because I was gettin' obfuscated. Now then. Begin at the door. Fryin'-pans and saucepans on the wall. Gas-stove—oven goin'—chicken inside. Rack of wooden spoons on the wall, gas-lighter, pan-lifter. Stop me when I'm gettin' hot. Mantelpiece. Spice-boxes and stuff. Anything wrong with them? No. Dresser. Plates. Knives and forks—all clean; flour dredger—milk-jug—sieve on the wall—nutmeg-grater. Three-tier steamer. Looked inside—no grisly secrets in the steamer.'

'Did you look in all the dresser drawers, my lord?'

'No. That could be done. But the point is, I *did* notice somethin'. What did I notice? That's the point. Never mind. On with the dance—let joy be unconfined! Knife-board. Knife-powder. Kitchen table. Did you speak?'

'No,' said Bunter, who had moved from his attitude of wooden deference.

'Table stirs a chord. Very good. On table. Choppin'-board. Remains of ham and herb stuffin'. Packet of suet. Another sieve. Several plates. Butter in a glass dish. Bowl of drippin'— '

'Ah!'

'Drippin'—! Yes, there was— '

'Something unsatisfactory, my lord— '

'About the drippin'! Oh, my head! What's that they say in *Dear Brutus*, Bunter? "Hold on to the workbox." That's right. Hold on to the drippin'. Beastly slimy stuff to hold on to—Wait!'

There was a pause.

'When I was a kid,' said Wimsey, 'I used to love to go down into the kitchen and talk to old cookie. Good old soul she was, too. I can see her now, gettin' chicken ready, with me danglin' my legs on the table. *She* used to pluck an' draw 'em herself. I revelled in it. Little beasts boys are, ain't they, Bunter? Pluck it, draw it, wash it, stuff it, tuck its little tail through its little what-you-may-call-it, truss it, grease the dish—Bunter?'

'My lord!'

'Hold on to the dripping!'

'The bowl, my lord— '

'The bowl—visualise it—what was wrong!'

'It was full, my lord!'

'Got it—got it—*got* it! The bowl was full—smooth surface. Golly! I knew there was something queer about it. Now why shouldn't it be full? Hold on to the— '

'The bird was in the oven.'

'Without dripping!'

'Very careless cookery, my lord.'

'The bird—in the oven—no dripping, Bunter! Suppose it was never put in till after she was dead? Thrust in hurriedly by someone who had something to hide—horrible!'

'But with what object, my lord?'

'Yes, why? That's the point. One more mental association with the bird. It's just coming. Wait a moment. Pluck, draw, wash, stuff, tuck up, truss—By God!'

'My lord?'

'Come on, Bunter. Thank Heaven we turned off the gas!'

He dashed through the bedroom, disregarding the doctor and the patient, who sat up with a smothered shriek. He flung open the oven door and snatched out the baking-tin. The skin of the bird had just begun to discolour. With a little gasp of triumph, Wimsey caught the iron ring that protruded from the wing, and jerked out—the six-inch spiral skewer.

The doctor was struggling with the excited Brotherton in the doorway. Wimsey caught the man as he broke away, and shook him into the corner with a jiu-jitsu twist.

'Here is the weapon,' he said.

'Prove it, blast you!' said Brotherton savagely.

'I will,' said Wimsey. 'Bunter, call in the policeman whom you will find at the door. Doctor, we shall need your microscope.'

In the laboratory the doctor bent over the microscope. A thin layer of blood from the skewer had been spread upon the slide.

'Well?' said Wimsey impatiently.

'It's all right,' said Hartman. 'The roasting didn't get anywhere near the middle. My God, Wimsey, yes, you're right—round corpuscles, diameter 1/3621—mammalian blood—probably human—'

'Her blood,' said Wimsey.

'It was very clever, Bunter,' said Lord Peter, as the taxi trundled along on the way to his flat in Piccadilly. 'If that fowl had gone on roasting a bit

longer the blood-corpuscles might easily have been destroyed beyond all hope of recognition. It all goes to show that the unpremeditated crime is usually the safest.'

'And what does your lordship take the man's motive to have been?'

