

lasted long. But Ann Dorland was really rather overcome, you know. She tried the craggy style herself, but it wasn't at all her line—she hasn't any colour-sense, so there was nothing to make up for the bad drawing.'

'I thought you said she didn't have any affairs.'

'It wasn't an affair. I expect Ledbury gathered her up at some time or other when there wasn't anybody else handy, but he did demand good looks for anything serious. He went off to Poland a year ago with a woman called Natasha somebody. After that, Ann Dorland began to chuck painting. The trouble was, she took things seriously. A few little passions would have put her right, but she isn't the sort of person a man can enjoy flirting with. Heavy-handed. I don't think she would have gone on worrying about Ledbury if he hadn't happened to be the one and only episode. Because, as I say, she did make a few efforts, but she couldn't bring 'em off.'

'I see.'

'But that's no reason why Naomi should turn round like that. The fact is, the little brute's so proud of having landed a man—and an engagement ring—for herself, that she's out to patronize everybody else.'

'Oh?'

'Yes; besides, everything is looked at from dear Walter's point of view now, and naturally Walter isn't feeling very loving towards Ann Dorland.'

'Why not?'

'My dear man, you're being very discreet, aren't you? Naturally, everybody's saying that she did it.'

'Are they?'

'Who else could they think did it?'

Winsey realized, indeed, that everybody must be thinking it. He was exceedingly inclined to think it himself.

'Probably that's why she didn't turn up.'

'Of course it is. She's not a fool. She must know.'

'That's true. Look here, will you do something for me? Something more, I mean?'

'What?'

'From what you say, it looks as though Miss Dorland might find herself rather short of friends in the near future. If she comes to you...'

'I'm not going to spy on her. Not if she had poisoned fifty old generals.'

'I don't want you to. But I want you to keep an open mind, and tell me what you think. Because I don't want to make a mistake over this. And I'm prejudiced. I want Miss Dorland to be guilty. So I'm very likely to persuade myself she is when she isn't. See?'

'Why do you want her to be guilty?'

'I oughtn't to have mentioned that. Of course, I don't want her found guilty if she isn't really.'

'All right. I won't ask questions. And I'll try and see Ann. But I won't try to worm anything out of her. That's definite. I'm standing by Ann.'

'My dear girl,' said Winsey, 'you're not keeping an open mind. You think she did it.'

Marjorie Phelps flushed.

'I don't. Why do you think that?'

'Because you're so anxious not to worm anything out of her. Worming couldn't hurt an innocent person.'

'Peter Winsey! You sit there looking a perfectly well-bred imbecile, and then in the most underhand way you twist people into doing things they ought to blush for. No wonder you detect things. I will *not* do your worming for you!'

'Well, if you don't, I shall know your opinion, shan't I?'

The girl was silent for a moment. Then she said:

'It's all so beastly.'

'Poisoning is a beastly crime, don't you think?' said Winsey.

He got up quickly. Father Whittington was approaching, with Penberthy.

'Well,' said Lord Peter, 'have the altars reeled?'

'Dr Penberthy has just informed me that they haven't a leg to stand on,' replied the priest, smiling. 'We have been spending a pleasant quarter of an hour abolishing good and evil. Unhappily, I understand his dogma as little as he understands mine. But I exercised myself in Christian humility. I said I was willing to learn.'

Penberthy laughed.

'You don't object, then, to my casting out devils with a syringe,' he said, 'when they have proved obdurate to prayer and fasting?'

'Not at all. Why should I? So long as they *are* cast out. And provided you are certain of your diagnosis.'

Penberthy crimsoned and turned away sharply.

‘Oh, lord!’ said Wimsey. ‘That was a nasty one. From a Christian priest, too!’

‘What have I said?’ cried Father Whittington, much disconcerted.

‘You have reminded science,’ said Wimsey, ‘that only the Pope is infallible.’

‘Thanks,’ said Marjorie. ‘I deserve all I can get for having talked to Naomi Rushworth. I cannot like that girl. She hints things.’

‘What, particularly?’

