'Come, Wimsey—you're not going to pretend that Robert had any interest in his grandfather's dying before Lady Dormer. On the contrary.'

'No—but he might have had some interest in his dying before he made a will. Those notes on that bit of paper. The larger share was to go to George. That doesn't entirely agree with what Robert said. And if there was no will, Robert stood to get everything.'

'So he did. But by killing the General then, he made sure of getting nothing at all.'

'That's the awkwardness. Unless he thought Lady Dormer was already dead. But I don't see how he could have thought that. Or unless— '

'Well?'

'Unless he gave his grandfather a pill or something to be taken at some future time, and the old boy took it too soon by mistake.'

'That idea of a delayed-action pill is the most tiresome thing about this case. It makes almost anything possible.'

'Including, of course, the theory of its being given to him by Miss Dorland.'

'That's what I'm going to interview the nurse about, the minute I can get hold of her. But we've got away from George.'

'You're right. Let's face George. I don't want to, though. Like the lady in Maeterlinck who's running round the table while her husband tries to polish her off with a hatchet, I am not gay. George is the nearest in point of time. In fact he fits very well in point of time. He parted from General Fentiman at about half-past six, and Robert found Fentiman dead at about eight o'clock. So allowing that the stuff was given in a pill— '

'Which it would have to be in a taxi,' interjected Parker.

'As you say—in a pill, which would take a bit longer to get working than the same stuff taken in solution—why then the General might quite well have been able to get to the Bellona and see Robert before collapsing.'

'Very nice. But how did George get the drug?'

'I know, that's the first difficulty.'

'And how did he happen to have it on him just at that time? He couldn't possibly have known that General Fentiman would run across him just at that moment. Even if he'd known of his being at Lady Dormer's, he couldn't be expecting him to go from there to Harley Street.'

'He might have been carrying the stuff about with him, waiting for a good opportunity to use it. And when the old man called him up and started jawing him about his conduct and all that, he thought he'd better do the job quick, before he was cut out of the will.'

'Um!—but why should George be such a fool, then, as to admit he'd never heard about Lady Dormer's will? If he had heard of it, we couldn't possibly suspect him. He'd only to say the General told him about it in the taxi.'

'I suppose it hadn't struck him in that light.'

'Then George is a bigger ass than I took him for.'

'Possibly he is,' said Parker, dryly. 'At any rate, I have put a man on to make inquiries at his home.'

'Oh! have you? I say, do you know, I wish I'd left this case alone. What the deuce did it matter if old Fentiman was pushed painlessly off a bit before his time? He was simply indecently ancient.'

'We'll see if you say that in sixty years' time,' said Parker.

'By that time we shall, I hope, be moving in different circles. I shall be in the one devoted to murderers and you in the much lower and hotter one devoted for those who tempt others to murder them. I wash my hands of this case, Charles. There's nothing for me to do now you have come into it. It bores and annoys me. Let's talk about something else.'

Wimsey might wash his hands, but, like Pontius Pilate, he found society irrationally determined to connect him with an irritating and unsatisfactory case.

At midnight, the telephone bell rang.

He had just gone to bed, and cursed it.

'Tell them I'm out,' he shouted to Bunter, and cursed again on hearing the man assure the unknown caller that he would see whether his lordship had returned. Disobedience in Bunter spelt urgent necessity.

'Well?'

'It is Mrs George Fentiman, my lord; she appears to be in great distress. If your lordship wasn't in I was to beg you to communicate with her as soon as you arrived.'

'Punk! they're not on the 'phone.'

'No, my lord.'

'Did she say what the matter was?'

'She began by asking if Mr George Fentiman was here, my lord.'

'Oh, hades!'

Bunter advanced gently with his master's dressing-gown and slippers. Wimsey thrust himself into them savagely and padded away to the telephone.

'Hullo!'

'Is that Lord Peter?—Oh, *good*!' The line sighed with relief—a harsh sound, like a death-rattle. 'Do you know where George is?'

'No idea. Hasn't he come home?'

'No—and I'm frightened. Some people were here this morning…'

'The police.'

'Yes…George…they found something…I can't say it all over the 'phone…but George went off to Walmisley-Hubbard's with the car…and they say he never came back there…and…you remember that time he was so funny before…and got lost…'

'Your six minutes are up,' boomed the voice of the Exchange, 'will you have another call?'

'Yes, please…oh, don't cut us off…wait…oh! I haven't any more pennies…Lord Peter…'

'I'll come round at once,' said Wimsey, with a groan.

'Oh, thank you—thank you so much!'