'In my youth,' said Wimsey meditatively, 'they used to make me read the Bible. Trouble was, the only books I ever took to naturally were the ones they weren't over and above keen on. But I got to know the Song of Songs pretty well by heart. Look it up, Bunter; at your age it won't hurt you; it talks sense about jealousy.'

'I have perused the work in question, your lordship,' replied Mr Bunter, with a sallow blush. 'It says, if I remember rightly: "*Jealousy is cruel as the grave*".'

'What about him?'

'Could you swear that it wasn't the window-cleaner who made those marks on the sill?'

'And the man Brotherton saw—?'

'Have we examined your laboratory roof for his footsteps?'

'But the weapon? Wimsey, this is madness! Someone took the weapon.'

'I know. But did you think the edge of the wound was clean enough to have been made by a smooth stiletto? It looked ragged to me.'

'Wimsey, what are you driving at?'

'There's a clue here in the flat—and I'm damned if I can remember it. I've seen it—I know I've seen it. It'll come to me presently. Meanwhile, don't let Brotherton— '

'What?'

'Do whatever it is he's going to do.'

'But what is it?'

'If I could tell you that I could show you the clue. Why couldn't he make up his mind whether the bedroom door was open or shut? Very good story, but not quite thought out. Anyhow—I say, doctor, make some excuse, and strip him, and bring me his clothes. And send Bunter to me.'

The doctor stared at him, puzzled. Then he made a gesture of acquiescence and passed into the bedroom. Lord Peter followed him, casting a ruminating glance at Brotherton as he went. Once in the sitting-room, Lord Peter sat down on a red velvet arm-chair, fixed his eyes on a gilt-framed oleograph, and became wrapped in contemplation.

Presently Bunter came in, with his arms full of clothing. Wimsey took it, and began to search it, methodically enough, but listlessly. Suddenly he dropped the garments, and turned to the manservant.

'No,' he said, 'this is a precaution, Bunter mine, but I'm on the wrong track. It wasn't here I saw—whatever I did see. It was in the kitchen. Now, what was it?'

'I could not say, my lord, but I entertain a conviction that I was also, in a manner of speaking, conscious—not consciously conscious, my lord, if you understand me, but still conscious of an incongruity.'

'Hurray!' said Wimsey suddenly. 'Cheer-oh! for the sub-conscious what's-his-name! Now let's remember the kitchen. I cleared out of it

appears at the window, like the ghost of Hamilton Tighe, and a gruff voice, suspended between earth and heaven, says "Good morning, sir." Where do window-cleaners go between visits? Do they hibernate, like busy bees? Do they— ?'

'Really, Lord Peter,' said the doctor, 'don't you think you're going a bit beyond the limit?'

'Sorry you feel like that,' said Peter, 'but I really want to know about the window-cleaner. Look how clear these panes are.'

'He came yesterday, if you want to know,' said Dr Hartman, rather stiffly.

'You are sure?'

'He did mine at the same time.'

'I thought as much,' said Lord Peter. 'In the words of the song:

> I thought as much,
> It was a little—window-cleaner,
>
> ,

'In that case,' he added, 'it is absolutely imperative that Brotherton should not be left alone for a moment. Bunter! Confound it all, where's that fellow got to?'

The door into the bedroom opened.

'My lord?' Mr Bunter unobtrusively appeared, as he had unobtrusively stolen out to keep an unobtrusive eye upon the patient.

'Good,' said Wimsey. 'Stay where you are.' His lackadaisical manner had gone, and he looked at the doctor as four years previously he might have looked at a refractory subaltern.

'Dr Hartman,' he said, 'something is wrong. Cast your mind back. We were talking about symptoms. Then came the scream. Then came the sound of feet running. *Which direction did they run in?*'

'I'm sure I don't know.'

'Don't you? Symptomatic, though, doctor. They have been troubling me all the time, subconsciously. Now I know why. They ran *from the kitchen*.'

'Well?'

'Well! And now the window-cleaner— '

The Bibulous Business of a Matter of Taste

'HALTE-LÀ!... Attention!... F—e!'

The young man in the grey suit pushed his way through the protesting porters and leapt nimbly for the footboard of the guard's van as the Paris-Evreux express steamed out of the Invalides. The guard, with an eye to a tip, fielded him adroitly from among the detaining hands.

