Chapter 9

Mr Parker, summoned the next morning to 110 Piccadilly, arrived to find the Dowager Duchess in possession. She greeted him charmingly.

'I am going to take this silly boy down to Denver for the week-end,' she said, indicating Peter, who was writing and only acknowledged his friend's entrance with a brief nod. 'He's been doing too much—running about to Salisbury and places and up till all hours of the night—you really shouldn't encourage him, Mr Parker, it's very naughty of you—waking poor Bunter up in the middle of the night with scares about Germans, as if that wasn't all over years ago, and he hasn't had an attack for ages, but there! Nerves are such funny things, and Peter always did have nightmares when he was quite a little boy—though very often of course it was only a little pill he wanted; but he was so dreadfully bad in 1918, you know, and I suppose we can't expect to forget all about a great war in a year or two, and, really, I ought to be very thankful with both my boys safe. Still, I think a little peace and quiet at Denver won't do him any harm.'

'Sorry you've been having a bad turn, old man,' said Parker, vaguely sympathetic; 'you're looking a bit seedy.'

'Charles,' said Lord Peter, in a voice entirely void of expression, 'I am going away for a couple of days because I can be no use to you in London. What has got to be done for the moment can be much better done by you than by me. I want you to take this'—he folded up his writing and placed it in an envelope—'to Scotland Yard immediately and get it sent out to all the workhouses, infirmaries, police stations, Y.M.C.A.'s and so on in London. It is a description of Thipps's corpse as he was before he was shaved and cleaned up. I want to know whether any man answering to

that description has been taken in anywhere, alive or dead, during the last fortnight. You will see Sir Andrew Mackenzie personally, and get the paper sent out at once, by his authority; you will tell him that you have solved the problems of the Levy murder and the Battersea mystery'—Mr Parker made an astonished noise to which his friend paid no attention—'and you will ask him to have men in readiness with a warrant to arrest a very dangerous and important criminal at any moment on your information. When the replies to this paper come in, you will search for any mention of St Luke's Hospital, or of any person connected with St Luke's Hospital, and you will send for me at once.'

'Meanwhile you will scrape acquaintance—I don't care how—with one of the students at St Luke's. Don't march in there blowing about murders and police warrants, or you may find yourself in Queer Street. I shall come up to town as soon as I hear from you, and I shall expect to find a nice ingenuous Sawbones here to meet me.' He grinned faintly.

'D'you mean you've got to the bottom of this thing?' asked Parker.

'Yes. I may be wrong. I hope I am, but I know I'm not.'

'You won't tell me?'

'D'you know,' said Peter, 'honestly I'd rather not. I say I *may* be wrong—and I'd feel as if I'd libelled the Archbishop of Canterbury.'

'Well, tell me—is it one mystery or two?'

'One.'

'You talked of the Levy murder. Is Levy dead?'

'God—yes!' said Peter, with a strong shudder.

The Duchess looked up from where she was reading the *Tatler*.

'Peter,' she said, 'is that your ague coming on again? Whatever you two are chattering about, you'd better stop it at once if it excites you. Besides, it's about time to be off.'

can't hear—I can't hear anything for the noise of the guns. Can't they stop the guns?'

'Oh, dear!' said Mr Bunter to himself. 'No, no—it's all right, Major—don't you worry.'

'But I hear it,' protested Peter.

'So do I,' said Mr Bunter stoutly; 'very good hearing, too, my lord. That's our own sappers at work in the communication trench. Don't you fret about that, sir.'

Lord Peter grasped his wrist with a feverish hand.

'Our own sappers,' he said; 'sure of that?'

'Certain of it,' said Mr Bunter, cheerfully.

'They'll bring down the tower,' said Lord Peter.

'To be sure they will,' said Mr Bunter, 'and very nice, too. You just come and lay down a bit, sir—they've come to take over this section.'

'You're sure it's safe to leave it?' said Lord Peter.

'Safe as houses, sir,' said Mr Bunter, tucking his master's arm under his and walking him off to his bedroom.

Lord Peter allowed himself to be dosed and put to bed without further resistance. Mr Bunter, looking singularly un-Bunterlike in striped pyjamas, with his stiff black hair ruffled about his head, sat grimly watching the younger man's sharp cheekbones and the purple stains under his eyes.

'Thought we'd had the last of these attacks,' he said. 'Been overdoin' of himself. Asleep?' He peered at him anxiously. An affectionate note crept into his voice. 'Bloody little fool!' said Sergeant Bunter.