'I say—where's Robert?'

'Your six minutes are up,' said the voice, finally, and the line went dead with a metallic crash.

'Get me my clothes,' said Wimsey, bitterly—'give me those loathsome and despicable rags which I hoped to have put off forever. Get me a taxi. Get me a drink. Macbeth has murdered sleep. Oh! and get me Robert Fentiman, first.'

Major Fentiman was not in town, said Woodward. He had gone back to Richmond again. Wimsey tried to get through to Richmond. After a long time, a female voice, choked with sleep and fury, replied. Major Fentiman had not come home. Major Fentiman kept very late hours. Would she give Major Fentiman a message when he did come in? Indeed she would not. She had other things to do than to stay up all night answering the telephone calls and giving messages to Major Fentiman. This was the second time that night, and she had told the other party that she could not be responsible for telling Major Fentiman this, that and the other. Would she leave a note for Major

Chapter 18

Picture-cards

'So I've put a man in and had all the things in that cupboard taken away for examination,' said Parker.

Lord Peter shook his head.

'I wish I had been there,' he said, 'I should have liked to see those paintings. However— '

'They might have conveyed something to you,' said Parker, 'you're artistic. You can come along and look at them any time, of course. But it's the time factor that's worrying me, you know. Supposing she gave the old boy digitalin in his B and S, why should it wait all that time before working? According to the books, it ought to have popped him off in about an hour's time. It was a biggish dose, according to Lubbock.'

'I know. I think you're up against a snag there. That's why I should have liked to see the pictures.'

Parker considered this apparent *non sequitur* for a few moments and gave it up.

'George Fentiman— ' he began.

'Yes,' said Wimsey, 'George Fentiman. I must be getting emotional in my old age, Charles, for I have an unconquerable dislike to examining the question of George Fentiman's opportunities.'

'Bar Robert,' pursued Parker, ruthlessly, 'he was the last interested person to see General Fentiman.'

'Yes—by the way, we have only Robert's unsupported word for what happened in that last interview between him and the old man.'

Parker stared aghast; it might possibly be a symbolic representation of Mrs Mitcham's character, for it was very hard and spiky; but it looked more like a Dutch doll, with its triangular nose, like a sharp-edged block of wood, and its eyes mere dots in an expanse of liver-coloured cheek.

'It's not very like her,' he said, doubtfully.

'It's not meant to be.'

'This seems better—I mean, I like this better,' said Parker, turning the next picture up hurriedly.

'Oh, that's nothing—just a fancy head.'

Evidently this picture—the head of a rather cadaverous man, with a sinister smile and a slight cast in the eye—was despised—a Philistine backsliding, almost like a human being. It was put away, and Parker tried to concentrate his attention on a 'Madonna and Child' which, to Parker's simple evangelical mind, seemed an abominable blasphemy.

Happily, Miss Dorland soon wearied, even of her paintings, and flung them all back into the corner.

'D'you want anything else?' she demanded abruptly. 'Here's that address.'

Parker took it.

'Just one more question,' he said, looking her hard in the eyes. 'Before Lady Dormer died—before General Fentiman came to see her—did you know what provision she had made for you and for him in her will?'

The girl stared back at him, and he saw panic come into her eyes. It seemed to flow all over her like a wave. She clenched her hands at her sides, and her miserable eyes dropped beneath his gaze, shifting as though looking for a way out.

'Well?' said Parker.

'No!' she said. 'No! of course not. Why should I?' Then, surprisingly, a dull crimson flush flooded her sallow cheeks and ebbed away, leaving her looking like death.

'Go away,' she said, furiously, 'you make me sick.'

Fentiman, asking him to go round to his brother's house at once? Well now, was it reasonable to expect her to sit up on a bitter cold night writing letters? Of course not, but this was a case of urgent illness. It would be a very great kindness. Just that—to go round to his brother's house and say the call came from Lord Peter Wimsey.

'Who?'

'Lord Peter Wimsey.'

'Very well, sir. I beg your pardon if I was a bit short, but really— '

'You weren't, you snobby old cat, you were infernally long,' breathed his lordship inaudibly. He thanked her, and rang off.

Sheila Fentiman was anxiously waiting for him on the doorstep, so that he was saved the embarrassment of trying to remember which was the right number of rings to give. She clasped his hand eagerly as she drew him in.

'Oh! it is good of you. I'm so worried. I say, don't make a noise, will you? They complain, you know.' She spoke in a harassed whisper.