'It is happy for monsieur that he is so agile,' he remarked. 'Monsieur is in a hurry?'

'Somewhat. Thank you. I can get through by the corridor?'

'But certainly. The *premières* are two coaches away, beyond the luggage-van.'

The young man rewarded his rescuer, and made his way forward, mopping his face. As he passed the piled-up luggage, something caught his eye, and he stopped to investigate. It was a suit-case, nearly new, of expensive-looking leather, labelled conspicuously:

LORD PETER WIMSEY,
Hôtel Saumon d'Or,
Verneuil-sur-Eure

and bore witness to its itinerary thus:

LONDON—PARIS
(Waterloo) (Gare St Lazare)
via Southampton-Havre

PARIS—VERNEUIL
(Ch. de Fer de l'Ouest)

The young man whistled, and sat down on a trunk to think it out.

Somewhere there had been a leakage, and they were on his trail. Nor did they care who knew it. There were hundreds of people in London and Paris who would know the name of Wimsey, not counting the police of both countries. In addition to belonging to one of the oldest ducal families in England, Lord Peter had made himself conspicuous by his meddling with crime detection. A label like this was a gratuitous advertisement.

But the amazing thing was that the pursuers were not troubling to hide themselves from the pursued. That argued very great confidence. That he should have got into the guard's van was, of course, an accident, but, even so, he might have seen it on the platform, or anywhere.

An accident? It occurred to him—not for the first time, but definitely now, and without doubt—that it was indeed an accident for them that he was here. The series of maddening delays that had held him up between London and the Invalides presented itself to him with an air of pre-arrangement. The preposterous accusation, for instance, of the woman who had accosted him in Piccadilly, and the slow process of extricating himself at Marlborough Street. It was easy to hold a man up on some trumped-up charge till an important plan had matured. Then there was the lavatory door at Waterloo, which had so ludicrously locked itself upon him. Being athletic, he had climbed over the partition, to find the attendant mysteriously absent. And, in Paris, was it by chance that he had had a deaf taxi-driver, who mistook the direction 'Quai d'Orléans' for 'Gare de Lyon,' and drove a mile and a half in the wrong direction before the shouts of his fare attracted his attention? They were clever, the pursuers, and circumspect. They had accurate information; they would delay him, but without taking any overt step; they knew that, if only they could keep time on their side, they needed no other ally.

Did they know he was on the train? If not, he still kept the advantage, for they would travel in a false security, thinking him to be left, raging and helpless, in the Invalides. He decided to make a cautious reconnaissance.

The first step was to change his grey suit for another of inconspicuous navy-blue cloth, which he had in his small black bag. This he did in the privacy of the toilet, substituting for his grey soft hat a large travelling-cap, which pulled well down over his eyes.

After some further persuasion, Brotherton allowed himself to be led away.

'Bunter,' said Lord Peter, as the kitchen door closed behind them, 'do you know why I am doubtful about the success of those rat experiments?'

'Meaning Mr Hartman's, my lord?'

'Yes. Dr Hartman has a theory. In any investigations, my Bunter, it is most damnably dangerous to have a theory.'

'I have heard you say so, my lord.'

'Confound you—you know it as well as I do! What is wrong with the doctor's theories, Bunter?'

'You wish me to reply, my lord, that he only sees the facts which fit in with the theory.'

'Thought-reader!' exclaimed Lord Peter bitterly.

'And that he supplies them to the police, my lord.'

'Hush!' said Peter, as the doctor returned.

'I have got him to lie down,' said Dr Hartman, 'and I think the best thing we can do is to leave him to himself.'

'D'you know,' said Wimsey, 'I don't cotton to that idea, somehow.'

'Why? Do you think he's likely to destroy himself?'

'That's as good a reason to give as any other, I suppose,' said Wimsey, 'when you haven't got any reason which can be put into words. But my advice is, don't leave him for a moment.'

'But why? Frequently, with a deep grief like this, the presence of other people is merely an irritant. He begged me to leave him.'

'Then for God's sake go back to him,' said Peter.

'Really, Lord Peter,' said the doctor, 'I think I ought to know what is best for my patient.'

'Doctor,' said Wimsey, 'this is not a question of your patient. A crime has been committed.'

'But there is no mystery.'

