the Lord High Steward upon his high seat, the ushers and the heralds and the gaudy kings-of-arms, rested rigid in their places. Only the prisoner looked across at his counsel and back to the Lord High Steward in a kind of bewilderment, and the reporters scribbled wildly and desperately stop-press announcements—lurid headlines, picturesque epithets, and alarming weather predictions, to halt hurrying London on its way: 'Peer's Son Flies Atlantic'; 'Brother's Devotion'; 'Will Wimsey Be in Time?'; 'Riddlesdale Murder Charge: Amazing Development'. This was news. A million tape-machines ticked it out in offices and clubs, where clerks and messenger-boys gloated over it and laid wagers on the result; the thousands of monster printing-presses sucked it in, boiled it into lead, champed it into slugs, engulfed it in their huge maws, digested it to paper, and flapped it forth again with clutching talons; and a blue-nosed, ragged veteran of Vimy Ridge, who had once assisted to dig Major Wimsey out of a shell-hole, muttered: 'Gawd 'elp 'im, 'e's a real decent little blighter,' as he tucked his newspapers into the iron grille of a tree in Kingsway and displayed his placard to the best advantage.

After a brief statement that he intended, not merely to prove his noble client's innocence but (as a work of supererogation) to make clear every detail of the tragedy, Sir Impey Biggs proceeded without further delay to call his witnesses.

Among the first was Mr Goyles, who testified that he had found Cathcart already dead at 3 a.m., with his head close to the water-trough which stood near the well. Ellen, the maid-servant, next confirmed James Fleming's evidence with regard to the post-bag, and explained how she changed the blotting-paper in the study every day.

The evidence of Detective-Inspector Parker aroused more interest and some bewilderment. His description of the discovery of the green-eyed cat was eagerly listened to. He also gave a minute account of the footprints and marks of dragging, especially the imprint of a hand in the flower-bed. The piece of blotting-paper was then produced, and photographs of it circulated among the peers. A long discussion ensued on both these points, Sir Impey Biggs endeavouring to show that the imprint on the flower-bed was such as would have been caused by a man endeavouring to lift himself from a prone position, Sir Wigmore Wrinching doing his

best to force an admission that it might have been made by deceased in trying to prevent himself from being dragged along.

'The position of the fingers being towards the house appears, does it not, to negative the suggestion of dragging?' suggested Sir Impey.

Sir Wigmore, however, put it to the witness that the wounded man might have been dragged head foremost.

'If, now,' said Sir Wigmore. 'I were to drag you by the coat-collar—my lords will grasp my contention— '

'It appears,' observed the Lord High Steward, 'to be a case for *solvitur ambulando*'. (Laughter.) 'I suggest that when the House rises for lunch, some of us should make the experiment, choosing a member of similar height and weight to the deceased.' (All the noble lords looked round at one another to see which unfortunate might be chosen for the part.)

Inspector Parker then mentioned the marks of forcing on the study window.

'In your opinion, could the catch have been forced back by the knife found on the body of the deceased?'

'I know it could, for I made the experiment myself with a knife of exactly similar pattern.'

After this the message on the blotting-paper was read backwards and forwards and interpreted in every possible way, the defence insisting that the language was French and the words '*Je suis fou de douleur*', the prosecution scouting the suggestion as far-fetched, and offering an English interpretation, such as 'is found' or 'his foul.' A handwriting expert was then called, who compared the handwriting with that of an authentic letter of Cathcart's, and was subsequently severely handled by the prosecution.

These knotty points being left for the consideration of the noble lords, the defence then called a tedious series of witnesses: the manager of Cox's and Monsieur Turgeot of the Crédit Lyonnais, who went with much detail into Cathcart's financial affairs; the concierge and Madame Leblanc from the Rue St Honoré; and the noble lords began to yawn, with the exception of a few of the soap and pickles lords, who suddenly started to make computations in their note-books, and exchanged looks of intelligence as from one financier to another.

Chapter 15

Bar Falling

WHEN Sir Impey Biggs rose to make his opening speech for the defence on the second day, it was observed that he looked somewhat worried—a thing very unusual in him. His remarks were very brief, yet in those few words he sent a thrill through the great assembly.