‘Well, I started to ask about Ann Dorland. So she said she wasn’t coming. So I said, “Oh, why?” and she said, “She *said* she wasn’t well.”’

‘Who said?’

‘Naomi Rushworth said Ann Dorland said she couldn’t come because she wasn’t well. But she said that was only an excuse, of course.’

‘Who said?’

‘Naomi said. So I said, was it? And she said yes, she didn’t suppose she felt like facing people very much. So I said, “I thought you were such friends.” So she said, “Well, we are, but of course Ann always was a little abnormal, you see.” So I said that was the first I had heard of it. And she gave me one of her catty looks and said, “Well, there was Ambrose Ledbury, wasn’t there? But of course you had other things to think of then, hadn’t you?” The little beast. She meant Komski. And after all, everybody knows how obvious she’s made herself over this man Penberthy.’

‘I’m sorry, I’ve got mixed.’

‘Well, I was rather fond of Komski. And I did almost promise to live with him, till I found that his last three women had all got fed up with him and left him, and I felt there must be something wrong with a man who continually got left, and I’ve discovered since that he was a dreadful bully when he dropped that touching lost-dog manner of his. So I was well out of it. Still, seeing that Naomi had been going about for the last year nearly, looking at Dr Penberthy like a female spaniel that thinks it’s going to be whipped, I can’t see why she need throw Komski in my face. And as for Ambrose Ledbury, anybody might have been mistaken in him.’

‘Who was Ambrose Ledbury?’

‘Oh, he was the man who had that studio over Boulter’s Mews. Powerfulness was his strong suit, and being above worldly considerations. He was rugged and wore homespun and painted craggy people in bedrooms, but his colour was amazing. He really could paint and so we could excuse a lot, but he was a professional heart-breaker. He used to gather people up hungrily in his great arms, you know—that’s always rather irresistible. But he had no discrimination. It was just a habit, and his affairs never

'No, but you're news. You can give me the money, if you're so beastly flush. Look here, have you got a line on this case at all? That police friend of yours won't give anything away. I want to get something in before there's an arrest, because after that it's contempt. I suppose it's the girl you're after, isn't it? Can you tell me anything about her?'

'No—I came here to-night to get a look at her but she hasn't turned up. I wish you could dig up her hideous past for me. The Rushworths must know something about her, I should think. She used to paint or something. Can't you get on to that?'

Hardy's face lighted up.

'Waffles Newton will probably know something,' he said. 'I'll see what I can dig out. Thanks very much, old man. That's given me an idea. We might get one of her pictures on the back pages. The old lady seems to have been a queer old soul. Odd will, wasn't it?'

'Oh, I can tell you all about that,' said Wimsey. 'I thought you probably knew.'

He gave Hardy the history of Lady Dormer as he had heard it from Mr Murbles. The journalist was enthralled.

'Great stuff!' he said. 'That'll get 'em. Romance there! This'll be a scoop for the *Yell*. Excuse me. I want to 'phone it through to 'em before somebody else gets it. Don't hand it out to any of the other fellows.'

'They can get it from Robert or George Fentiman,' warned Wimsey.

'Not much, they won't,' said Salcombe Hardy, feelingly. 'Robert Fentiman gave old Barton of the *Banner* such a clip under the ear this morning that he had to go and see a dentist. And George has gone down to the Bellona, and they won't let anybody in. I'm all right on this. If there's anything I can do for you, I will, you bet. So long.'

He faded away. A hand was laid on Peter's arm.

'You're neglecting me shockingly,' said Marjorie Phelps. 'And I'm frightfully hungry. I've been doing my best to find things out for you.'

'That's top-hole of you. Look here. Come and sit out in the hall; it's quieter. I'll scrounge some grub and bring it along.'

He secured a quantity of curious little stuffed buns, four *petits-fours*, some dubious claret-cup and some coffee and brought them with him on a tray, snatched while the waitress's back was turned.

Chapter 17

Parker Plays a Hand

NOW, Mrs Mitcham, said Inspector Parker, affably. He was always saying 'Now, Mrs Somebody,' and he always remembered to say it affably. It was part of the routine.

