

Those footsteps one by one,
Into the middle of the plank;
And farther there were none!

‘Great poet, Wordsworth,’ said Lord Peter; ‘how often I’ve had that feeling. Now let’s see. These footmarks—a man’s № 10 with worn-down heels and a patch on the left inner side—advance from the hard bit of the path which shows no footmarks; they come to the body—here, where that pool of blood is. I say, that’s rather odd, don’t you think? No? Perhaps not. There are no footmarks under the body? Can’t say, it’s such a mess. Well, the Unknown gets so far—here’s a footmark deeply pressed in. Was he just going to throw Cathcart into the well? He hears a sound; he starts; he turns; he runs on tiptoe—into the shrubbery, by Jove!’

‘Yes,’ said Parker, ‘and the tracks come out on one of the grass paths in the wood, and there’s an end of them.’

‘H’m! Well, we’ll follow them later. Now where did they come from?’

Together the two friends followed the path away from the house. The gravel, except for the little patch before the conservatory, was old and hard, and afforded but little trace, particularly as the last few days had been rainy. Parker, however, was able to assure Winsey that there had been definite traces of dragging and bloodstains.

‘What sort of bloodstains? Smears?’

‘Yes, smears mostly. There were pebbles displaced, too, all the way—and now here is something odd.’

It was the clear impression of the palm of a man’s hand heavily pressed into the earth of a herbaceous border, the fingers pointing towards the house. On the path the gravel had been scraped up in two long furrows. There was blood on the grass border between the path and the bed, and the edge of the grass was broken and trampled.

‘I don’t like that,’ said Lord Peter.

‘Ugly, isn’t it?’ agreed Parker.

‘Poor devil!’ said Peter. ‘He made a determined effort to hang on here. That explains the blood by the conservatory door. But what kind of a devil drags a corpse that isn’t quite dead?’

A few yards farther the path ran into the main drive. This was bordered with trees, widening into a thicker. At the point of intersection of the two paths were some further indistinct marks, and in another twenty yards or so they turned aside into the thicker. A large tree had fallen at some time and made a little clearing, in the midst of which a tarpaulin had been carefully spread out and pegged down. The air was heavy with the smell of fungus and fallen leaves.

‘Scene of the tragedy,’ said Parker briefly, rolling back the tarpaulin. Lord Peter gazed down sadly. Muffled in an overcoat and a thick grey scarf, he looked, with his long, narrow face, like a melancholy adjutant stork. The writhing body of the fallen man had scraped up the dead leaves and left a depression in the sodden ground. At one place the darker earth showed where a great pool of blood had soaked into it, and the yellow leaves of a Spanish poplar were rusted with no autumnal stain.

‘That’s where they found the handkerchief and revolver,’ said Parker. ‘I looked for finger-marks, but the rain and mud had messed everything up.’

Winsey took out his lens, lay down, and conducted a personal tour of the whole space slowly on his stomach, Parker moving mutely after him.

‘He paced up and down for some time,’ said Lord Peter. ‘He wasn’t smoking. He was turning something over in his mind, or waiting for somebody. What’s this? Aha! Here’s our № 10 foot again, coming in through the trees on the farther side. No signs of a struggle. That’s odd! Cathcart was shot close up, wasn’t he?’

‘Yes, it singed his shirt-front.’

‘Quite so. Why did he stand still to be shot at?’

‘I imagine,’ said Parker, ‘that if he had an appointment with № 10 Boots it was somebody he knew, who could get close to him without arousing suspicion.’

‘Then the interview was a friendly one—on Cathcart’s side, anyhow. But the revolver’s a difficulty. How did № 10 get hold of Gerald’s revolver?’

‘The conservatory door was open,’ said Parker dubiously.

‘Nobody knew about that except Gerald and Fleming,’ retorted Lord Peter. ‘Besides, do you mean to tell me that № 10 walked in here, went to the study, fetched the revolver, walked back here, and shot Cathcart? It seems a clumsy method. If he wanted to do any shooting, why didn’t he come armed in the first place?’