'There are twenty mysteries. For one thing, when was the window-cleaner here last?'

'The window-cleaner?'

'Who shall fathom the ebony-black enigma of the window-cleaner?' pursued Peter lightly, putting a match to his pipe. 'You are quietly in your bath, in a state of more or less innocent nature, when an intrusive head

sees the poor young lady standin' 'ere by the table all alone, gettin' the dinner ready; 'e comes in be'ind, catches 'er round the waist, stabs 'er —easy job, you see; no corsets nor nothink—she shrieks out, 'e pulls 'is stiletty out of 'er an' makes tracks. Well, now we've got to find 'im, and by your leave, sir, I'll be gettin' along. We'll 'ave 'im by the 'eels before long, sir, don't you worry. I'll 'ave to put a man in charge 'ere, sir, to keep folks out, but that needn't worry you. Good mornin', gentlemen.'

'May we move the poor girl now?' asked the doctor.

'Certainly. Like me to 'elp you, sir?'

'No. Don't lose any time. We can manage.' Dr Hartman turned to Peter as the constable clattered downstairs. 'Will you help me, Lord Peter?'

'Bunter's better at that sort of thing,' said Wimsey, with a hard mouth.

The doctor looked at him in some surprise, but said nothing, and he and Bunter carried the still form away. Brotherton did not follow them. He sat in a grief-stricken heap, with his head buried in his hands. Lord Peter walked about the little kitchen, turning over the various knives and kitchen utensils, peering into the sink bucket, and apparently taking an inventory of the bread, butter, condiments, vegetables, and so forth which lay about in preparation for the Sunday meal. There were potatoes in the sink, half peeled, a pathetic witness to the quiet domestic life which had been so horribly interrupted. The colander was filled with green peas. Lord Peter turned these things over with an inquisitive finger, gazed into the smooth surface of a bowl of dripping as though it were a divining-crystal, ran his hands several times right through a bowl of flour—then drew his pipe from his pocket and filled it slowly.

The doctor returned, and put his hand on Brotherton's shoulder.

'Come,' he said gently, 'we have laid her in the other bedroom. She looks very peaceful. You must remember that, except for that moment of terror when she saw the knife, she suffered nothing. It is terrible for you, but you must try not to give way. The police— '

'The police can't bring her back to life,' said the man savagely. 'She's dead. Leave me alone, curse you! Leave me alone, I say!'

He stood up, with a violent gesture.

'You must not sit here,' said Hartman firmly. 'I will give you something to take, and you must try to keep calm. Then we will leave you, but if you don't control yourself— '

There was little difficulty in locating the man he was in search of. He found him seated in the inner corner of a first-class compartment, facing the engine, so that the watcher could approach unseen from behind. On the rack was a handsome dressing-case, with the initials P.D.B.W. The young man was familiar with Wimsey's narrow, beaky face, flat yellow hair, and insolent dropped eyelids. He smiled a little grimly.

'He is confident,' he thought, 'and has regrettably made the mistake of underrating the enemy. Good! This is where I retire into a *seconde* and keep my eyes open. The next act of this melodrama will take place, I fancy, at Dreux.'

It is a rule on the Chemin de Fer de l'Ouest that all Paris-Evreux trains, whether of Grande Vitesse or what Lord Peter Wimsey preferred to call Grande Paresse, shall halt for an interminable period at Dreux. The young man (now in navy-blue) watched his quarry safely into the refreshment-room, and slipped unobtrusively out of the station. In a quarter of an hour he was back—this time in a heavy motoring-coat, helmet, and goggles, at the wheel of a powerful hired Peugeot. Coming quietly on to the platform, he took up his station behind the wall of the *lampisterie*, whence he could keep an eye on the train and the buffet door. After fifteen minutes his patience was rewarded by the sight of his man again boarding the express, dressing-case in hand. The porters slammed the doors, crying: 'Next stop Verneuil!' The engine panted and groaned; the long train of grey-green carriages clanked slowly away. The motorist drew a breath of satisfaction, and, hurrying past the barrier, started up the car. He knew that he had a good eighty miles an hour under his bonnet, and there is no speed-limit in France.

