upholsterer—Mr Piggott, of Piggott & Piggott, Liverpool—and you knew enough about carpets to know that you couldn't even guess at the price of this one. When you moved your head on the bulging silk cushion in the corner of the sofa, it made you wish you shaved more often and more carefully. The sofa was a monster—but even so, it hardly seemed big enough to contain you. This Lord Peter was not very tall—in fact, he was rather a small man, but he didn't look undersized. He looked right; he made you feel that to be six-foot-three was rather vulgarly assertive; you felt like Mother's new drawing-room curtains—all over great big blobs. But everybody was very decent to you, and nobody said anything you couldn't understand, or sneered at you. There were some frightfully deep-looking books on the shelves all round, and you had looked into a great folio Dante which was lying on the table, but your hosts were talking quite ordinarily and rationally about the sort of books you read yourself—clinking good love stories and detective stories. You had read a lot of those, and could give an opinion, and they listened to what you had to say, though Lord Peter had a funny way of talking about books, too, as if the author had confided in him beforehand, and told him how the story was put together, and which bit was written first. It reminded you of the way old Freke took a body to pieces.

'Thing I object to in detective stories,' said Mr Piggott, 'is the way fellows remember every bloomin' thing that's happened to 'em within the last six months. They're always ready with their time of day and was it rainin' or not, and what were they doin' on such an' such a day. Reel it all off like a page of poetry. But one ain't like that in real life, d'you think so, Lord Peter?' Lord Peter smiled, and young Piggott, instantly embarrassed, appealed to his earlier acquaintance. 'You know what I mean, Parker. Come now. One day's so like another, I'm sure I couldn't remember—well, I might remember yesterday, p'r'aps, but I couldn't be certain about what I was doin' last week if I was to be shot for it.'

'No,' said Parker, 'and evidence given in police statements sounds just as impossible. But they don't really get it like that, you know. I mean, a man doesn't just say, "Last Friday I went out at 10 A.M. to buy a mutton chop. As I was turning into Mortimer Street I noticed a girl of about twenty-two with black hair and brown eyes, wearing a green jumper, check skirt, Panama hat and black shoes, riding a Royal Sunbeam Cycle at about ten miles an hour turning the corner by the Church of St Simon and St Jude on the wrong side of the road riding towards the market place!" It amounts to that, of course, but it's really wormed out of him by a series of questions.'

'And in short stories,' said Lord Peter, 'it has to be put in statement form, because the real conversation would be so long and twaddly and tedious, and nobody would have the patience to read it. Writers have to consider their readers, if any, y'see.'

'Yes,' said Mr Piggott, 'but I bet you most people would find it jolly difficult to remember, even if you asked 'em things. I should—of course, I know I'm a bit of a fool, but then, most people are, ain't they? You know what I mean. Witnesses ain't detectives, they're just average idiots like you and me.'

'Quite so,' said Lord Peter, smiling as the force of the last phrase sank into its unhappy perpetrator; 'you mean, if I were to ask you in a general way what you were doin'—say, a week ago today, you wouldn't be able to tell me a thing about it offhand?'

'No—I'm sure I shouldn't.' He considered. 'No. I was in at the Hospital as usual, I suppose, and, being Tuesday, there'd be a lecture on something or the other—dashed if I know what—and in the evening I went out with Tommy Pringle—no, that must have been Monday—or was it Wednesday? I tell you, I couldn't swear to anything.'

'You do yourself an injustice,' said Lord Peter gravely. 'I'm sure, for instance, you recollect what work you were doing in the dissecting-room on that day, for example.'

'Lord, no! not for certain. I mean, I daresay it might come back to me if I thought for a long time, but I wouldn't swear to it in a court of law.'

'I'll bet you half-a-crown to sixpence,' said Lord Peter, 'that you'll remember within five minutes.'

'I'm sure I can't.'

'We'll see. Do you keep a notebook of the work you do when you dissect? Drawings or anything?'

'Oh, yes.'

'Think of that. What's the last thing you did in it?'

'That's easy, because I only did it this morning. It was leg muscles.'

'Yes. Who was the subject?'

'An old woman of sorts; died of pneumonia.'

'Yes. Turn back the pages of your drawing book in your mind. What came before that?'

'Oh, some animals—still legs; I'm doing motor muscles at present. Yes. That was old Cunningham's demonstration on comparative anatomy. I did rather a good thing of a hare's legs and a frog's, and rudimentary legs on a snake.'

'Yes. Which day does Mr Cunningham lecture?'

'Friday.'

'Friday; yes. Turn back again. What comes before that?'

Mr Piggott shook his head.