‘It seems more probable that Cathcart brought the revolver,’ said Parker.

‘Then why no signs of a struggle?’

‘Perhaps Cathcart shot himself,’ said Parker.

‘Then why should № 10 drag him into a conspicuous position and then run away?’

‘Wait a minute,’ said Parker. ‘How’s this? № 10 has an appointment with Cathcart—to blackmail him, let’s say. He somehow gets word of his intention to him between 9:45 and 10:15. That would account for the alteration in Cathcart’s manner, and allow both Mr Arbutnot and the Duke to be telling the truth. Cathcart rushes violently out after his row with your brother. He comes down here to keep his appointment. He paces up and down waiting for № 10. № 10 arrives and parleys with Cathcart. Cathcart offers him money. № 10 stands out for more. Cathcart says he really hasn’t got it. № 10 says in that case he blows the gaff. Cathcart retorts, “In that case you can go to the devil. I’m going there myself.” Cathcart, who has previously got hold of the revolver, shoots himself. № 10 is seized with remorse. He sees that Cathcart isn’t quite dead. He picks him up and part drags, part

somebody might very well have shoved it in here if they were caught with it—say at three o’clock in the morning—and didn’t want it to be seen.’

‘Then when did they take it away?’

‘Almost immediately, I should say. Before daylight, anyhow, or even Inspector Craikes could hardly have failed to see it.’

‘It’s not the doctor’s bag, I suppose?’

‘No—unless the doctor’s a fool. Why put a bag inconveniently in a damp and dirty place out of the way when every law of sense and convenience would urge him to pop it down handy by the body? No. Unless Craikes or the gardener has been leaving things about, it was thrust away there on Wednesday night by Gerald, by Cathcart—or, I suppose, by Mary. Nobody else could be supposed to have anything to hide.’

‘Yes,’ said Parker, ‘one person.’

‘Who’s that?’

‘The Person Unknown.’

‘Who’s he?’

For answer Mr Parker proudly stepped to a row of wooden frames, carefully covered with matting. Stripping this away, with the air of a bishop unveiling a memorial, he disclosed a V-shaped line of footprints.

‘These,’ said Parker, ‘belong to nobody—to nobody I’ve ever seen or heard of, I mean.’

‘Hurray!’ said Peter.

Then downwards from the steep hill’s edge
They tracked the footmarks small

(only they’re largish).’

‘No such luck,’ said Parker. ‘It’s more a case of:

They followed from the earthy bank

all those. But now here, just coming over the threshold, is a woman's foot in a strong shoe. I make that out to be Lady Mary's. Here it is again, just at the edge of the well. She came out to examine the body.'

'Quite so,' said Peter; 'and then she came in again, with a few grains of red gravel on her shoes. Well, that's all right. Hullo!'

On the outer side of the conservatory were some shelves for small plants, and, beneath these, a damp and dismal bed of earth, occupied, in a sprawling and lackadaisical fashion, by stringy cactus plants and a sporadic growth of maidenhair fern, and masked by a row of large chrysanthemums in pots.

'What've you got?' inquired Parker, seeing his friend peering into this green retreat.

Lord Peter withdrew his long nose from between two pots and said:

'Who put what down here?'

Parker hastened to the place. There, among the cacti, was certainly the clear mark of some oblong object, with corners, that had been stood out of sight on the earth behind the pots.

'It's a good thing Gerald's gardener ain't one of those conscientious blighers that can't even let a cactus alone for the winter,' said Lord Peter, 'or he'd've tenderly lifted these little drooping heads—Oh! damn and blast the beastly plant for a crimson porcupine! You measure it.'

Parker measured it.

'Two and a half feet by six inches,' he said. 'And fairly heavy, for it's sunk in and broken the plants about. Was it a bar of anything?'

'I fancy not,' said Lord Peter. 'The impression is deeper on the farther side. I think it was something bulky set up on edge, and leaned against the glass. If you asked for my private opinion I should guess that it was a suit-case.'

'A suit-case!' exclaimed Parker. 'Why a suit-case?'

