind—and suppose he came suddenly on this stiff corpse. You think he might—possibly—lose his head?'

Wimsey thought for a moment; then strolled across to the smoking-room, exchanged a mute greeting with one or two of the assembled veterans, picked up the *Morning Post,* and looked round for a seat. The great arm-chair with ears still stood before the fire, but some dim feeling of respect for the dead had left it vacant. Wimsey sauntered over to it, and dropped lazily into its well-sprung depths. A veteran close at hand looked angrily at him and rustled the *Times* loudly. Wimsey ignored these signals, barricading himself behind his paper. The veteran sank back again, muttering something about 'young men' and 'no decency.' Wimsey sat on unmoved, and paid no attention, even when a man from *The Twaddler* came in, escorted by the Secretary, to take photographs of the smoking-room. A few sensitives retired before this attack. Wetheridge waddled away with a grumbling protest into the library. It gave Wimsey considerable satisfaction to see the relentless camera pursue him into that stronghold.

It was half-past twelve before a waiter approached Lord Peter to say that Mr Culyer would be glad to speak to him for a moment. In the office, Bunter reported his job done, and was despatched to get some lunch and a fresh supply of plates. Wimsey presently went down to the dining-room, where he found Wetheridge already established, getting the first cut off the saddle of mutton, and grumbling at the wine. Wimsey went deliberately over, greeted him heartily, and sat down at the same table.

Wetheridge said it was beastly weather. Wimsey agreed amiably. Wetheridge said it was scandalous, seeing what one paid for one's food in this place, that one couldn't get anything fit to eat. Wimsey, who was adored by chef and waiters alike for his appreciation of good food, and had been sent the choicest cut without having to ask for it, sympathized with this sentiment too. Wetheridge said he had been chased all over the Club that morning by an infernal photographer fellow, and that one got no peace these days with all this confounded publicity. Wimsey said it was all done for

advertisement, and that advertisement was the curse of the age. Look at the papers—nothing but advertisements from cover to cover. Wetheridge said that in his time, by gad, a respectable Club would have scorned advertisements, and that he could remember the time when newspapers were run by gentlemen for gentlemen. Wimsey said that nothing was what it had been; he thought it must be due to the War.

'Infernal slackness, that's what it is,' said Wetheridge. 'The service in this place is a disgrace. That fellow Culyer doesn't know his job. This week it's the soap. Would you believe it, there was none—actually none—in the bathroom yesterday. Had to ring for it. Made me late for dinner. Last week it was the telephone. Wanted to get through to a man down in Norfolk. Brother was a friend of mine—killed on the last day of the War, half an hour before the guns stopped firing—damnable shame—always ring up on Armistice Day, say a few words, don't you know—hr'rm!'

Wetheridge, having unexpectedly displayed this softer side of his character, relapsed into a snorting silence.

'Couldn't you get through, sir?' inquired Wimsey, with feeling. Anything that had happened at the Bellona Club on Armistice Day was of interest to him.

'I got *through* all right,' said Wetheridge, morosely. 'But, confound it all, I had to go down to the cloak-room to get a call from one of the boxes there. Didn't want to hang about the entrance. Too many imbeciles coming in and out. Exchanging silly anecdotes. Why a solemn national occasion should be an excuse for all these fools meeting and talking rot, I don't know.'

'Beastly annoyin'. But why didn't you tell 'em to put the call through to the box by the library?'

'Aren't I telling you? The damned thing was out of order. Damned great notice stuck across it as cool as you please—'Instrument out of order.' Just like that. No apology. Nothing. Sickening, I call it. I told the fellow at the switch-board it was a disgrace.

Chapter 5

—And Finds The Club Suit Blocked

THERE never was anybody in the library at the Bellona. It was a large, quiet, pleasant room, with the bookshelves arranged in bays; each of which contained a writing-table and three or four chairs. Occasionally some one would wander in to consult the *Times Atlas*, or a work on Strategy and Tactics, or to hunt up an ancient Army list, but for the most part it was deserted. Sitting in the farthest bay, immured by books and silence, confidential conversation could be carried on with all the privacy of the confessional.

'Well, now,' said Wimsey, 'what about it?'

'About—?' prompted the doctor, with professional caution.

'About that leg?'

'I wonder if anybody else noticed that?' said Penberthy.

'I doubt it. I did, of course. But then, I make that kind of thing my hobby. Not a popular one, perhaps—an ill-favoured thing, but mine own. In fact, I've got rather a turn for corpses. But not knowin' quite what it meant, and seein' you didn't seem to want to call attention to it, I didn't put myself forward.'