The late Lady Dormer's housekeeper bowed frigidly, to indicate that she would submit to questioning.

'We want just to get the exact details of every little thing that happened to General Fentiman the day before he was found dead. I am sure you will help us. Do you recollect exactly what time he got here?'

'It would be round about a quarter to four—not later; I am sure I could not say exactly to the minute.'

'Who let him in?'

'The footman.'

'Did you see him then?'

'Yes; he was shown into the drawing-room, and I came down to him and brought him upstairs to her ladyship's bedroom.'

'Miss Dorland did not see him then?'

'No; she was sitting with her ladyship. She sent her excuses by me, and begged General Fentiman to come up.'

'Did the General seem quite well when you saw him?'

'So far as I could say he seemed well—always bearing in mind that he was a very old gentleman and had heard bad news.'

'He was not bluish about the lips, or breathing very heavily, or anything of that kind?'

'Well, going up the stairs tried him rather.'

'Yes, of course it would.'

‘He stood still on the landing for a few minutes to get his breath. I asked him whether he would like to take something, but he said no, he was all right.’

‘Ah! I daresay it would have been a good thing if he had accepted your very wise suggestion, Mrs Mitcham.’

‘No doubt he knew best,’ replied the housekeeper, primly. She considered that in making observations the policeman was stepping out of his sphere.

‘And then you showed him in. Did you witness the meeting between himself and Lady Dormer?’

‘I did not,’ (emphatically). ‘Miss Dorland got up and said “How do you do, General Fentiman?” and shook hands with him, and then I left the room, as it was my place to do.’

‘Just so. Was Miss Dorland alone with Lady Dormer when General Fentiman was announced?’

‘Oh, no—the nurse was there.’

‘The nurse—yes, of course. Did Miss Dorland and the nurse stay in the room all the time that the General was there?’

‘No. Miss Dorland came out again in about five minutes and came downstairs. She came to me in the housekeeper’s room, and she looked rather sad. She said, “Poor old dears,”—just like that.’

‘Did she say any more?’

‘She said: “They quarrelled, Mrs Mitcham, ages and ages ago, when they were quite young, and they’ve never seen each other since.” Of course, I was aware of that, having been with her ladyship all these years, and so was Miss Dorland.’

‘I expect it would seem very pitiful to a young lady like Miss Dorland?’

‘No doubt; she is a young lady with feelings; not like some of those you see nowadays.’

Parker wagged his head sympathetically.

‘And then?’

‘Then Miss Dorland went away again, after a little talk with me, and presently Nellie came in—that’s the housemaid.’

‘How long after was that?’

‘Oh, some time. I had just finished my cup of tea which I have at four o’clock. It would be about half past. She came to ask for some brandy for

number of distinguished scientific friends who found him a good listener, but some of the experiments mentioned were new and the conclusions suggestive. True to his principles, Wimsey made a bolt for the supper-room, while polite hands were still applauding. He was not the first, however. A large figure in a hard-worked looking dress-suit was already engaged with a pile of savoury sandwiches and a whisky-and-soda. It turned at his approach and beamed at him from its liquid and innocent blue eyes. Sally Hardy—never quite drunk and never quite sober—was on the job, as usual. He held out the sandwich-plate invitingly.

‘Damn good, these are,’ he said. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘What are you, if it comes to that?’ asked Wimsey.

Hardy laid a fat hand on his sleeve.

‘Two birds with one stone,’ he said, impressively. ‘Smart fellow, that Penberthy. Glands are news, you know. He knows it. He’ll be one of these fashionable practitioners’—Sally repeated this phrase once or twice, as it seemed to have got mixed up with the soda—‘before long. Doing us poor bloody journalists out of a job like... and...’ (He mentioned two gentlemen whose signed contributions to popular dailies were a continual source of annoyance to the G.M.C.)

‘Provided he doesn’t damage his reputation over this Fentiman affair,’ rejoined Wimsey, in a refined shriek which did duty for a whisper amid the noisy strampede which had followed them up to the refreshment-table.