'Blast them, let them complain,' said Wimsey, cheerfully. 'Why shouldn't you make a row when George is upset? Besides, if we whisper, they'll think we're no better than we ought to be. Now, my child, what's all this? You're as cold as a *pêche Melba*. That won't do. Fire half out—where's the whisky?'

'Hush! I'm all right, really. George— '

'You're not all right. Nor am I. As George Robey says, this getting up from my warm bed and going into the cold night air doesn't suit me.' He flung a generous shovelful of coals on the fire and thrust the poker between the bars. 'And you've had no grub. No wonder you're feeling awful.'

Two places were set at the table—untouched—waiting for George. Wimsey plunged into the kitchen premises, followed by Sheila uttering agitated remonstrances. He found some disagreeable remnants—a watery stew, cold and sodden; a basin half-full of some kind of tinned soup; a chill suet pudding put away on a shelf.

'Does your woman cook for you? I suppose she does, as you're both out all day. Well, she can't cook, my child. No matter, here's some Bovril—she can't have hurt that. You go and sit down and I'll make you some.'

'Mrs Munns— '

'Blow Mrs Munns!'

'But I must tell you about George.'

He looked at her, and decided that she really must tell him about George.

'I'm sorry. I didn't mean to bully. One has an ancestral idea that women must be treated like imbeciles in a crisis. Centuries of the "women-and-children-first" idea, I suppose. Poor devils!'

'Who, the women?'

'Yes. No wonder they sometimes lose their heads. Pushed into corners, told nothing of what's happening and made to sit quiet and do nothing. Strong men would go dotty in the circs. I suppose that's why we've always grabbed the privilege of rushing about and doing the heroic bits.'

'That's quite true. Give me the kettle.'

'No, no. I'll do that. You sit down and—I mean, sorry, *take* the kettle. Fill it, light the gas, put it on. And tell me about George.'

The trouble, it seemed, had begun at breakfast. Ever since the story of the murder had come out, George had been very nervy and jumpy, and, to Sheila's horror, had 'started muttering again.' 'Muttering,' Wimsey remembered, had formerly been the prelude to one of George's 'queer fits.' These had been a form of shell-shock, and they had generally ended in his going off and wandering about in a distraught manner for several days, sometimes with partial and occasionally with complete temporary loss of memory. There was the time when he had been found dancing naked in a field among a flock of sheep and singing to them. It had been the more ludicrously painful in that George was altogether tone-deaf, so that his singing, though loud, was like a hoarse and rumbling wind in the chimney. Then there was a dreadful time when George had deliberately walked into a bonfire. That was when they had been staying down in the country. George had been badly burnt, and the shock of the pain had brought him round. He never remembered afterwards why he had tried to do these things, and had only the faintest recollection of having done them at all. The next vagary might be even more disconcerting.

At any rate, George had been 'muttering.'

They were at breakfast that morning, when they saw two men coming up the path. Sheila, who sat opposite the window, saw them first, and said carelessly: 'Hullo! who are these? They look like plainclothes policemen.' George took one look, jumped up and rushed out of the room. She called to him to know what was the matter, but he did not answer, and she heard him 'rummaging' in the back room, which was the bedroom. She was going to him,

drawn and hot and restless in colour. Parker was no judge of art; he would have liked to get Wimsey's opinion. He explored further. The table with the Bunsen burner was bare, but in a cupboard close by he discovered a quantity of chemical apparatus of the kind he remembered using at school. Everything had been tidily washed and stacked away. Nellie's job, he imagined. There were a number of simple and familiar chemical substances in jars and packages, occupying a couple of shelves. They would probably have to be analysed, he thought, to see if they were all they seemed. And what useless nonsense it all was, he thought to himself; anything suspicious would obviously have been destroyed weeks before. Still, there it was. A book in several volumes on the top shelf caught his attention: it was Quain's Dictionary of Medicine. He took down a volume in which he noticed a paper mark. Opening it at the marked place, his eye fell upon the words: 'rigour Mortis,' and, a little later on—'action of certain poisons.' He was about to read more, when he heard Miss Dorland's voice just behind him.

'That's all nothing,' she said, 'I don't do any of that muck now. It was just a passing craze. I paint, really. What do you think of this?' She indicated the unpleasant landscape.

Parker said it was very good.

'Are these your work, too?' he asked, indicating the other canvases.

'Yes,' she said.

He turned a few of them to the light, noticing at the same time how dusty they were. Nellie had scamped this bit of the work—or perhaps had been told not to touch. Miss Dorland showed a trifle more animation than she had done hitherto, while displaying her works. Landscape seemed to be rather a new departure; most of the canvases were figure-studies. Mr Parker thought that on the whole, the artist had done wisely to turn to landscape. He was not well acquainted with the modern school of thought in painting, and had difficulty in expressing his opinion of these curious figures, with their faces like eggs and their limbs like rubber.