He flung the book away. 'Confirmation!' he groaned. 'As if I needed it!'

He sat down again and buried his face in his hands. He remembered quite suddenly how, years ago, he had stood before the breakfast table at Denver Castle—a small, peaky boy in blue knickers, with a thunderously beating heart. The family had not come down; there was a great silver urn with a spirit lamp under it, and an elaborate coffee-pot boiling in a glass dome. He had twitched the corner of the tablecloth—twitched it harder, and the urn moved ponderously forward and all the teaspoons rattled. He seized the tablecloth in a firm grip and pulled his hardest—he could feel now the delicate and awful thrill as the urn and the coffee machine and the whole of a Sèvres breakfast service had crashed down in one stupendous ruin—he remembered the horrified face of the butler, and the screams of a lady guest.

A log broke across and sank into a fluff of white ash. A belated motor-lorry rumbled past the window.

Mr Bunter, sleeping the sleep of the true and faithful servant, was aroused in the small hours by a hoarse whisper, 'Bunter!'

'Yes, my lord,' said Bunter, sitting up and switching on the light.

'Put that light out, damn you!' said the voice. 'Listen—over there—listen—can't you hear it?'

'It's nothing, my lord,' said Mr Bunter, hastily getting out of bed and catching hold of his master; 'it's all right, you get to bed quick and I'll fetch you a drop of bromide. Why, you're all shivering—you've been sitting up too late.'

'Hush! no, no—it's the water,' said Lord Peter with chattering teeth; 'it's up to their waists down there, poor devils. But listen! can't you hear it? Tap, tap, tap—they're mining us—but I don't know where—I can't hear—I can't. Listen, you! There it is again—we must find it—we must stop it.... Listen! Oh, my God! I

'All right, Mother,' said Peter. He turned to Bunter, standing respectfully in the door with an overcoat and suitcase. 'You understand what you have to do, don't you?' he said.

'Perfectly, thank you, my lord. The car is just arriving, your Grace.'

'With Mrs Thipps inside it,' said the Duchess. 'She'll be delighted to see you again, Peter. You remind her so of Mr Thipps. Good-morning, Bunter.'

'Good-morning, your Grace.'

Parker accompanied them downstairs.

When they had gone he looked blankly at the paper in his hand—then, remembering that it was Saturday and there was need for haste, he hailed a taxi.

'Scotland Yard!' he cried.

Tuesday morning saw Lord Peter and a man in a velveteen jacket swishing merrily through seven acres of turnip-tops, streaked yellow with early frosts. A little way ahead, a sinuous undercurrent of excitement among the leaves proclaimed the unseen yet ever-near presence of one of the Duke of Denver's setter pups. Presently a partridge flew up with a noise like a police rattle, and Lord Peter accounted for it very creditably for a man who, a few nights before, had been listening to imaginary German sappers. The setter bounded foolishly through the turnips, and fetched back the dead bird.

'Good dog,' said Lord Peter.

Encouraged by this, the dog gave a sudden ridiculous gambol and barked, its ear tossed inside out over its head.

'Heel,' said the man in velveteen, violently. The animal sidled up, ashamed.

'Fool of a dog, that,' said the man in velveteen; 'can't keep quiet. Too nervous, my lord. One of old Black Lass's pups.'

'Dear me,' said Peter, 'is the old dog still going?'

'No, my lord; we had to put her away in the spring.'

Peter nodded. He always proclaimed that he hated the country and was thankful to have nothing to do with the family estates, but this morning he enjoyed the crisp air and the wet leaves washing darkly over his polished boots. At Denver things moved in an orderly way; no one died sudden and violent deaths except aged setters—and partridges, to be sure. He sniffed up the autumn smell with appreciation. There was a letter in his pocket which had come by the morning post, but he did not intend to read it just yet. Parker had not wired; there was no hurry.

He read it in the smoking-room after lunch. His brother was there, dozing over the *Times*—a good, clean Englishman, sturdy and conventional, rather like Henry VIII in his youth; Gerald, sixteenth Duke of Denver. The Duke considered his cadet rather degenerate, and not quite good form; he disliked his taste for police-court news.

The letter was from Mr Bunter.

110, Piccadilly,
W.1.

My Lord:

I write (Mr Bunter had been carefully educated and knew that nothing is more vulgar than a careful avoidance of beginning a letter with the first person singular) as your lordship directed, to inform you of the result of my investigations.