'Do your drawings of legs begin on the right-hand page or the left-hand page? Can you see the first drawing?'

'Yes—yes—I can see the date written at the top. It's a section of a frog's hind leg, on the right-hand page.'

'Yes. Think of the open book in your mind's eye. What is opposite to it?'

This demanded some mental concentration.

'Something round—coloured—oh, yes—it's a hand.'

Chapter 10

Mr Parker, a faithful though doubting Thomas, had duly secured his medical student: a large young man like an overgrown puppy, with innocent eyes and a freckled face. He sat on the Chesterfield before Lord Peter's library fire, bewildered in equal measure by his errand, his surroundings and the drink which he was absorbing. His palate, though untutored, was naturally a good one, and he realized that even to call this liquid a drink—the term ordinarily used by him to designate cheap whisky, post-war beer or a dubious glass of claret in a Soho restaurant—was a sacrilege; this was something outside normal experience: a genie in a bottle.

The man called Parker, whom he had happened to run across the evening before in the public-house at the corner of Prince of Wales Road, seemed to be a good sort. He had insisted on bringing him round to see this friend of his, who lived splendidly in Piccadilly. Parker was quite understandable; he put him down as a government servant, or perhaps something in the City. The friend was embarrassing; he was a lord, to begin with, and his clothes were a kind of rebuke to the world at large. He talked the most fatuous nonsense, certainly, but in a disconcerting way. He didn't dig into a joke and get all the fun out of it; he made it in passing, so to speak, and skipped away to something else before your retort was ready. He had a truly terrible man-servant—the sort you read about in books—who froze the marrow in your bones with silent criticism. Parker appeared to bear up under the strain, and this made you think more highly of Parker; he must be more habituated to the surroundings of the great than you would think to look at him. You wondered what the carpet had cost on which Parker was carelessly spilling cigar ash; your father was an

'Because,' said Lord Peter, 'there's a terrible piece of news to be broken to her about her husband.'

'Is he dead, dear?'

'Yes; and she will have to come and identify him.'

'Poor Christine.'

'Under very revolting circumstances, Mother.'

'I'll come with you, dear.'

'Thank you, Mother, you're a brick. D'you mind gettin' your things on straight away and comin' up with me? I'll tell you about it in the car.'

'Yes. You went on from the muscles of the hand and arm to leg- and foot-muscles?'

'Yes; that's right. I've got a set of drawings of arms.'

'Yes. Did you make those on the Thursday?'

'No; I'm never in the dissecting-room on Thursday.'

'On Wednesday, perhaps?'

'Yes; I must have made them on Wednesday. Yes; I did. I went in there after we'd seen those tetanus patients in the morning. I did them on Wednesday afternoon. I know I went back because I wanted to finish 'em. I worked rather hard—for me. That's why I remember.'

'Yes; you went back to finish them. When had you begun them, then?'

'Why, the day before.'

'The day before. That was Tuesday, wasn't it?'

'I've lost count—yes, the day before Wednesday—yes, Tuesday.'

'Yes. Were they a man's arms or a woman's arms?'

"Oh, a man's arms.

'Yes; last Tuesday, a week ago today, you were dissecting a man's arms in the dissecting-room. Sixpence, please.'

'By Jove!'

'Wait a moment. You know a lot more about it than that. You've no idea how much you know. You know what kind of man he was.'

'Oh, I never saw him complete, you know. I got there a bit late that day, I remember. I'd asked for an arm specially, because I was rather weak in arms, and Watts—that's the attendant—had promised to save me one.'

'Yes. You have arrived late and found your arm waiting for you. You are dissecting it—taking your scissors and slitting up the skin and pinning it back. Was it very young, fair skin?'

'Oh, no—no. Ordinary skin, I think—with dark hairs on it—yes, that was it.'

'Yes. A lean, stringy arm, perhaps, with no extra fat anywhere?'

'Oh, no—I was rather annoyed about that. I wanted a good, muscular arm, but it was rather poorly developed and the fat got in my way.'

'Yes; a sedentary man who didn't do much manual work.'

'That's right.'

'Yes. You dissected the hand, for instance, and made a drawing of it. You would have noticed any hard calluses.'

'Oh, there was nothing of that sort.'

'No. But should you say it was a young man's arm? Firm young flesh and limber joints?'

'No—no.'

'No. Old and stringy, perhaps.'

'No. Middle-aged—with rheumatism. I mean, there was a chalky deposit in the joints, and the fingers were a bit swollen.'

'Yes. A man about fifty.'

'About that.'

'Yes. There were other students at work on the same body.'

'Oh, yes.'