'No—I wanted to think it over. You see, it suggested, at the first blush, something rather— '

And all he said was, he hadn't put the notice up, but he'd draw attention to the matter.'

'It was all right in the evening,' said Wimsey, 'because I saw Colonel Marchbanks using it.'

'I know it was. And then, dashed if we didn't get the fool thing ringing, ringing at intervals all the next morning. Infuriating noise. When I told Fred to stop it, he just said it was the Telephone Company testing the line. They've no business to make a row like that. Why can't they test it quietly, that's what I want to know?'

Wimsey said telephones were an invention of the devil. Wetheridge grumbled his way through to the end of lunch, and departed. Wimsey returned to the entrance-hall, where he found the assistant commissionaire on duty, and introduced himself.

Weston, however, was of no assistance. He had not noticed General Fentiman's arrival on the eleventh. He was not acquainted with many of the members, having only just taken over his new duties. He thought it odd that he should not have noticed so very venerable a gentleman, but the fact remained that he had not. He regretted it extremely. Wimsey gathered that Weston was annoyed at having lost a chance of reflected celebrity. He had missed his scoop, as the reporters say.

Nor was the hall-porter any more helpful. The morning of November 11th had been a busy one. He had been in and out of his little glass pigeonhole continually, shepherding guests into various rooms to find the members they wanted, distributing letters and chatting to country members who visited the Bellona seldom and liked to 'have a chat with Piper' when they did. He could not recollect seeing the General. Wimsey began to feel that there must have been a conspiracy to overlook the old gentleman on the last morning of his life.

'You don't think he never was here at all, do you, Bunter?' he suggested. 'Walkin' about invisible and tryin' hard to commu-

nicate, like the unfortunate ghost in that story of somebody or other's?'

Bunter was inclined to reject the psychic view of the case. 'The General must have been here in the body, my lord, because there *was* the body.'

'That's true,' said Wimsey. 'I'm afraid we can't explain away the body. S'pose that means I'll have to question every member of this beastly Club separately. But just at the moment I think we'd better go round to the General's flat and hunt up Robert Fentiman. Weston, get me a taxi, please.'

rest. As I see it, he must have insisted on getting up, in spite of feeling groggy, walked here—he would do it—and collapsed straight away.'

'That's all right, Penberthy, but when—just when—did it happen?'

'Lord knows. I don't. Have another?'

'No, thanks; not for the moment. I say, I suppose you are perfectly satisfied about it all?'

'Satisfied?' The doctor stared at him. 'Yes, of course. If you mean, satisfied as to what he died of—of course I'm satisfied. I shouldn't have given a certificate if I hadn't been satisfied.'

'Nothing about the body struck you as queer?'

'What sort of thing?'

'You know what I mean as well as I do,' said Wimsey, suddenly turning and looking the other straight in the face. The change in him was almost startling—it was as if a steel blade had whipped suddenly out of its velvet scabbard. Penberthy met his eye, and nodded slowly.

'Yes, I do know what you mean. But not here. We'd better go up to the Library. There won't be anybody there.'

'Hear, hear!—Well, I should have said he'd been dead a long time.'

'That's pretty vague.'

'You said yourself that rigour was well advanced. Give it, say, six hours to set in and—when did it pass off?'

'It was passing off then—I remarked upon it at the time.'

'So you did. I thought rigour usually lasted twenty-four hours or so.'

'It does, sometimes. Sometimes it goes off quickly. Quick come, quick go, as a rule. Still, I agree with you, that in the absence of other evidence, I should have put the death rather earlier than ten o'clock.'

'You admit that?'

'I do. But we know he came in not earlier than a quarter-past ten.'

'You've seen Williamson, then?'

'Oh, yes. I thought it better to check up on the thing as far as possible. So I can only suppose that, what with the death being sudden, and what with the warmth of the room—he was very close to the fire, you know—the whole thing came on and worked itself off very quickly.'

'H'm! Of course, you knew the old boy's constitution very well.'

'Oh, rather. He was very frail. Heart gets a bit worn-out when you're over the four-score and ten, you know. I should never have been surprised at his dropping down anywhere. And then, he'd had a bit of a shock, you see.'

'What was that?'