'My lords, in rising to open this defence I find myself in a more than usually anxious position. Not that I have any doubt of your lordships' verdict. Never perhaps has it been possible so clearly to prove the innocence of any accused person as in the case of my noble client. But I will explain to your lordships at once that I may be obliged to ask for an adjournment, since we are at present without an important witness and a decisive piece of evidence. My lords, I hold here in my hand a cablegram from this witness—I will tell you his name; it is Lord Peter Wimsey, the brother of the accused. It was handed in yesterday at New York. I will read it to you. He says: "Evidence secured. Leaving tonight with Air Pilot Grant. Sworn copy and depositions follow by S.S. *Lucarnia* in case accident. Hope arrive Thursday." My lords, at this moment this all-important witness is cleaving the air high above the wide Atlantic. In this wintry weather he is braving a peril which would appal any heart but his own and that of the world-famous aviator whose help he has enlisted, so that no moment may be lost in freeing his noble brother from this terrible charge. My lords, the barometer is falling.'

An immense hush, like the stillness of a black frost, had fallen over the glittering benches. The lords in their scarlet and ermine, the peeresses in their rich furs, counsel in their full-bottomed wigs and billowing gowns,

Then came Monsieur Briquet, the jeweller from the Rue de la Paix, and the girl from his shop, who told the story of the tall, fair, foreign lady and the purchase of the green-eyed cat—whereat everybody woke up. After reminding the assembly that this incident took place in February, when Cathcart's fiancée was in Paris, Sir Impey invited the jeweller's assistant to look round the house and tell them if she saw the foreign lady. This proved a lengthy business, but the answer was finally in the negative.

'I do not want there to be any doubt about this,' said Sir Impey, 'and, with the learned Attorney-General's permission, I am now going to confront this witness with Lady Mary Wimsey.'

Lady Mary was accordingly placed before the witness, who replied immediately and positively: 'No, this is not the lady; I have never seen this lady in my life. There is the resemblance of height and colour and the hair bobbed, but there is nothing else at all—not the least in the world. It is not the same type at all. Mademoiselle is a charming English lady, and the man who marries her will be very happy, but the other was *belle à se suicider*—a woman to kill, suicide one's self, or send all to the devil for, and believe me, gentlemen' (with a wide smile to her distinguished audience), 'we have the opportunity to see them in my business.'

There was a profound sensation as this witness took her departure, and Sir Impey scribbled a note and passed it down to Mr Murbles. It contained the one word, 'Magnificent!' Mr Murbles scribbled back:

'Never said a word to her. Can you beat it?' and leaned back in his seat smirking like a very neat little grotesque from a Gothic corbel.

The witness who followed was Professor Hébert, a distinguished exponent of international law, who described Cathcart's promising career as a rising young diplomat in Paris before the war. He was followed by a number of officers who testified to the excellent war record of the deceased. Then came a witness who gave the aristocratic name of du Bois-Gobey Houdin, who perfectly recollected a very uncomfortable dispute on a certain occasion when playing cards with le Capitaine Cathcart, and having subsequently mentioned the matter to Monsieur Thomas Freeborn, the distinguished English engineer. It was Parker's diligence that had unearthed this witness, and he looked across with an undisguised grin at the discomfited Sir Wigmore Wrinching. When Mr Glibbery had dealt with all these the afternoon was well advanced, and the Lord High Stew-

Sir Impey Biggs: 'But suicide by shooting in the heart is not by any means impossible?'

'Oh, dear, no.'

'There have been such cases?'

'Oh, certainly; many such.'

'There is nothing in the medical evidence before you to exclude the idea of suicide?'

'Nothing whatever.'

This closed the case for the Crown.

ard accordingly asked the lords if it was their pleasure that the House be adjourned till the next day at 10:30 of the clock in the forenoon, and the lords replying 'Aye' in a most exemplary chorus, the House was accordingly adjourned.