'Why indeed? I think we may assume that it didn't stay here very long. It would have been exceedingly visible in the daytime. But

carries him to the house. He is smaller than Cathcart and not very strong, and finds it a hard job. They have just got to the conservatory door when Cathcart has a final hemorrhage and gives up the ghost. № 10 suddenly becomes aware that his position in somebody else's grounds, alone with a corpse at 3 A.M., wants some explaining. He drops Cathcart—and bolts. Enter the Duke of Denver and falls over the body. Tableau.'

'That's good,' said Lord Peter; 'that's very good. But when do you suppose it happened? Gerald found the body at 3 A.M.; the doctor was here at 4:30, and said Cathcart had been dead several hours. Very well. Now, how about that shot my sister heard at three o'clock?'

'Look here, old man,' said Parker, 'I don't want to appear rude to your sister. May I put it like this? I suggest that that shot at 3 A.M. was poachers.'

'Poachers by all means,' said Lord Peter. 'Well, really, Parker, I think that hangs together. Let's adopt that explanation provisionally. The first thing to do is now to find № 10, since he can bear witness that Cathcart committed suicide; and that, as far as my brother is concerned, is the only thing that matters a rap. But for the satisfaction of my own curiosity I'd like to know: What was № 10 blackmailing Cathcart about? Who hid a suit-case in the conservatory? And what was Gerald doing in the garden at 3 A.M.?''

'Well,' said Parker, 'suppose we begin by tracing where № 10 came from.'

'Hi, hi!' cried Wimsey, as they returned to the trail. 'Here's something—here's real treasure-trove, Parker!'

From amid the mud and the fallen leaves he retrieved a tiny, glittering object—a flash of white and green between his fingertips.

It was a little charm such as women hang upon a bracelet—a diminutive diamond cat with eyes of bright emerald.

Lord Peter looked gloomily round at the chrysanthemums and boxes of bulbs.

'These damned flowers look jolly healthy,' he said. 'Do you mean you've been letting the gardener swarm in here every day to water 'em?'

'Yes,' said Parker apologetically, 'I did. But he's had strict orders only to walk on these mats.'

'Good,' said Lord Peter. 'Take 'em up, then, and let's get to work.'

With his lens to his eye he crawled cautiously over the floor.

'They all came through this way, I suppose,' he said.

'Yes,' said Parker. 'I've identified most of the marks. People went in and out. Here's the Duke. He comes in from outside. He trips over the body.' (Parker had opened the outer door and lifted some matting, to show a trampled patch of gravel, discoloured with blood.) 'He kneels by the body. Here are his knees and toes. Afterwards he goes into the house, through the conservatory, leaving a good impression in black mud and gravel just inside the door.'

Lord Peter squatted carefully over the marks.

'It's lucky the gravel's so soft here,' he said.

'Yes. It's just a patch. The gardener tells me it gets very trampled and messy just here owing to his coming to fill cans from the water-trough. They fill the trough up from the well every so often, and then carry the water away in cans. It got extra bad this year, and they put down fresh gravel a few weeks ago.'

'Pity they didn't extend their labours all down the path while they were about it,' grunted Lord Peter, who was balancing himself precariously on a small piece of sacking. 'Well, that bears out old Gerald so far. Here's an elephant been over this bit of box border. Who's that?'

'Oh, that's a constable. I put him at eighteen stone. He's nothing. And this rubber sole with a patch on it is Craikes. He's all over the place. This squelchy-looking thing is Mr Arbuthnot in bedroom slippers, and the galoshes are Mr Pettigrew-Robinson. We can dismiss

‘Quite so. But does he actually realize—imaginatively—that it is possible to hang an English peer for murder on circumstantial evidence?’

Lord Peter considered this.

‘Imagination isn’t Gerald’s strong point,’ he admitted. ‘I suppose they do hang peers? They can’t be beheaded on Tower Hill or anything?’

‘I’ll look it up,’ said Parker, ‘but they certainly hanged Earl Ferrers in 1760.’

‘Did they, though?’ said Lord Peter. ‘Ah, well, as the old pagan said of the Gospels, after all, it was a long time ago, and we’ll hope it wasn’t true.’