‘Ah! there you are,’ said Hardy. ‘Penberthy’s news in himself. He’s a story, don’t you see. We’ll have to sit on the fence a bit, of course, till we see which way the cat jumps. I’ll have a par. about it at the end, mentioning that he attended old Fentiman. Presently we’ll be able to work up a little thing on the magazine page about the advisability of a p.m. in all cases of sudden death. You know—even experienced doctors may be deceived. If he comes off very badly in cross-examination, there can be something about specialists not always being trustworthy—a kind word for the poor down-trodden G.P. and all that. Anyhow, he’s worth a story. It doesn’t matter what you say about him, provided you say something. You couldn’t do us a little thing—about eight hundred words, could you—about rigour mortis or something? Only make it snappy.’

‘I could not,’ said Wimsey. ‘I haven’t time and I don’t want the money. Why should I? I’m not a dean or an actress.’

'Only for a moment this evening. My friend Miss Phelps carried her off to hear all about you.'

'Oh, yes. Well, you must come along and talk to her. She's a sweet girl, and very intelligent. The old lady's a bit of a trial, I don't mind saying, but her heart's in the right place. And there's no doubt she gets hold of people whom it's very useful to meet.'

'I didn't know you were such an authority on glands.'

'I only wish I could afford to be. I've done a certain amount of experimental work under Professor Sligo. It's the Science of the Future, as they say in the press. There really isn't any doubt about that. It puts biology in quite a new light. We're on the verge of some really interesting discoveries, no doubt about it. Only what with the anti-vivisectionists and the parsons and the other old women, one doesn't make the progress one ought. Oh, lord—they're waiting for me to begin. See you later.'

'Half a jiff. I really came here—no, dash it, that's rude! but I'd no idea you were the lecturer till I spotted you. I originally came here (that sounds better) to get a look at Miss Dorland of Fentiman fame. But my trusty guide has abandoned me. Do you know Miss Dorland? Can you tell me which she is?'

'I know her to speak to. I haven't seen her this evening. She may not turn up, you know.'

'I thought she was very keen on—on glands and things.'

'I believe she is—or thinks she is. Anything does for these women, as long as it's new—especially if it's sexual. By the way, I don't intend to be sexual.'

'Bless you for that. Well, possibly Miss Dorland will show up later.'

'Perhaps. But—I say, Wimsey. She's in rather a queer position, isn't she? She may not feel inclined to face it. It's all in the papers, you know.'

'Dash it, don't I know it? That inspired tipplet, Salcombe Hardy, got hold of it somehow. I think he bribes the cemetery officials to give him advance news of exhumations. He's worth his weight in pound notes to the *Yell*. Cheerio! Speak your bit nicely. You don't mind if I'm not in the front row, do you? I always take up a strategic position near the door that leads to the grub.'

Penberthy's paper struck Wimsey as being original and well-delivered. The subject was not altogether unfamiliar to him, for Wimsey had a

the General, as he was feeling badly. The spirits are kept in my room, you see, and I have the key.'

Parker showed nothing of his special interest in this piece of news.

'Did you see the General when you took the brandy?'

'I did not take it.' Mrs Mitcham's tone implied that fetching and carrying was not part of her duty. 'I sent it by Nellie.'

'I see. So you did not see the General again before he left?'

'No. Miss Dorland informed me later that he had had a heart attack. I am very much obliged to you, Mrs Mitcham. Now I should like just to ask Nellie a few questions.'

Mrs Mitcham touched a bell. A fresh-faced pleasant-looking girl appeared in answer.

'Nellie, this police-officer wants you to give him some information about that time General Fentiman came here. You must tell him what he wants to know, but remember he is busy and don't start your chattering. You can speak to Nellie here, officer.'

And she sailed out.

'A bit stiff, isn't she?' murmured Parker, in an awestruck whisper.

'She's one of the old-fashioned sort, I don't mind saying,' agreed Nellie with a laugh.