A scurry of swift black clouds with ragged edges was driving bleakly westward as they streamed out into Parliament Square, and the seagulls screeched and wheeled inwards from the river. Charles Parker wrapped his ancient Burberry closely about him as he scrambled on to a 'bus to get home to Great Ormond Street. It was only one more drop in his cup of discomfort that the conductor greeted him with 'Outside only!' and rang the bell before he could get off again. He climbed to the top and sat there holding his hat on. Mr Bunter returned sadly to 110 Piccadilly, and wandered restlessly about the flat till seven o'clock, when he came into the sitting-room and switched on the loud speaker.

'London calling,' said the unseen voice impartially. '2LO calling. Here is the weather forecast. A deep depression is crossing the Atlantic, and a secondary is stationary over the British Isles. Storms, with heavy rain and sleet, will be prevalent, rising to a gale in the south and south-west…'

'You never know,' said Bunter. 'I suppose I'd better light a fire in his bedroom.'

'Further outlook similar.'

'Might the mark have been caused by forcing back the catch of a window?'

Inspector Craikes agreed that it might, but doubted whether so small a knife would have been adequate for such a purpose. The revolver was produced, and the question of ownership raised.

'My lords,' put in Sir Impey, 'we do not dispute the Duke's ownership of the revolver.'

The Court looked surprised, and, after Hardraw the gamekeeper had given evidence of the shot heard at 11:30, the medical evidence was taken.

Sir Impey Biggs: 'Could the wound have been self-inflicted?'

'It could, certainly.'

'Would it have been instantly fatal?'

'No. From the amount of blood found upon the path it was obviously not immediately fatal.'

'Are the marks found, in your opinion, consistent with deceased having crawled towards the house?'

'Yes, quite. He might have had sufficient strength to do so.'

'Would such a wound cause fever?'

'It is quite possible. He might have lost consciousness for some time, and contracted a chill and fever by lying in the wet.'

'Are the appearances consistent with his having lived for some hours after being wounded?'

'They strongly suggest it.'

Re-examining, Sir Wigmore Wrinching established that the wound and general appearance of the ground were equally consistent with the theory that deceased had been shot by another hand at very close quarters, and dragged to the house before life was extinct.

'In your experience is it more usual for a person committing suicide to shoot himself in the chest or in the head?'

'In the head is perhaps more usual.'

'So much as almost to create a presumption of murder when the wound is in the chest?'

'I would not go so far as that.'

'But, other things being equal, you would say that a wound in the head is more suggestive of suicide than a body-wound?'

'That is so.'

'They did not avail themselves of my experience, sir,' said Mr Pettigrew-Robinson, exploding suddenly. 'I was ignored completely. If only my advice had been taken at the time— '

'Thank you, thank you,' said Sir Impey, cutting short an impatient exclamation from the Attorney-General, who thereupon rose and demanded:

'If Captain Cathcart had had any secret or trouble of any kind in his life, you would have expected him to tell you about it?'

'From any right-minded young man I might certainly have expected it,' said Mr Pettigrew-Robinson blusteringly; 'but Captain Cathcart was disagreeably secretive. On the only occasion when I showed a friendly interest in his affairs he was very rude indeed. He called me— '

'That'll do,' interposed Sir Impey hastily, the answer to the question not having turned out as he expected. 'What the deceased called you is immaterial.'

Mr Pettigrew-Robinson retired, leaving behind him the impression of a man with a grudge—an impression which seemed to please Mr Glibbery and Mr Brownrigg-Fortescue extremely, for they chuckled continuously through the evidence of the next two witnesses.

Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson had little to add to her previous evidence at the inquest. Miss Cathcart was asked by Sir Impey about Cathcart's parentage, and explained, with deep disapproval in her voice, that her brother, when an all-too-experienced and middle-aged man of the world, had nevertheless 'been entangled by' an Italian singer of nineteen, who had 'contrived' to make him marry her. Eighteen years later both parents had died. 'No wonder,' said Miss Cathcart, 'with the rackety life they led,' and the boy had been left to her care. She explained how Denis had always chafed at her influence, gone about with men she disapproved of, and eventually gone to Paris to make a diplomatic career for himself, since which time she had hardly seen him.

An interesting point was raised in the cross-examination of Inspector Craikes. A penknife being shown him, he identified it as the one found on Cathcart's body.

By Mr Glibbery: 'Do you observe any marks on the blade?'

'Yes, there is a slight notch near the handle.'