‘It’s true enough,’ said Parker, ‘and he was dissected and anatomized afterwards. But that part of the treatment is obsolete.’

‘We’ll tell Gerald about it,’ said Lord Peter, ‘and persuade him to take the matter seriously. Which are the boots he wore Wednesday night?’

‘These,’ said Parker, ‘but the fool’s cleaned them.’

‘Yes,’ said Lord Peter bitterly. ‘M’m! a good heavy lace-up boot—the sort that sends the blood to the head.’

‘He wore leggings, too,’ said Parker, ‘these.’

‘Rather elaborate preparations for a stroll in the garden. But, as you were just going to say, the night was wet. I must ask Helen if Gerald ever suffered from insomnia.’

‘I did. She said she thought not as a rule, but that he occasionally had toothache, which made him restless.’

‘It wouldn’t send one out of doors on a cold night, though. Well, let’s get downstairs.’

They passed through the billiard-room, where the Colonel was making a sensational break, and into the small conservatory which led from it.

Chapter 3

Mudstains and Bloodstains

Other things are all very well in their way, but give me Blood... We say, ‘There it is! that’s Blood!’ It is an actual matter of fact. We point it out. It admits of no doubt.... We must have Blood, you know.

David Copperfield

‘HITHERTO,’ said Lord Peter, as they picked their painful way through the little wood on the trail of Gent’s № 10’s, ‘I have always maintained that those obliging criminals who strew their tracks with little articles of personal adornment—here he is, on a squashed fungus—were an invention of detective fiction for the benefit of the author. I see that I have still something to learn about my job.’

‘Well, you haven’t been at it very long, have you?’ said Parker. ‘Besides, we don’t know that the diamond cat is the criminal’s. It may belong to a member of your own family, and have been lying here for days. It may belong to Mr What’s-his-name in the States, or to the last tenant but one, and have been lying here for years. This broken branch may be our friend—I think it is.’

‘I’ll ask the family,’ said Lord Peter, ‘and we could find out in the village if anyone’s ever inquired for a lost cat. They’re pukka stones. It ain’t the sort of thing one would drop without making a fuss about—I’ve lost him altogether.’

‘It’s all right—I’ve got him. He’s tripped over a root.’

'Serve him glad,' said Lord Peter viciously, straightening his back. 'I say, I don't think the human frame is very thoughtfully constructed for this sleuth-hound business. If one could go on all-fours, or had eyes in one's knees, it would be a lot more practical.'

'There are many difficulties inherent in a teleological view of creation,' said Parker placidly. 'Ah! here we are at the park palings.'

'And here's where he got over,' said Lord Peter, pointing to a place where the *chevaux de frise* on the top was broken away. 'Here's the dent where his heels came down, and here's where he fell forward on hands and knees. Hum! Give us a back, old man, would you? Thanks. An old break, I see. Mr Montague-now-in-the-States should keep his palings in better order. № 10 tore his coat on the spikes all the same; he left a fragment of Burberry behind him. What luck! Here's a deep, damp ditch on the other side, which I shall now proceed to fall into.'

A slithering crash proclaimed that he had carried out his intention. Parker, thus callously abandoned, looked round, and, seeing that they were only a hundred yards or so from the gate, ran along and was let out, decorously, by Hardraw, the gamekeeper, who happened to be coming out of the Lodge.

'By the way,' said Parker to him, 'did you ever find any signs of any poachers on Wednesday night after all?'

'Nay,' said the man, 'not so much as a dead rabbit. I reckon t'lady wor mistaken, an 'twore the shot I heard as killed t'Captain.'

'Possibly,' said Parker. 'Do you know how long the spikes have been broken off the palings over there?'

'A moonth or two, happen. They should 'a' bin put right, but the man's sick.'

'The gate's locked at night, I suppose?'

'Aye.'

'Anybody wishing to get in would have to waken you?'

'Aye, that he would.'