'Yes. And they made all the usual sort of jokes about it.'

'I expect so—oh, yes!'

'You can remember some of them. Who is your local funny man, so to speak?'

'Tommy Pringle.'

'What was Tommy Pringle's doing?'

'Can't remember.'

'Whereabouts was Tommy Pringle working?'

'Over by the instrument cupboard—by sink C.'

'Yes. Get a picture of Tommy Pringle in your mind's eye.'

Piggott began to laugh.

'I remember now. Tommy Pringle said the old Sheeny— '

'Why did he call him a Sheeny?'

'I don't know. But I know he did.'

'Hurray!' said Lord Peter, suddenly sparkling. 'I'm glad I've puzzled Parker. Gives me confidence in myself. Makes me feel like Sherlock Holmes. "Perfectly simple, Watson." Dash it all, though! this is a beastly business. Still, it's puzzled Parker.'

'What's the matter?' asked the Duke, getting up and yawning.

'Marching orders,' said Peter, 'back to town. Many thanks for your hospitality, old bird—I'm feelin' no end better. Ready to tackle Professor Moriarty or Leon Kestrel or any of 'em.'

'I do wish you'd keep out of the police courts,' grumbled the Duke. 'It makes it so dashed awkward for me, havin' a brother makin' himself conspicuous.'

'Sorry, Gerald,' said the other; 'I know I'm a beastly blot on the 'scutcheon.'

'Why can't you marry and settle down and live quietly, doin' something useful?' said the Duke, unappeased.

'Because that was a wash-out as you perfectly well know,' said Peter; 'besides,' he added cheerfully, 'I'm bein' no end useful. You may come to want me yourself, you never know. When anybody comes blackmailin' you, Gerald, or your first deserted wife turns up unexpectedly from the West Indies, you'll realize the pull of havin' a private detective in the family. "Delicate private business arranged with tact and discretion. Investigations undertaken. Divorce evidence a specialty. Every guarantee!" Come, now.'

'Ass!' said Lord Denver, throwing the newspaper violently into his armchair. 'When do you want the car?'

'Almost at once. I say, Jerry, I'm taking Mother up with me.'

'Why should she be mixed up in it?'

'Well, I want her help.'

'I call it most unsuitable,' said the Duke.

The Dowager Duchess, however, made no objection.

'I used to know her quite well,' she said, 'when she was Christine Ford. Why, dear?'

I need not repeat any more of his conversation, as it became unpleasant and incoherent, and I could not bring him back to the events of Monday night. I was unable to get rid of him till three. He cried on my neck, and said I was the bird, and you were the governor for him. He said that Sir Julian would be greatly annoyed with him for coming home so late, but Sunday night was his night out and if anything was said about it he would give notice. I think he will be ill-advised to do so, as I feel he is not a man I could conscientiously recommend if I were in Sir Julian Freke's place. I noticed that his boot-heels were slightly worn down.

I should wish to add, as a tribute to the great merits of your lordship's cellar, that, although I was obliged to drink a somewhat large quantity both of the Cockburn '68 and the 1800 Napoleon I feel no headache or other ill effects this morning.

Trusting that your lordship is deriving real benefit from the country air, and that the little information I have been able to obtain will prove satisfactory, I remain.

With respectful duty to all the family,

Obediently yours,
MERVYN BUNTER.

'Y'know,' said Lord Peter thoughtfully to himself, 'I sometimes think Mervyn Bunter's pullin' my leg. What is it, Soames?'

'A telegram, my lord.'

'Parker,' said Lord Peter, opening it. It said:

DESCRIPTION RECOGNISED CHELSEA WORKHOUSE. UNKNOWN VAGRANT INJURED STREET ACCIDENT WEDNESDAY WEEK. DIED WORKHOUSE MONDAY. DELIVERED ST LUKE'S SAME EVENING BY ORDER FREKE. MUCH PUZZLED. PARKER.

'Perhaps he looked like it. Did you see his head?'

'No.'

'Who had the head?'

'I don't know—oh, yes, I do, though. Old Freke bagged the head himself, and little Bouncible Binns was very cross about it, because he'd been promised a head to do with old Scrooger.'

'I see. What was Sir Julian doing with the head?'

'He called us up and gave us a jaw on spinal haemorrhage and nervous lesions.'

'Yes. Well, go back to Tommy Pringle.'

Tommy Pringle's joke was repeated, not without some embarrassment.

'Quite so. Was that all?'

'No. The chap who was working with Tommy said that sort of thing came from over-feeding.'

'I deduce that Tommy Pringle's partner was interested in the alimentary canal.'