Mon Souci, the seat of that eccentric and eremitical genius the Comte de Rueil, is situated three kilometres from Verneuil. It is a sorrowful and decayed château, desolate at the termination of its neglected avenue of pines. The mournful state of a nobility without an allegiance surrounds it. The stone nymphs droop greenly over their dry and mouldering fountains. An occasional peasant creaks with a single wagon-load of wood along the ill-forested glades. It has the atmosphere of sunset at all hours of the day. The woodwork is dry and gaping for lack of paint. Through the jalousies

one sees the prim *salon*, with its beautiful and faded furniture. Even the last of its ill-dressed, ill-favoured women has withered away from Mon Souci, with her inbred, exaggerated features and her long white gloves. But at the rear of the château a chimney smokes incessantly. It is the furnace of the laboratory, the only living and modern thing among the old and dying; the only place tended and loved, petted and spoiled, heir to the long solicitude which counts of a more light-hearted day had given to stable and kennel, portrait-gallery and ballroom. And below, in the cool cellar, lie row upon row the dusty bottles, each an enchanted glass coffin in which the Sleeping Beauty of the vine grows ever more ravishing in sleep.

As the Peugeot came to a standstill in the courtyard, the driver observed with considerable surprise that he was not the count's only visitor. An immense super-Renault, like a *merveilleuse* of the Directoire, all bonnet and no body, had been drawn so ostentatiously across the entrance as to embarrass the approach of any new-comer. Its glittering panels were embellished with a coat of arms, and the count's elderly servant was at that moment staggering beneath the weight of two large and elaborate suit-cases, bearing in silver letters that could be read a mile away the legend: 'Lord Peter Wimsey.'

The Peugeot driver gazed with astonishment at this display, and grinned sardonically. 'Lord Peter seems rather ubiquitous in this country,' he observed to himself. Then, taking pen and paper from his bag, he busied himself with a little letter-writing. By the time that the suit-cases had been carried in, and the Renault had purred its smooth way to the outbuildings, the document was complete and enclosed in an envelope addressed to the Comte de Rueil. 'The hoist with his own petard touch,' said the young man, and, stepping up to the door, presented the envelope to the manservant.

'I am the bearer of a letter of introduction to monsieur le comte,' he said. 'Will you have the obligingness to present it to him? My name is Bredon—Death Bredon.'

The man bowed, and begged him to enter.

'If monsieur will have the goodness to seat himself in the hall for a few moments. Monsieur le comte is engaged with another gentleman, but I will lose no time in making monsieur's arrival known.'

Brotherton lifted a wild face, and the doctor interposed.

'I think you ought to know, constable,' he said, 'that there was—well, not a murderous attack, but what might have been one, made on this woman before—about eight weeks ago—by a man named Marincetti—an Italian waiter—with a knife.'

'Ah!' The policeman licked his pencil eagerly. 'Do you know this party as 'as been mentioned?' he enquired of Brotherton.

'That's the man,' said Brotherton, with concentrated fury. 'Coming here after my wife—God curse him! I wish to God I had him dead here beside her!'

'Quite so,' said the policeman. 'Now, sir'—to the doctor—''ave you got the weapon wot the crime was committed with?'

'No,' said Hartman, 'there was no weapon in the body when I arrived.'

'Did *you* take it out?' pursued the constable, to Brotherton.

'No,' said Brotherton, 'he took it with him.'

'Took it with 'im,' the constable entered the fact in his notes. 'Phew! Wonderful 'ot it is in 'ere, ain't it, sir?' he added, mopping his brow.

'It's the gas-oven, I think,' said Peter mildly. 'Uncommon hot thing, a gas-oven, in the middle of July. D'you mind if I turn it out? There's the chicken inside, but I don't suppose you want— '

Brotherton groaned, and the constable said: 'Quite right, sir. A man wouldn't 'ardly fancy 'is dinner after a thing like this. Thank you, sir. Well now, doctor, wot kind of weapon do you take this to 'ave been?'

'It was a long, narrow weapon—something like an Italian stiletto, I imagine,' said the doctor, 'about six inches long. It was thrust in with great force under the fifth rib, and I should say it had pierced the heart centrally. As you see, there has been practically no bleeding. Such a wound would cause instant death. Was she lying just as she is now when you first saw her, Mr Brotherton?'