Chapter 16

The Second String

O, whan he came to broken briggs
He bent his bow and swam,
And whan he came to the green grass growin'
He slacked his shoone and ran.

O, whan he came to Lord William's gates
He baed na to chap na ca',
But set his bent bow till his breast,
An' lightly lap the wa'.

Ballad Of Lady Maisry

Lord Peter peered out through the cold scurry of cloud. The thin struts of steel, incredibly fragile, swung slowly across the gleam and glint far below, where the wide country dizzied out and spread like a revolving map. In front the sleek leather back of his companion humped stubbornly, sheeted with rain. He hoped that Grant was feeling confident. The roar of the engine drowned the occasional shout he threw to his passenger as they lurched from gust to gust.

He withdrew his mind from present discomforts and went over that last, strange, hurried scene. Fragments of conversation spun through his head.

'Mademoiselle, I have scoured two continents in search of you.'

'*Voyons*, then, it is urgent. But be quick for the big bear may come in and be grumpy, and I do not like *des histoires*.'

There had been a lamp on a low table; he remembered the gleam through the haze of short gold hair. She was a tall girl, but slender, looking up at him from the huge black-and-gold cushions.

'Mademoiselle, it is incredible to me that you should ever—dine or dance—with a person called Van Humperdinck.'

Now what had possessed him to say that—when there was so little time, and Jerry's affairs were of such importance?

'Monsieur van Humperdinck does not dance. Did you seek me through two continents to say that?'

'No, I am serious.'

'*Eh bien*, sit down.'

She had been quite frank about it.

'Yes, poor soul. But life was very expensive since the war. I refused several good things. But always *des histoires*. And so little money. You see, one must be sensible. There is one's old age. It is necessary to be provident, *hein*?'

'Assuredly.' She had a little accent—very familiar. At first he could not place it. Then it came to him—Vienna before the war, that capital of incredible follies.

'Yes, yes, I wrote. I was very kind, very sensible. I said, *"Je ne suis pas femme à supporter de gros ennuis." Cela se comprend, n'est-ce pas?*'

That was readily understood. The 'plane dived sickly into a sudden pocket, the propeller whirring helplessly in the void, then steadied and began to nose up the opposite spiral.

'I saw it in the papers—yes. Poor boy! Why should anybody have shot him?'

'Mademoiselle, it is for that I have come to you. My brother, whom I dearly love, is accused of the murder. He may be hanged.'

'Brr!'

'For a murder he did not commit.'

'Mon pauvre enfant— '

'Mademoiselle, I implore you to be serious. My brother is accused, and will be standing his trial— '

Once her attention had been caught she had been all sympathy. Her blue eyes had a curious and attractive trick—a full lower lid that shut them into glimmering slits.

'Mademoiselle, I implore you, try to remember what was in his letter.'

'But, mon pauvre ami, how can I? I did not read it. It was very long, very tedious, full of histoires. The thing was finished—I never bother about what cannot be helped, do you?'

But his real agony at this failure had touched her.

'Sir Wigmore,' interposed the Lord High Steward, 'you really must control your witness.'

'Kindly confine yourself to the evidence,' said Sir Wigmore, rather heated. 'We do not want your deductions from it. You say that when you saw the body it was lying on its back. Is that correct?'

'And Denver and Arbuthnot were washing it.'

'Yes. Now I want to pass to another point. Do you remember an occasion when you lunched at the Royal Automobile Club?'

'I do. I lunched there one day in the middle of last August—I think it was about the sixteenth or seventeenth.'

'Will you tell us what happened on that occasion?'

'I had gone into the smoke-room after lunch, and was reading in a high-backed armchair, when I saw the prisoner at the Bar come in with the late Captain Cathcart. That is to say, I saw them in the big mirror over the mantelpiece. They did not notice there was anyone there, or they would have been a little more careful what they said, I fancy. They sat down near me and started talking, and presently Cathcart leaned over and said something in a low tone which I couldn't catch. The prisoner leapt up with a horrified face, exclaiming, "For God's sake, don't give me away, Cathcart—there'd be the devil to pay." Cathcart said something reassuring—I didn't hear what, he had a furtive sort of voice—and the prisoner replied, "Well, don't, that's all. I couldn't afford to let anybody get hold of it." The prisoner seemed greatly alarmed. Captain Cathcart was laughing. They dropped their voices again, and that was all I heard.'