'Yes; and Tommy said, if he'd thought they'd feed you like that he'd go to the workhouse himself.'

'Then the man was a pauper from the workhouse?'

'Well, he must have been, I suppose.'

'Are workhouse paupers usually fat and well-fed?'

'Well, no—come to think of it, not as a rule.'

'In fact, it struck Tommy Pringle and his friend that this was something a little out of the way in a workhouse subject?'

'Yes.'

'And if the alimentary canal was so entertaining to these gentlemen, I imagine the subject had come by his death shortly after a full meal.'

'Yes—oh, yes—he'd have had to, wouldn't he?'

'Well, I don't know,' said Lord Peter. 'That's in your department, you know. That would be your inference, from what they said.'

'Oh, yes. Undoubtedly.'

'Yes; you wouldn't, for example, expect them to make that observation if the patient had been ill for a long time and fed on slops.'

'Of course not.'

'Well, you see, you really know a lot about it. On Tuesday week you were dissecting the arm muscles of a rheumatic middle-aged Jew, of sedentary habits, who had died shortly after eating a heavy meal, of some injury producing spinal haemorrhage and nervous lesions, and so forth, and who was presumed to come from the workhouse?'

'Yes.'

'And you could swear to those facts, if need were?'

'Well, if you put it in that way, I suppose I could.'

'Of course you could.'

Mr Piggott sat for some moments in contemplation.

'I say,' he said at last, 'I did know all that, didn't I?'

'Oh, yes—you knew it all right—like Socrates's slave.'

'Who's he?'

'A person in a book I used to read as a boy.'

"Oh—does he come in 'The Last Days of Pompeii'?"

'No—another book—I daresay you escaped it. It's rather dull.'

'I never read much except Henty and Fenimore Cooper at school.... But—have I got rather an extra good memory, then?'

'You have a better memory than you credit yourself with.'

'Then why can't I remember all the medical stuff? It all goes out of my head like a sieve.'

'Well, why can't you?' said Lord Peter, standing on the hearthrug and smiling down at his guest.

'Well,' said the young man, 'the chaps who examine one don't ask the same sort of questions you do.'

'No?'

'No—they leave you to remember all by yourself. And it's beastly hard. Nothing to catch hold of, don't you know? But, I say—how did you know about Tommy Pringle being the funny man and— '

BUNTER: Just as well. There's nothing I find more wearisome, Mr Cummings, than sitting up to see visitors out.

CUMMINGS: Oh, I didn't see this one out. Sir Julian let him out himself at ten o'clock or thereabouts. I heard the gentleman shout 'Good-night' and off he goes.

BUNTER: Does Sir Julian always do that?

CUMMINGS: Well, that depends. If he sees visitors downstairs, he lets them out himself: if he sees them upstairs in the library, he rings for me.

BUNTER: This was a downstairs visitor, then?

CUMMINGS: Oh, yes. Sir Julian opened the door to him, I remember. He happened to be working in the hall. Though now I come to think of it, they went up to the library afterwards. That's funny. I know they did, because I happened to go up to the hall with coals, and I heard them upstairs. Besides, Sir Julian rang for me in the library a few minutes later. Still, anyway, we heard him go at ten, or it may have been a bit before. He hadn't only stayed about three-quarters of an hour. However, as I was saying, there was Sir Julian banging in and out of the private door all night, and a bath at three in the morning, and up again for breakfast at eight—it beats me. If I had all his money, curse me if I'd go poking about with dead men in the middle of the night. I'd find something better to do with my time, eh, Mr Bunter—

can't help themselves. A visitor will come in unexpectedly and keep them late, perhaps.

CUMMINGS: That's true enough, Mr Bunter. Now I come to think of it, there *was* a gentleman come in on Monday evening. Not that he came late, but he stayed about an hour, and may have put Sir Julian behindhand.

BUNTER: Very likely. Let me give you some more port, Mr Cummings. Or a little of Lord Peter's old brandy.

CUMMINGS: A little of the brandy, thank you, Mr Bunter. I suppose you have the run of the cellar here. [*He winked at me.*]

'Trust me for that,' I said, and I fetched him the Napoleon. I assure your lordship it went to my heart to pour it out for a man like that. However, seeing we had got on the right tack, I felt it wouldn't be wasted.

'I'm sure I wish it was always gentlemen that come here at night,' I said. (Your lordship will excuse me, I am sure, making such a suggestion.)

('Good God,' said Lord Peter, 'I wish Bunter was less thorough in his methods.')