'We'll follow 'em down. Wait a jiff. Who are in the other rooms? Oh, yes. Here's Gerald's room. Helen's at church. In we go. Of course, this has been dusted and cleaned up, and generally ruined for purposes of observation?'

'I'm afraid so. I could hardly keep the Duchess out of her bedroom.'

'No. Here's the window Gerald shouted out of. H'm! Nothing in the grate here, naturally—the fire's been lit since. I say, I wonder where Gerald did put that letter to—Freeborn's, I mean.'

'Nobody's been able to get a word out of him about it,' said Parker. 'Old Mr Murbles had a fearful time with him. The Duke insists simply that he destroyed it. Mr Murbles says that's absurd. So it is. If he was going to bring that sort of accusation against his sister's fiancé he'd want *some* evidence of a method in his madness, wouldn't he? Or was he one of those Roman brothers who say simply: "As the head of the family I forbid the banns and that's enough"?'

'Gerald,' said Wimsey, 'is a good, clean, decent, thoroughbred public schoolboy, and a shocking ass. But I don't think he's so medieval as that.'

'But if he has the letter, why not produce it?'

'Why, indeed? Letters from old college friends in Egypt aren't, as a rule, compromising.'

'You don't suppose,' suggested Parker tentatively, 'that this Mr Freeborn referred in his letter to any old—er—entanglement which your brother wouldn't wish the Duchess to know about?'

Lord Peter paused, while absently examining a row of boots.

'That's an idea,' he said. 'There were occasions—mild ones, but Helen would make the most of them.' He whistled thoughtfully. 'Still, when it comes to the gallows—'

'Do you suppose, Wimsey, that your brother really contemplates the gallows?' asked Parker.

'I think Murbles put it to him pretty straight,' said Lord Peter.

'Yes, you'd better. Any pocket-book?'

'Yes; here you are. About £30 in various notes, a wine-merchant's card, and a bill for a pair of riding-breeches.'

'No correspondence?'

'Not a line.'

'No,' said Winsey, 'he was the kind, I imagine, that didn't keep letters. Much too good an instinct of self-preservation.'

'Yes. I asked the servants about his letters, as a matter of fact. They said he got a good number, but never left them about. They couldn't tell me much about the ones he wrote, because all the outgoing letters are dropped into the post-bag, which is carried down to the post-office as it is and opened there, or handed over to the postman when—or if—he calls. The general impression was that he didn't write much. The housemaid said she never found anything to speak of in the waste-paper basket.'

'Well, that's uncommonly helpful. Wait a moment. Here's his fountain-pen. Very handsome—Onoto with complete gold casing. Dear me! Entirely empty. Well, I don't know that one can deduce anything from that, exactly. I don't see any pencil about, by the way. I'm inclined to think you're wrong in supposing that he was writing letters.'

'I didn't suppose anything,' said Parker mildly. 'I daresay you're right.'

Lord Peter left the dressing-table, looked through the contents of the wardrobe, and turned over the two or three books on the pedestal beside the bed.

'*La Rôisserie de la Reine Pédauque, L'Anneau d'Amithyste, South Wind* (our young friend works out very true to type), *Chronique d'un Cadet de Coutras* (tut-tut, Charles!), *Manon Lescaut*. H'm! Is there anything else in this room I ought to look at?'

'I don't think so. Where'd you like to go now?'

'You didn't see any suspicious character loitering about outside these palings last Wednesday, I suppose?'

'Nay, sir, but my wife may ha' done. Hey, lass!'

Mrs Hardraw, thus summoned, appeared at the door with a small boy clinging to her skirts.

'Wednesday?' said she. 'Nay, I saw no loiterin' folks. I keep a look-out for tramps and such, as it be such a lonely place. Wednesday. Eh, now, John, that wad be t'day t'young mon called wi' t'motor-bike.'

'Young man with a motor-bike?'

'I reckon 'twas. He said he'd had a puncture and asked for a bucket o' watter.'

'Was that all the asking he did?'

'He asked what were t'name o' t'place and whose house it were.'

'Did you tell him the Duke of Denver was living here?'