'Thank you.'

Sir Impey took over the witness with a Belial-like politeness.

'You are gifted with very excellent powers of observation and deduction, Mr Pettigrew-Robinson,' he began, 'and no doubt you like to exercise your sympathetic imagination in a scrutiny of people's motives and characters?'

'I think I may call myself a student of human nature,' replied Mr Pettigrew-Robinson, much mollified.

'Doubtless, people are inclined to confide in you?'

'Certainly. I may say I am a great repository of human documents.'

'On the night of Captain Cathcart's death your wide knowledge of the world was doubtless of great comfort and assistance to the family?'

'Did Captain Cathcart read his letter there and then?'

'No, I'm sure he didn't. You see, I opened mine, and then I saw he was shoving his away in his pocket, and I thought— '

'Never mind what you thought,' said Sir Impey. 'What did you do?'

'I said, "Excuse me, you don't mind, do you?" And he said, "Not at all"; but he didn't read his; and I remember thinking— '

'We can't have that, you know,' said the Lord High Steward.

'But that's why I'm so sure he didn't open it,' said the Hon. Freddy, hurt. 'You see, I said to myself at the time what a secretive fellow he was, and that's how I know.'

Sir Wigmore, who had bounced up with his mouth open, sat down again.

'Thank you, Mr Arbuthnot,' said Sir Impey, smiling.

Colonel and Mrs Marchbanks testified to having heard movements in the Duke's study at 11:30. They had heard no shot or other noise. There was no cross-examination.

Mr Pettigrew-Robinson gave a vivid account of the quarrel, and asserted very positively that there could be no mistaking the sound of the Duke's bedroom door.

'We were then called up by Mr Arbuthnot at a little after 3 A.M.,' proceeded witness, 'and went down to the conservatory, where I saw the accused and Mr Arbuthnot washing the face of the deceased. I pointed out to them what an unwise thing it was to do this, as they might be destroying valuable evidence for the police. They paid no attention to me. There were a number of footmarks round about the door which I wanted to examine, because it was my theory that— '

'My lords,' cried Sir Impey, 'we really cannot have this witness's theory.'

'Certainly not!' said the Lord High Steward. 'Answer the questions, please, and don't add anything on your own account.'

'Of course,' said Mr Pettigrew-Robinson. 'I don't mean to imply that there was anything wrong about it, but I considered— '

'Never mind what you considered. Attend to me, please. When you first saw the body, how was it lying?'

'On its back, with Denver and Arbuthnot washing its face. It had evidently been turned over, because— '

'Listen, then; all is perhaps not lost. It is possible the letter is still somewhere about. Or we will ask Adèle. She is my maid. She collects letters to blackmail people—oh, yes, I know! But she is habile comme tout pour la toilette. Wait—we will look first.'

Tossing out letters, trinkets, endless perfumed rubbish from the little gimcrack secretaire, from drawers full of lingerie ('I am so untidy—I am Adèle's despair') from bags—hundreds of bags—and at last Adèle, thin-lipped and wary-eyed, denying everything till her mistress suddenly slapped her face in a fury, and called her ugly little names in French and German.

'It is useless, then,' said Lord Peter. 'What a pity that Mademoiselle Adèle cannot find a thing so valuable to me.'

The word 'valuable' suggested an idea to Adèle. There was Mademoiselle's jewel-case which had not been searched. She would fetch it.

'C'est cela que cherche monsieur?'

After that the sudden arrival of Mr Cornelius van Humperdinck, very rich and stout and suspicious, and the rewarding of Adèle in a tactful, unobtrusive fashion by the elevator shaft.

Grant shouted, but the words flipped feebly away into the blackness and were lost. 'What?' bawled Wimsey in his ear. He shouted again, and this time the word 'juice' shot into sound and fluttered away. But whether the news was good or bad Lord Peter could not tell.

Mr Murbles was aroused a little after midnight by a thunderous knocking upon his door. Thrusting his head out of the window in some alarm, he saw the porter with his lantern steaming through the rain, and behind him a shapeless figure which for the moment Mr Murbles could not make out.