'On her back, just as she is,' replied the husband.

'Well, that seems clear enough,' said the policeman. 'This 'ere Marinetti, or wotever 'is name is, 'as a grudge against the poor young lady— '

'I believe he was an admirer,' put in the doctor.

'Quite so,' agreed the constable. 'Of course, these foreigners are like that—even the decentest of 'em. Stabbin' and such-like seems to come nateral to them, as you might say. Well, this 'ere Marinetti climbs in 'ere,

'My first thought was for her,' said the man. 'I thought maybe she wasn't dead. I tried to bring her round— ' His speech ended in a groan.

'You say he came in through the window,' said the policeman.

'I beg your pardon, officer,' interrupted Lord Peter, who had been apparently making a mental inventory of the contents of the kitchen. 'Mr Brotherton suggested that the man went *out* through the window. It's better to be accurate.'

'It's the same thing,' said the doctor. 'It's the only way he could have come in. These flats are all alike. The staircase door leads into the sitting-room, and Mr Brotherton was there, so the man couldn't have come that way.'

'And,' said Peter, 'he didn't get in through the bedroom window, or we should have seen him. We were in the room below. Unless, indeed, he let himself down from the roof. Was the door between the bedroom and the sitting-room open?' he asked suddenly, turning to Brotherton.

The man hesitated a moment. 'Yes,' he said finally. 'Yes, I'm sure it was.'

'Could you have seen the man if he had come through the bedroom window?'

'I couldn't have helped seeing him.'

'Come, come, sir,' said the policeman, with some irritation, 'better let *me* ask the questions. Stands to reason the fellow wouldn't get in through the bedroom window in full view of the street.'

'How clever of you to think of that,' said Wimsey. 'Of course not. Never occurred to me. Then it must have been this window, as you say.'

'And, what's more, here's his marks on the window-sill,' said the constable triumphantly, pointing to some blurred traces among the London soot. 'That's right. Down he goes by that drain-pipe, over the glass roof down there—what's that the roof of?'

'My laboratory,' said the doctor. 'Heavens! to think that while we were there at dinner this murdering villain— '

'Quite so, sir,' agreed the constable. 'Well, he'd get away over the wall into the court be'ind. 'E'll 'ave been seen there, no fear; you needn't anticipate much trouble in layin' 'ands on 'im, sir. I'll go round there in 'arf a tick. Now then, sir'—turning to Brotherton—"ave you any idea wot this party might have looked like?'

The young man sat down and waited. The windows of the hall looked out upon the entrance, and it was not long before the château's sleep was disturbed by the hooting of yet another motor-horn. A station taxi-cab came noisily up the avenue. The man from the first-class carriage and the luggage labelled P.D.B.W. were deposited upon the doorstep. Lord Peter Wimsey dismissed the driver and rang the bell.

'Now,' said Mr Bredon, 'the fun is going to begin.' He effaced himself as far as possible in the shadow of a tall *armoire normande*.

'Good evening,' said the new-comer to the manservant, in admirable French, 'I am Lord Peter Wimsey. I arrive upon the invitation of Monsieur le comte de Rueil. Monsieur le comte is at liberty?'

'Milord Peter Wimsey? Pardon, monsieur, but I do not understand. Milord de Wimsey is already arrived and is with monsieur le comte at this moment.'

'You surprise me,' said the other, with complete imperturbability, 'for certainly no one but myself has any right to that name. It seems as though some person more ingenious than honest has had the bright idea of impersonating me.'

The servant was clearly at a loss.

'Perhaps,' he suggested, 'monsieur can show his *papiers d'identité*.'

'Although it is somewhat unusual to produce one's credentials on the doorstep when paying a private visit,' replied his lordship, with unaltered good humour, 'I have not the slightest objection. Here is my passport, here is a *permis de séjour* granted to me in Paris, here my visiting-card, and here a quantity of correspondence addressed to me at the Hôtel Meurice, Paris, at my flat in Piccadilly, London, at the Marlborough Club, London, and at my brother's house at King's Denver. Is that sufficiently in order?'

The servant perused the documents carefully, appearing particularly impressed by the *permis de séjour*.

'It appears there is some mistake,' he murmured dubiously; 'if monsieur will follow me, I will acquaint monsieur le comte.'