'She put the wind up me. Now, Nellie—' he took up the old formula, 'I hear you were sent to get some brandy for the old gentleman. Who told you about it?'

'Why, it was like this. After the General had been with Lady Dormer getting on for an hour, the bell rang in her ladyship's room. It was my business to answer that, so I went up, and Nurse Armstrong put her head out and said, "Get me a drop of brandy, Nellie, quick, and ask Miss Dorland to come here. General Fentiman's rather unwell." So I went for the brandy to Mrs Mitcham, and on the way up with it, I knocked at the studio door where Miss Dorland was.'

'Where's that, Nellie?'

'It's a big room on the first floor—built over the kitchen. It used to be a billiard-room in the old days, with a glass roof. That's where Miss Dorland does her painting and messing about with bottles and things, and she uses it as a sitting-room, too.'

'Messing about with bottles?'

'Well, chemists' stuff and things. Ladies have to have their hobbies, you know, not having any work to do. It makes a lot to clear up.'

'I'm sure it does. Well, go on, Nellie—I didn't mean to interrupt.'

'Well, I gave Nurse Armstrong's message, and Miss Dorland said, "Oh, dear, Nellie," she said, "poor old gentleman. It's been too much for him. Give me the brandy, I'll take it along. And run along and get Dr Penberthy on the telephone." So I gave her the brandy and she took it upstairs.'

'Half a moment. Did you see her take it upstairs?'

'Well, no, I don't think I actually saw her go up—but I thought she did. But I was going down to the telephone, so I didn't exactly notice.'

'No—why should you?'

'I had to look Dr Penberthy's number up in the book, of course. There was two numbers, and when I got his private house, they told me he was in Harley Street. While I was trying to get the second number Miss Dorland called over the stairs to me. She said "Have you got the doctor, Nellie?" And I said, "No, miss, not yet. The doctor's round in Harley Street." And she said, "Oh! well, when you get him, say General Fentiman's had a bad turn and he's coming round to see him at once." So I said, "Isn't the doctor to come here, miss?" And she said, "No; the General's better now and he says he would rather go round there. Tell William to get a taxi." So she went back, and just then I got through to the surgery and said to Dr Penberthy's man to expect General Fentiman at once. And then he came downstairs with Miss Dorland and Nurse Armstrong holding on to him, and he looked mortal bad, poor old gentleman. William—the footman, you know, came in then and said he'd got the taxi, and he put General Fentiman into it, and then Miss Dorland and Nurse went upstairs again, and that was the end of it.'

'I see. How long have you been here, Nellie?'

'Three years—sir.' The 'sir' was a concession to Parker's nice manners and educated way of speech. 'Quite the gentleman,' as Nellie remarked afterwards to Mrs Mitcham, who replied, 'No, Nellie—gentlemanlike I will not deny, but a policeman is a person, and I will trouble you to remember it.'

'Three years? That's a long time as things go nowadays. Is it a comfortable place?'

'The same. You're Lord Peter Wimsey, I know. We've got an interest in crime in common, haven't we? I'm interested in this glandular theory. It may throw a great light on some of our heart-breaking problems.'

'Glad to see there's no antagonism between religion and science,' said Wimsey.

'Of course not. Why should there be? We are all searching for Truth.'

'And all these?' asked Wimsey, indicating the curious crowd with a wave of the hand.

'In their way. They mean well. They do what they can, like the woman in the Gospels, and they are surprisingly generous. Here's Penberthy, looking for you, I fancy. Well, Dr Penberthy, I've come, you see, to hear you make mince-meat of original sin.'

'That's very open-minded of you,' said Penberthy, with a rather strained smile. 'I hope you are not hostile. We've no quarrel with the Church, you know, if she'll stick to her business and leave us to ours.'

'My dear man, if you can cure sin with an injection, I shall be only too pleased. Only be sure you don't pump in something worse in the process. You know the parable of the swept and garnished house.'

'I'll be as careful as I can,' said Penberthy. 'Excuse me one moment. I say, Wimsey, you've heard all about Lubbock's analysis, I suppose.'

'Yes. Bit of a starter, isn't it?'