I experienced no difficulty in becoming acquainted with Sir Julian Freke's man-servant. He belongs to the same club as the Hon. Frederick Arbuthnot's man, who is a friend of mine, and was very willing to introduce me. He took me to the club yesterday (Sunday) evening, and we dined with the man, whose name is John Cummings, and afterwards I invited Cummings to drinks and a cigar in the flat.

Lord Peter got up and paced the room: 'Good Lord!' he said. 'Good Lord!' He took down 'Who's Who' from the little shelf over the telephone and sought comfort in its pages:

FREKE, Sir Julian, Kt. *cr.* 1916; G.C.V.O. *cr.* 1919; K.C.V.O. 1917; K.C.B. 1918; M.D., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S., Dr en Méd. Paris; D. Sci. Cantab.; Knight of Grace of the Order of S. John of Jerusalem; Consulting Surgeon of St Luke's Hospital, Battersea. *b.* Grylling-ham, 16 March, 1872, *only son* of Edward Curzon Freke, Esq., of Gryll Court, Gryllingham. *Educ.* Harrow and Trinity Coll., Cambridge; Col. A.M.S.; late Member of the Advisory Board of the Army Medical Service. *Publications*: Some Notes on the Pathological Aspects of Genius, 1892; Statistical Contributions to the Study of Infantile Paralysis in England and Wales, 1894; Functional Disturbances of the Nervous System, 1899; Cerebro-Spinal Diseases, 1904; The Borderland of Insanity, 1906; An Examination into the Treatment of Pauper Lunacy in the United Kingdom, 1906; Modern Developments in Psycho-Therapy: A Criticism, 1910; Criminal Lunacy, 1914; The Application of Psycho-Therapy to the Treatment of Shell-Shock, 1917; An Answer to Professor Freud, with a Description of Some Experiments Carried Out at the Base Hospital at Amiens, 1919; Structural Modifications Accompanying the More Important Neuroses, 1920. *Clubs*: White's; Oxford and Cambridge; Alpine, etc. Recreations: Chess, Mountaineering, Fishing. *Address*: 282, Harley Street and St Luke's House, Prince of Wales Road, Battersea Park, S.W.11.

S C S R S O

Another way is to stare at the inco-ordinate elements until, by no logical process that the conscious mind can detect, or under some adventitious external stimulus, the combination:

S C I S S O R S

presents itself with calm certainty. After that, one does not even need to arrange the letters in order. The thing is done.

Even so, the scattered elements of two grotesque conundrums, flung higgledy-piggledy into Lord Peter's mind, resolved themselves, unquestioned henceforward. A bump on the roof of the end house—Levy in a welter of cold rain talking to a prostitute in the Battersea Park Road—a single ruddy hair—lint bandages—Inspector Sugg calling the great surgeon from the dissecting-room of the hospital—Lady Levy with a nervous attack—the smell of carbolic soap—the Duchess's voice—'not really an engagement, only a sort of understanding with her father'—shares in Peruvian Oil—the dark skin and curved, fleshy profile of the man in the bath—Dr Grimbold giving evidence, 'In my opinion, death did not occur for several days after the blow'—india-rubber gloves—even, faintly, the voice of Mr Appledore, 'He called on me, sir, with an anti-vivisectionist pamphlet'—all these things and many others rang together and made one sound, they swung together like bells in a steeple, with the deep tenor booming through the clamour:

'The knowledge of good and evil is a phenomenon of the brain, and is removable, removable, removable. The knowledge of good and evil is removable.'

Lord Peter Wimsey was not a young man who habitually took himself very seriously, but this time he was frankly appalled. 'It's impossible,' said his reason, feebly; '*credo quia impossibile,*' said his interior certainty with impervious self-satisfaction. 'All right,' said conscience, instantly allying itself with blind faith, 'what are you going to do about it?'

> Your lordship will excuse me doing this, knowing that it is not my habit, but it has always been my experience that the best way to gain a man's confidence is to let him suppose that one takes advantage of one's employer.

('I always suspected Bunter of being a student of human nature,' commented Lord Peter.)

> I gave him the best old port

('The deuce you did,' said Lord Peter),

> having heard you and Mr Arbuthnot talk over it.

('Hum!' said Lord Peter.)