'What's the matter?' said the solicitor.

'Young lady askin' urgently for you, sir.'

The shapeless figure looked up, and he caught the spangle of gold hair in the lantern-light under the little tight hat.

'Mr Murbles, please come. Bunter rang me up. There's a woman come to give evidence. Bunter doesn't like to leave her—she's frightened—but he says it's frightfully important, and Bunter's always right, you know.'

'Did he mention the name?'

'A Mrs Grimethorpe.'

'God bless me! Just a moment, my dear young lady, and I will let you in.'

And, indeed, more quickly than might have been expected, Mr Murbles made his appearance in a Jaeger dressing-gown at the front door.

'Come in, my dear. I will get dressed in a very few minutes. It was quite right of you to come to me. I'm very, very glad you did. What a terrible night! Perkins, would you kindly wake up Mr Murphy and ask him to oblige me with the use of his telephone?'

Mr Murphy—a noisy Irish barrister with a hearty manner—needed no waking. He was entertaining a party of friends, and was delighted to be of service.

'Is that you Biggs? Murbles speaking. That alibi— '

'Yes!'

'Has come along of its own accord.'

'My God! You don't say so!'

'Can you come round to 110 Piccadilly?'

'Straight away.'

It was a strange little party gathered round Lord Peter's fire—the white-faced woman, who started at every sound; the men of law, with their keen, disciplined faces; Lady Mary; Bunter, the efficient. Mrs Grimethorpe's story was simple enough. She had suffered the torments of knowledge ever since Lord Peter had spoken to her. She had seized an hour when her husband was drunk in the 'Lord in Glory', and had harnessed the horse and driven in to Stapley.

'I couldn't keep silence. It's better my man should kill me, for I'm unhappy enough, and maybe I couldn't be any worse off in the Lord's hand—rather than they should hang him for a thing he never done. He was kind, and I was desperate miserable, that's the truth, and I'm hoping his lady won't be hard on him when she knows it all.'

'No, no,' said Mr Murbles, clearing his throat. 'Excuse me a moment, madam. Sir Impey— '

The lawyers whispered together in the window-seat.

'You see,' said Sir Impey, 'she has burnt her boats pretty well now by coming at all. The great question for us is, Is it worth the risk? After all, we don't know what Wimsey's evidence amounts to.'

'When was that?'

'Before the Grand Jury, sir.'

'And how was it you didn't speak about it then?'

'The gentleman said I was to confine myself to the questions, and not say nothing on my own, sir.'

'Who was this very peremptory gentleman?'

'The lawyer that came down to ask questions for the Crown, sir.'

'Thank you,' said Sir Impey smoothly, sitting down, and leaning over to say something, apparently of an amusing nature, to Mr Glibbery.

The question of the letter was further pursued in the examination of the Hon. Freddy. Sir Wigmore Wrinching laid great stress upon this witness's assertion that deceased had been in excellent health and spirits when retiring to bed on the Wednesday evening, and had spoken of his approaching marriage. 'He seemed particularly cheerio, you know,' said the Hon. Freddy.

'Particularly what?' inquired the Lord High Steward.

'Cheerio, my lord,' said Sir Wigmore, with a deprecatory bow.

'I do not know whether that is a dictionary word,' said his lordship, entering it upon his notes with meticulous exactness, 'but I take it to be synonymous with cheerful.'

The Hon. Freddy, appealed to, said he thought he meant more than just cheerful, more merry and bright, you know.

'May we take it that he was in exceptionally lively spirits?' suggested Counsel.

'Take it in any spirit you like,' muttered the witness, adding, more happily, 'Take a peg of John Begg.'

'The deceased was particularly lively and merry when he went to bed,' said Sir Wigmore, frowning horribly, 'and looking forward to his marriage in the near future. Would that be a fair statement of his condition?'

The Hon. Freddy agreed to this.

Sir Impey did not cross-examine as to witness's account of the quarrel, but went straight to his point.

'Do you recollect anything about the letters that were brought in the night of the death?'

'Yes; I had one from my aunt. The Colonel had some, I fancy, and there was one for Cathcart.'