'It's going to make things damnably awkward for me, Wimsey. I wish to God you'd given me a hint at the time. Such a thing never once occurred to me.'

'Why should it? You were expecting the old boy to pop off from heart, and he did pop off from heart. Nobody could possibly blame you.'

'Couldn't they? That's all you know about juries. I wouldn't have had this happen, just at this moment, for a fortune. It couldn't have chosen a more unfortunate time.'

'I'll blow over, Penberthy. That sort of mistake happens a hundred times a week. By the way, I gather I'm to congratulate you. When did this get settled? You've been very quiet about it.'

'I was starting to tell you up at that infernal exhumation business, only somebody barged in. Yes. Thanks very much. We fixed it up—oh! about a fortnight or three weeks ago. You have met Naomi?'

Wimsey said that everything had the defects of its qualities.

'Yes, indeed,' agreed Mrs Rushworth. 'But I think it is so infinitely more heartening to look at it from the opposite point of view. Everything has the qualities of its defects, too, has it not? It is so important to see these things in their true light. It will be such a joy for Naomi to be able to help dear Walter in this great work. I hope you will feel eager to subscribe to the establishment of the new Clinic.'

Wimsey asked, what new Clinic.

'Oh! hasn't Marjorie told you about it? The new Clinic to make everybody good by glands. That is what dear Walter is going to speak about. He is so keen and so is Naomi. It was such a joy to me when Naomi told me that they were really engaged, you know. Not that her old mother hadn't suspected something, of course,' added Mrs Rushworth, archly. 'But young people are so odd nowadays and keep their affairs so much to themselves.'

Wimsey said that he thought both parties were heartily to be congratulated. And indeed, from what he had seen of Naomi Rushworth, he felt that she at least deserved congratulation, for she was a singularly plain girl, with a face like a weasel.

'You will excuse me if I run off and speak to some of these other people, won't you?' went on Mrs Rushworth. 'I'm sure you will be able to amuse yourself. No doubt you have many friends in my little gathering.'

Wimsey glanced around and was about to felicitate himself on knowing nobody, when a familiar face caught his eye.

'Why,' said he, 'there is Dr Penberthy.'

'Dear Walter!' cried Mrs Rushworth, turning hurriedly in the direction indicated. 'I declare, so he is. Ah, well—now we shall be able to begin. He should have been here before, but a doctor's time is never his own.'

'Penberthy?' said Wimsey, half aloud, 'good lord!'

'Very sound man,' said a voice beside him. 'Don't think the worse of his work from seeing him in this crowd. Beggars in a good cause can't be choosers, as we parsons know too well.'

Wimsey turned to face a tall, lean man, with a handsome, humorous face, whom he recognized as a well-known slum padre.

'Father Whittington, isn't it?'

'Not bad. There's Mrs Mitcham, of course, but I know how to keep the right side of her. And the old lady—well, she was a real lady in every way.'

'And Miss Dorland?'

'Oh, she gives no trouble, except clearing up after her. But she always speaks nicely and says please and thank you. I haven't any complaints.'

'Modified rapture,' thought Parker. Apparently Ann Dorland had not the knack of inspiring passionate devotion. 'Not a very lively house, is it, for a young girl like yourself?'

'Dull as ditchwater,' agreed Nellie, frankly. 'Miss Dorland would have what they called studio parties sometimes, but not at all smart and nearly all young ladies—artists and such-like.'

'And naturally it's been quieter still since Lady Dormer died. Was Miss Dorland very much distressed at her death?'

Nellie hesitated.

'She was very sorry, of course; her ladyship was the only one she had in the world. And then she was worried with all this lawyer's business—something about the will, I expect you know, sir?'

'Yes, I know about that. Worried, was she?'

'Yes, and that angry—you wouldn't believe. There was one day Mr Pritchard came, I remember particular, because I happened to be dusting the hall at the time, you see, and she was speaking that quick and loud I couldn't help hearing. "I'll fight it for all I'm worth," that was what she said and "a... something—to defraud"—what would that be, now?'