> Its effects were quite equal to my expectations as regards the principal matter in hand, but I very much regret to state that the man had so little understanding of what was offered to him that he smoked a cigar with it (one of your lordship's Villar Villars). You will understand that I made no comment on this at the time, but your lordship will sympathize with my feelings. May I take this opportunity of expressing my grateful appreciation of your lordship's excellent taste in food, drink and dress? It is, if I may say so, more than a pleasure—it is an education, to valet and buttle your lordship.

Lord Peter bowed his head gravely.

'What on earth are you doing, Peter, sittin' there noddin' an' grinnin' like a what-you-may-call-it?' demanded the Duke, coming suddenly out of a snooze. 'Someone writin' pretty things to you, what?'

'Charming things,' said Lord Peter.

The Duke eyed him doubtfully.

'Hope to goodness you don't go and marry a chorus beauty,' he muttered inwardly, and returned to the *Times*.

> Over dinner I had set myself to discover Cummings's tastes, and found them to run in the direction of the music-hall stage. During his first glass I drew him out in this direction, your lordship having kindly given me opportunities of seeing every performance in London, and I spoke more freely than I should consider becoming in the ordinary way in order to make myself pleasant to him. I may say that his views on women and the stage were such as I should have expected from a man who would smoke with your lordship's port.
>
> With the second glass I introduced the subject of your lordship's inquiries. In order to save time I will write our conversation in the form of a dialogue, as nearly as possible as it actually took place.
>
> CUMMINGS: You seem to get many opportunities of seeing a bit of life, Mr Bunter.
>
> BUNTER: One can always make opportunities if one knows how.
>
> CUMMINGS: Ah, it's very easy for you to talk, Mr Bunter. You're not married, for one thing.
>
> BUNTER: I know better than that, Mr Cummings.
>
> CUMMINGS: So do I—*now*, when it's too late. (He sighed heavily, and I filled up his glass.)
>
> BUNTER: Does Mrs Cummings live with you at Battersea?
>
> CUMMINGS: Yes, her and me we do for my governor. Such a life! Not but what there's a char comes

a disease. 'The knowledge of good and evil is an observed phenomenon, attendant upon a certain condition of the brain-cells, which is removable.' That was one phrase; and again:

'Conscience in man may, in fact, be compared to the sting of a hive-bee, which, so far from conducing to the welfare of its possessor, cannot function, even in a single instance, without occasioning its death. The survival-value in each case is thus purely social; and if humanity ever passes from its present phase of social development into that of a higher individualism, as some of our philosophers have ventured to speculate, we may suppose that this interesting mental phenomenon may gradually cease to appear; just as the nerves and muscles which once controlled the movements of our ears and scalps have, in all save a few backward individuals, become atrophied and of interest only to the physiologist.'

'By Jove!' thought Lord Peter, idly, 'that's an ideal doctrine for the criminal. A man who believed that would never— '

And then it happened—the thing he had been half-unconsciously expecting. It happened suddenly, surely, as unmistakably, as sunrise. He remembered—not one thing, nor another thing, nor a logical succession of things, but everything—the whole thing, perfect, complete, in all its dimensions as it were and instantaneously; as if he stood outside the world and saw it suspended in infinitely dimensional space. He no longer needed to reason about it, or even to think about it. He knew it.

There is a game in which one is presented with a jumble of letters and is required to make a word out of them, as thus:

C O S S S S R I

The slow way of solving the problem is to try out all the permutations and combinations in turn, throwing away impossible conjunctions of letters, as:

S S S I R C

or

the excitements of special duty, had brought from the Times Book Club. It happened to be Sir Julian Freke's 'Physiological Bases of the Conscience,' which he had seen reviewed two days before.

'This ought to send one to sleep,' said Lord Peter; 'if I can't leave these problems to my subconscious I'll be as limp as a rag tomorrow.'

He opened the book slowly, and glanced carelessly through the preface.

'I wonder if that's true about Levy being ill,' he thought, putting the book down; 'it doesn't seem likely. And yet—Dash it all, I'll take my mind off it.'

He read on resolutely for a little.

'I don't suppose Mother's kept up with the Levys much,' was the next importunate train of thought. 'Dad always hated self-made people and wouldn't have 'em at Denver. And old Gerald keeps up the tradition. I wonder if she knew Freke well in those days. She seems to get on with Milligan. I trust Mother's judgment a good deal. She was a brick about that bazaar business. I ought to have warned her. She said something once— '

He pursued an elusive memory for some minutes, till it vanished altogether with a mocking flicker of the tail. He returned to his reading.