They disappeared through the folding doors at the back of the hall, and Bredon was left alone.

'Quite a little boom in Richmonds to-day,' he observed, 'each of us more unscrupulous than the last. The occasion obviously calls for a refined subtlety of method.'

After what he judged to be a hectic ten minutes in the count's library, the servant reappeared, searching for him.

'Monsieur le comte's compliments, and would monsieur step this way?'

Bredon entered the room with a jaunty step. He had created for himself the mastery of this situation. The count, a thin, elderly man, his fingers deeply stained with chemicals, sat, with a perturbed expression, at his desk. In two arm-chairs sat the two Wimseys. Bredon noted that, while the Wimsey he had seen in the train (whom he mentally named Peter I) retained his unruffled smile, Peter II (he of the Renault) had the flushed and indignant air of an Englishman affronted. The two men were superficially alike—both fair, lean, and long-nosed, with the nondescript, inelastic face which predominates in any assembly of well bred Anglo-Saxons.

'Mr Bredon,' said the count, 'I am charmed to have the pleasure of making your acquaintance, and regret that I must at once call upon you for a service as singular as it is important. You have presented to me a letter of introduction from your cousin, Lord Peter Wimsey. Will you now be good enough to inform me which of these gentlemen he is?'

Bredon let his glance pass slowly from the one claimant to the other, meditating what answer would best serve his own ends. One, at any rate, of the men in this room was a formidable intellect, trained in the detection of imposture.

'Well?' said Peter II. 'Are you going to acknowledge me, Bredon?'

Peter I extracted a cigarette from a silver case. 'Your confederate does not seem very well up in his part,' he remarked, with a quiet smile at Peter II.

'Monsieur le comte,' said Bredon, 'I regret extremely that I cannot assist you in the matter. My acquaintance with my cousin, like your own, has been made and maintained entirely through correspondence on a subject of common interest. My profession,' he added, 'has made me unpopular with my family.'

There was a very slight sigh of relief somewhere. The false Wimsey—whichever he was—had gained a respite. Bredon smiled.

'An excellent move, Mr Bredon,' said Peter I, 'but it will hardly explain—Allow me.' He took the letter from the count's hesitating hand. 'It will hardly explain the fact that the ink of this letter of recommendation,

together, Mr Brotherton,' he said sharply. 'Perhaps she is only hurt. Stand out of the way!'

'Only hurt?' said the man, sitting heavily down on the nearest chair. 'No—no—she is dead—little Maddalena—Oh, my God!'

Dr Hartman snatched a roll of bandages and a few surgical appliances from the consulting-room, and he ran upstairs, followed closely by Lord Peter. Bunter remained for a few moments to combat hysterics with cold water. Then he stepped across to the dining-room window and shouted.

'Well, wot is it?' cried a voice from the street.

'Would you be so kind as to step in here a minute, officer?' said Mr Bunter. 'There's been murder done.'

When Brotherton and Bunter arrived upstairs with the constable, they found Dr Hartman and Lord Peter in the little kitchen. The doctor was kneeling beside the woman's body. At their entrance he looked up, and shook his head.

'Death instantaneous,' he said. 'Clean through the heart. Poor child. She cannot have suffered at all. Oh, constable, it is very fortunate you are here. Murder appears to have been done—though I'm afraid the man has escaped. Probably Mr Brotherton can give us some help. He was in the flat at the time.'

The man had sunk down on a chair, and was gazing at the body with a face from which all meaning seemed to have been struck out. The policeman produced a notebook.

'Now, sir,' he said, 'don't let's waste any time. Sooner we can get to work the more likely we are to catch our man. Now, you was 'ere at the time, was you?'

Brotherton stared a moment, then, making a violent effort, he answered steadily:

'I was in the sitting-room, smoking and reading the paper. My—*she*—was getting the dinner ready in here. I heard her give a scream, and I rushed in and found her lying on the floor. She didn't have time to say anything. When I found she was dead, I rushed to the window, and saw the fellow scrambling away over the glass roof there. I yelled at him, but he disappeared. Then I ran down—'

''Arf a mo',' said the policeman. 'Now, see 'ere, sir, didn't you think to go after 'im at once?'