'Plot?' suggested Parker.

'No—a—a conspiracy, that's it. A conspiracy to defraud. And then I didn't hear any more till Mr Pritchard came out, and he said to her, "Very well, Miss Dorland, we will make an independent inquiry." And Miss Dorland looked so eager and angry, I was surprised. But it all seemed to wear off, like. She hasn't been the same person the last week or so.'

'How do you mean?'

'Well, don't you notice it yourself, sir? She seems so quiet and almost frightened-like. As if she'd had a shock. And she cries a dreadful lot. She didn't do that at first.'

'How long has she been so upset?'

‘Well, I think it was when all this dreadful business came out about the poor old gentleman being murdered. It is awful, sir, isn’t it? Do you think you’ll catch the one as did it?’

‘Oh, I expect so,’ said Parker, cheerfully. ‘That came as a shock to Miss Dorland, did it?’

‘Well, I should say so. There was a little bit in the paper, you know, sir, about Sir James Lubbock having found out about the poisoning, and when I called Miss Dorland in the morning I took leave to point it out. I said, “That’s a funny thing, miss, isn’t it, about General Fentiman being poisoned,” just like that, I said. And she said, “Poisoned, Nellie? You must be mistaken.” So I showed her the bit in the paper and she looked just dreadful.’

‘Well, well,’ said Parker, ‘it’s a very horrid thing to hear about a person one knows. Anybody would be upset.’

‘Yes, sir; me and Mrs Mitcham was quite overcome. “Poor old gentleman,” I said, “whatever should anybody want to do him in for? He must have gone off his head and made away with himself,” I said. Do you think that was it, sir?’

‘It’s quite possible, of course,’ said Parker, genially.

‘Cut up about his sister dying like that, don’t you think? That’s what I said to Mrs Mitcham. But she said a gentleman like General Fentiman wouldn’t make away with himself and leave his affairs in confusion like he did. So I said, “Was his affairs in confusion then?” and she said, “They’re not your affairs, Nellie, so you needn’t be discussing them.” What do you think yourself, sir?’

‘I don’t think anything yet,’ said Parker, ‘but you have been very helpful. Now, would you kindly run and ask Miss Dorland if she could spare me a few minutes?’

Ann Dorland received him in the back drawing-room. He thought what an unattractive girl she was, with her sullen manner and gracelessness of form and movement. She sat huddled on one end of the sofa, in a black dress which made the worst of her sallow, blotched complexion. She had certainly been crying Parker thought, and when she spoke to him, it was curtsy, in a voice roughened and hoarse and curiously lifeless.

‘I am sorry to trouble you again,’ said Parker, politely.

Chapter 16

Quadrille

MRS Rushworth, this is Lord Peter Wimsey. Naomi, this is Lord Peter. He’s fearfully keen on glands and things, so I’ve brought him along. And Naomi, do tell me all about your news. Who is it? Do I know him?

Mrs Rushworth was a long, untidy woman, with long, untidy hair wound into bell-pushes over her ears. She beamed short-sighedly at Peter.

‘So glad to see you. So very wonderful about glands, isn’t it? Dr Vornoff, you know, and those marvelous old sheep. Such a hope for all of us. Not that dear Walter is specially interested in rejuvenation. Perhaps life is long and difficult enough as it is, don’t you think—so full of problems of one kind and another. And the insurance companies have quite set their faces against it, or so I understand. That’s natural isn’t it, when you come to think of it. But the effect on character is so interesting, you know. Are you devoted to young criminals by any chance?’

Wimsey said that they presented a very perplexing problem.

‘How very true. So perplexing. And just to think that we have been quite wrong about them all these thousands of years. Flogging and bread-and-water, you know, and Holy Communion, when what they really needed was a little bit of rabbit-gland or something to make them just as good as gold. Quite terrible, isn’t it? And all those poor freaks in sidehows, too—dwarfs and giants, you know—all pineal or pituitary, and they come right again. Though I daresay they make a great deal more money as they are, which throws such a distressing light on unemployment, does it not?’