Presently another thought crossed his mind aroused by a photograph of some experiment in surgery.

'If the evidence of Freke and that man Watts hadn't been so positive,' he said to himself, 'I should be inclined to look into the matter of those shreds of lint on the chimney.'

He considered this, shook his head and read with determination.

Mind and matter were one thing, that was the theme of the physiologist. Matter could erupt, as it were, into ideas. You could carve passions in the brain with a knife. You could get rid of imagination with drugs and cure an outworn convention like

in by the day. But what's a char? I can tell you it's dull all by ourselves in that d—d Battersea suburb.

BUNTER: Not very convenient for the Halls, of course.

CUMMINGS: I believe you. It's all right for you, here in Piccadilly, right on the spot as you might say. And I daresay your governor's often out all night, eh?

BUNTER: Oh, frequently, Mr Cummings.

CUMMINGS: And I daresay you take the opportunity to slip off yourself every so often, eh?

BUNTER: Well, what do *you* think, Mr Cummings?

CUMMINGS: That's it; there you are! But what's a man to do with a nagging fool of a wife and a blasted scientific doctor for a governor, as sits up all night cutting up dead bodies and experimenting with frogs?

BUNTER: Surely he goes out sometimes.

CUMMINGS: Not often. And always back before twelve. And the way he goes on if he rings the bell and you ain't there. I give you *my* word, Mr Bunter.

BUNTER: Temper?

CUMMINGS: No-o-o—but looking through you, nasty-like, as if you was on that operating table of his and he was going to cut you up. Nothing a man could rightly complain of, you understand, Mr Bunter, just nasty looks. Not but what I will say he's very correct. Apologizes if he's been inconsiderate. But what's the good of that when he's been and gone and lost you your night's rest?

BUNTER: How does he do that? Keeps you up late, you mean?

CUMMINGS: Not him; far from it. House locked up and household to bed at half-past ten. That's his little rule. Not but what I'm glad enough to go as a rule, it's that dreary. Still, when I *do* go to bed I like to go to sleep.

BUNTER: What does he do? Walk about the house?

CUMMINGS: Doesn't he? All night. And in and out of the private door to the hospital.

BUNTER: You don't mean to say, Mr Cummings, a great specialist like Sir Julian Freke does night work at the hospital?

CUMMINGS: No, no; he does his own work—research work, as you may say. Cuts people up. They say he's very clever. Could take you or me to pieces like a clock, Mr Bunter, and put us together again.

BUNTER: Do you sleep in the basement, then, to hear him so plain?

CUMMINGS: No; our bedroom's at the top. But, Lord! what's that? He'll bang the door so you can hear him all over the house.

BUNTER: Ah, many's the time I've had to speak to Lord Peter about that. And talking all night. And baths.

CUMMINGS: Baths? You may well say that, Mr Bunter. Baths? Me and my wife sleep next to the cistern-room. Noise fit to wake the dead. All hours. When d'you think he chose to have a bath, no later than last Monday night, Mr Bunter?

BUNTER: I've known them to do it at two in the morning, Mr Cummings.

Chapter 8

LORD Peter reached home about midnight, feeling extraordinarily wakeful and alert. Something was jigging and worrying in his brain; it felt like a hive of bees, stirred up by a stick. He felt as though he were looking at a complicated riddle, of which he had once been told the answer but had forgotten it and was always on the point of remembering.

'Somewhere,' said Lord Peter to himself, 'somewhere I've got the key to these two things. I know I've got it, only I can't remember what it is. Somebody said it. Perhaps I said it. I can't remember where, but I know I've got it. Go to bed, Bunter, I shall sit up a little. I'll just slip on a dressing-gown.'

Before the fire he sat down with his pipe in his mouth and his jazz-coloured peacocks gathered about him. He traced out this line and that line of investigation—rivers running into the sand. They ran out from the thought of Levy, last seen at ten o'clock in Prince of Wales Road. They ran back from the picture of the grotesque dead man in Mr Thipps's bathroom—they ran over the roof, and were lost—lost in the sand. Rivers running into the sand—rivers running underground, very far down—

> Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
> Through caverns measureless to man
> Down to a sunless sea.

By leaning his head down, it seemed to Lord Peter that he could hear them, very faintly, lipping and gurgling somewhere in the darkness. But where? He felt quite sure that somebody had told him once, only he had forgotten.

He roused himself, threw a log on the fire, and picked up a book which the indefatigable Bunter, carrying on his daily fatigues amid