'Seeing his sister the afternoon before. They told you about that, I imagine, since you seem to know all about the business. He came along to Harley Street afterwards and saw me. I told him to go to bed and keep quiet. Arteries very strained, and pulse erratic. He was excited—naturally. He ought to have taken a complete

Chapter 6

A Card Of Re-Entry

THE door of the little flat in Dover Street was opened by an elderly man-servant, whose anxious face bore signs of his grief at his master's death. He informed them that Major Fentiman was at home and would be happy to receive Lord Peter Wimsey. As he spoke, a tall, soldierly man of about forty-five came out from one of the rooms and hailed his visitor cheerily.

'That you, Wimsey? Murbles told me to expect you. Come in. Haven't seen you for a long time. Hear you're turning into a regular Sherlock. Smart bit of work that was you put in over your brother's little trouble. What's all this? Camera? Bless me, you're going to do our little job in the professional manner, eh? Woodward, see that Lord Peter's man has everything he wants. Have you had lunch? Well, you'll have a spot of something, I take it, before you start measuring up the footprints. Come along. We're a bit at sixes and sevens here, but you won't mind.'

He led the way into the small, austerely-furnished sitting-room.

'Thought I might as well camp here for a bit, while I get the old man's belongings settled up. It's going to be a deuce of a job, though, with all this fuss about the will. However, I'm his executor, so all this part of it falls to me in any case. It's very decent of you to lend us a hand. Queer old girl, Great-aunt Dormer.

Meant well, you know, but made it damned awkward for everybody. How are you getting along?'

Wimsey explained the failure of his researches at the Bellona.

'Thought I'd better get a line on it at this end,' he added. 'If we know exactly what time he left here in the morning, we ought to be able to get an idea of the time he got to the Club.'

Fentiman screwed his mouth into a whistle.

'But, my dear old egg, didn't Murbles tell you the snag?'

'He told me nothing. Left me to get on with it. What *is* the snag?'

'Why, don't you see, the old boy never came home that night.'

'Never came home?—Where was he, then?'

'Dunno. That's the puzzle. All we know is ... wait a minute, this is Woodward's story; he'd better tell you himself. Woodward!'

'Yes, sir.'

'Tell Lord Peter Wimsey the story you told me—about that telephone-call, you know.'

'Yes, sir. About nine o'clock....'

'Just a moment,' said Wimsey, 'I do like a story to begin at the beginning. Let's start with the morning—the mornin' of November 10th. Was the General all right that morning? Usual health and spirits and all that?'

'Entirely so, my lord. General Fentiman was accustomed to rise early, my lord, being a light sleeper, as was natural at his great age. He had his breakfast in bed at a quarter to eight—tea and buttered toast, with an egg lightly boiled, as he did every day in the year. Then he got up, and I helped him to dress—that would be about half-past eight to nine, my lord. Then he took a little rest, after the exertion of dressing, and at a quarter to ten I fetched his hat, overcoat, muffler and stick, and saw him start off to walk to the Club. That was his daily routine. He seemed in very good spirits—and in his usual health. Of course, his heart was always frail, my lord, but he seemed no different from ordinary.'

'You're a philosopher, Williamson.' Wimsey climbed the short flight of marble steps and turned into the bar. 'It's narrowin' down,' he muttered to himself. 'Between ten-fifteen and twelve-thirty. Looks as if it was goin' to be a close run for the Dormer stakes. But—dash it all! Let's hear what Penberthy has to say.'

The doctor was already standing at the bar with a whisky-and-soda before him. Wimsey demanded a Worthington and dived into his subject without more ado.

'Look here,' he said, 'I just wanted a word with you about old Fentiman. Frightfully confidential, and all that. But it seems the exact time of the poor old blighter's departure has become an important item. Question of succession. Get me? They don't want a row made. Asked me, as friend of the family and all that, don't y' know, to barge round and ask questions. Obviously, you're the first man to come to. What's your opinion? Medical opinion, apart from anything else?'

Penberthy raised his eyebrows.

'Oh? there's a question, is there? Thought there might be. That lawyer-fellow, what's-his-name, was here the other day, trying to pin me down. Seemed to think one can say to a minute when a man died by looking at his back teeth. I told him it wasn't possible. Once give these birds an opinion, and the next thing is, you find yourself in a witness-box, swearing to it.'

'I know. But one gets a general idea.'

'Oh, yes. Only you have to check up your ideas by other things—facts, and so on. You can't just theorize.'

'Very dangerous things, theories. F'r instance—take this case—I've seen one or two stiff 'uns in my short life, and, if I'd started theorizin' about this business, just from the look of the body, d'you know what I'd have said?'

'God knows what a layman would say about a medical question,' retorted the doctor, with a sour little grin.