CUMMINGS: Oh, he's that sort, his lordship, is he? [*He chuckled and poked me. I suppress a portion of his conversation here, which could not fail to be as offensive to your lordship as it was to myself. He went on*] No, it's none of that with Sir Julian. Very few visitors at night, and always gentlemen. And going early as a rule, like the one I mentioned.

'I didn't, till you told me.'

'No; I know. But how did you know he'd be there if you did ask? I mean to say—I say,' said Mr Piggott, who was becoming mellowed by influences themselves not unconnected with the alimentary canal—'I say, are you rather clever, or am I rather stupid?'

'No, no,' said Lord Peter, 'it's me. I'm always askin' such stupid questions, everybody thinks I must mean somethin' by 'em.'

This was too involved for Mr Piggott.

'Never mind,' said Parker, soothingly, "he's always like that. You mustn't take any notice. He can't help it. It's premature senile decay, often observed in the families of hereditary legislators. Go away, Wimsey, and play us the 'Beggar's Opera,' or something."

'That's good enough, isn't it?' said Lord Peter, when the happy Mr Piggott had been despatched home after a really delightful evening.

'I'm afraid so,' said Parker. 'But it seems almost incredible.'

'There's nothing incredible in human nature,' said Lord Peter; 'at least, in educated human nature. Have you got that exhumation order?'

'I shall have it tomorrow. I thought of fixing up with the workhouse people for tomorrow afternoon. I shall have to go and see them first.'

'Right you are; I'll let my mother know.'

'I begin to feel like you, Wimsey, I don't like this job.'

'I like it a deal better than I did.'

'You are really certain we're not making a mistake?'

Lord Peter had strolled across to the window. The curtain was not perfectly drawn, and he stood gazing out through the gap into lighted Piccadilly. At this he turned round:

'If we are,' he said, 'we shall know tomorrow, and no harm will have been done. But I rather think you will receive a certain amount of confirmation on your way home. Look here, Parker, d'you know, if I were you I'd spend the night here. There's a spare bedroom; I can easily put you up.'

Parker stared at him.

'Do you mean—I'm likely to be attacked?'

'I think it very likely indeed.'

'Is there anybody in the street?'

'Not now; there was half-an-hour ago.'

'When Piggott left?'

'Yes.'

'I say—I hope the boy is in no danger.'

'That's what I went down to see. I don't think so. Fact is, I don't suppose anybody would imagine we'd exactly made a confidant of Piggott. But I think you and I are in danger. You'll stay?'

'I'm damned if I will, Wimsey. Why should I run away?'

'Bosh!' said Peter. 'You'd run away all right if you believed me, and why not? You don't believe me. In fact, you're still not certain I'm on the right tack. Go in peace, but don't say I didn't warn you.'

'I won't; I'll dictate a message with my dying breath to say I was convinced.'

'Well, don't walk—take a taxi.'

'Very well, I'll do that.'

'And don't let anybody else get into it.'

'No.'

It was a raw, unpleasant night. A taxi deposited a load of people returning from the theatre at the block of flats next door, and Parker secured it for himself. He was just giving the address to the driver, when a man came hastily running up from a side street. He was in evening dress and an overcoat. He rushed up, signalling frantically.

'Sir—sir!—dear me! why, it's Mr Parker! How fortunate! If you would be so kind—summoned from the club—a sick friend—can't find a taxi—everybody going home from the theatre—if I might share your cab—you are returning to Bloomsbury? I want Russell Square—if I might presume—a matter of life and death.'

CUMMINGS: Have you, now? Well, this was at three. Three o'clock in the morning we was waked up. I give you *my* word.

BUNTER: You don't say so, Mr Cummings.

CUMMINGS: He cuts up diseases, you see, Mr Bunter, and then he don't like to go to bed till he's washed the bacilluses off, if you understand me. Very natural, too, I daresay. But what I say is, the middle of the night's no time for a gentleman to be occupying his mind with diseases.

BUNTER: These great men have their own way of doing things.

CUMMINGS: Well, all I can say is, it isn't my way. [*I could believe that, your lordship. Cummings has no signs of greatness about him, and his trousers are not what I would wish to see in a man of his profession.*]

BUNTER: Is he habitually as late as that, Mr Cummings?

CUMMINGS: Well, no, Mr Bunter, I will say, not as a general rule. He apologized, too, in the morning, and said he would have the cistern seen to—and very necessary, in my opinion, for the air gets into the pipes, and the groaning and screeching as goes on is something awful. Just like Niagara, if you follow me, Mr Bunter, I give you *my* word.

BUNTER: Well, that's as it should be, Mr Cummings. One can put up with a great deal from a gentleman that has the manners to apologize. And, of course, sometimes they