'Aye, sir, and he said he supposed a many gentlemen came up for t'shooting.'

'Did he say where he was going?'

'He said he'd coom oop fra' Weirdale an' were makin' a trip into Coomberland.'

'How long was he here?'

'Happen half an hour. An' then he tried to get his machine started, an' I see him hop-hoppin' away towards King's Fenton.'

She pointed away to the right, where Lord Peter might be seen gesticulating in the middle of the road.

'What sort of a man was he?'

Like most people, Mrs Hardraw was poor at definition. She thought he was youngish and tallish, neither dark nor fair, in such a long coat as motor-bicyclists use, with a belt round it.

'Was he a gentleman?'

Mrs Hardraw hesitated, and Mr Parker mentally classed the stranger as 'Not quite quite.'

'You didn't happen to notice the number of the bicycle?'

Mrs Hardraw had not. 'But it had a side-car,' she added.

Lord Peter's gesticulations were becoming quite violent, and Mr Parker hastened to rejoin him.

'Come on, gossiping old thing,' said Lord Peter unreasonably. 'This is a beautiful ditch.

From such a ditch as this,
When the soft wind did gently kiss the trees
And they did make no noise, from such a ditch
Our friend, methinks, mounted the Trojan walls,
And wiped his soles upon the greasy mud.

Look at my trousers!'

'It's a bit of a climb from this side,' said Parker.

'It is. He stood here in the ditch, and put one foot into this place where the paling's broken away and one hand on the top, and hauled himself up. N° 10 must have been a man of exceptional height, strength, and agility. I couldn't get my foot up, let alone reaching the top with my hand. I'm five foot nine. Could you?'

Parker was six foot, and could just touch the top of the wall with his hand.

'I *might* do it—on one of my best days,' he said, 'for an adequate object, or after adequate stimulant.'

'Just so,' said Lord Peter. 'Hence we deduce N° 10's exceptional height and strength.'

'Yes,' said Parker. 'It's a bit unfortunate that we had to deduce his exceptional shortness and weakness just now, isn't it?'

'Oh!' said Peter. 'Well—well, as you so rightly say, that *is* a bit unfortunate.'

'Well, it may clear up presently. He didn't have a confederate to give him a back or a leg, I suppose?'

'Not unless the confederate was a being without feet or any visible means of support,' said Lord Peter, indicating the solitary print of

'I like these tortoiseshell sets,' he said, 'and the perfume is "Baiser du Soir"—very nice too. New to me. I must draw Bunter's attention to it. A charming manicure set, isn't it? You know, I like being clean and neat and all that, but Cathcart was the kind of man who always impressed you as bein' just a little too well turned out. Poor devil! And he'll be buried at Golders Green after all. I only saw him once or twice, you know. He impressed me as knowin' about everything there was to know. I was rather surprised at Mary takin' to him, but, then, I know really awfully little about Mary. You see, she's five years younger than me. When the war broke out she'd just left school and gone to a place in Paris, and I joined up, and she came back and did nursing and social work, so I only saw her occasionally. At that time she was rather taken up with new schemes for puttin' the world to rights and hadn't a lot to say to me. And she got hold of some pacifist fellow who was a bit of a stumer, I fancy. Then I was ill, you know, and then I got the chuck from Barbara and didn't feel much like botherin' about other people's heart-to-hearts, and then I got mixed up in the Attenbury diamond case—and the result is I know uncommonly little about my own sister. But it looks as though her taste in men had altered. I know my mother said Cathcart had charm; that means he was attractive to women, I suppose. No man can see what makes that in another man, but mother is usually right. What's become of this fellow's papers?'

'He left very little here,' replied Parker. 'There's a check-book on Cox's Charing Cross branch, but it's a new one and not very helpful. Apparently he only kept a small current account with them for convenience when he was in England. The checks are mostly to self, with an occasional hotel or tailor.'

'Any pass-book?'

'I think all his important papers are in Paris. He has a flat there, near the river somewhere. We're in communication with the Paris police. He had a room at the Albany. I've told them to look it up till I get there. I thought of running up to town tomorrow.'