'That is the Judgement of Paris,' said Miss Dorland.

'Oh, yes,' said Parker. 'And this?'

'Oh, just a study of a woman dressing. It's not very good. I think this portrait of Mrs Mitcham is rather decent, though.'

'It's just a matter of routine. We are under orders to see everything there is to see,' replied Parker, reassuringly.

They went upstairs. A door on the first-floor landing immediately opposite the head of the staircase led into a pleasant, lofty room, with old-fashioned bedroom furniture in it.

'This is my aunt's room. She wasn't really my aunt, of course, but I called her so.'

'Quite. Where does that second door lead to?'

'That's the dressing-room. Nurse Armstrong slept there while Auntie was ill.'

Parker glanced in to the dressing-room, took in the arrangement of the bedroom and expressed himself satisfied.

She walked past him without acknowledgment while he held the door open. She was a sturdily-built girl, but moved with a languor distressing to watch—slouching, almost aggressively unalluring.

'You want to see the studio?'

'Please.'

She led the way down the six steps and along a short passage to the room which, as Parker already knew, was built out at the back over the kitchen premises. He mentally calculated the distance as he went.

The studio was large and well-lit by its glass roof. One end was furnished like a sitting-room; the other was left bare, and devoted to what Nellie called 'mess.' A very ugly picture (in Parker's opinion) stood on an easel. Other canvases were stacked round the walls. In one corner was a table covered with American cloth, on which stood a gas-ring, protected by a tin plate, and a Bunsen burner.

'I'll look up that address,' said Miss Dorland, indifferently, 'I've got it here somewhere.'

She began to rummage in an untidy desk. Parker strolled up to the business end of the room, and explored it with eyes, nose and fingers.

The ugly picture on the easel was newly-painted; the smell told him that, and the dabs of paint on the palette were still soft and sticky. Work had been done there within the last two days, he was sure. The brushes had been stuck at random into a small pot of turpentine. He lifted them out; they were still clogged with paint. The picture itself was a landscape, he thought, roughly

when she heard Mr Munns open the door to the policemen and then heard them inquiring for George. Mr Munns ushered them into the front room with a grim face on which 'police' seemed written in capital letters. George—

At this point the kettle boiled. Sheila was taking it off the stove to make the Bovril, when Wimsey became aware of a hand on his coat-collar. He looked round into the face of a gentleman who appeared not to have shaved for several days.

'Now then,' said this apparition, 'what's the meaning of this?'

'Which,' added an indignant voice from the door, 'I thought as there was something behind all this talk of the Captain being missing. You didn't expect him to be missing, I suppose, ma'am. Oh, dear no! Nor your gentleman friend, neither, sneaking up in a taxi and you waiting at the door so's Munns and me shouldn't hear. But I'd have you know this is a respectable house, Lord Knows Who or whatever you call yourself—more likely one of these low-down confidence fellers, I expect, if the truth was known. With a monocle too, like that man we was reading about in the News of the World. And in my kitchen too, and drinking my Bovril in the middle of the night, the impudence! Not to speak of the goings-in-and-out all day, banging the front door, and that was the police come here this morning, you think I didn't know? Up to something, that's what they've been, the pair of them, and the captain as he says he is but that's as may be, I daresay he had his reasons for clearing off, and the sooner you goes after him my fine madam, the better I'll be pleased, I can tell you.'

'That's right,' said Mr Munns—'ow!'

Lord Peter had removed the intrusive hand from his collar with a sharp jerk which appeared to cause anguish out of all proportion to the force used.

'I'm glad you've come along,' he said. 'In fact, I was just going to give you a call. Have you anything to drink in the house, by the way?'

'Drink?' cried Mrs Munns on a high note, 'the impudence! And if I see you, Joe, giving drinks to thieves and worse in the middle of the night in my kitchen, you'll get a piece of my mind. Coming in here as bold as brass and the captain run away, and asking for drink— '

'Because,' said Wimsey, fingering his note-case, 'the public houses in this law-abiding neighbourhood are of course closed. Otherwise a bottle of Scotch— '

Mr Munns appeared to hesitate.

'Call yourself a man!' said Mrs Munns.

'Of course,' said Mr Munns, 'if I was to go in a friendly manner to Jimmy Rowe at the Dragon, and ask him to give me a bottle of Johnny Walker as a friend to a friend, and provided no money was to pass between him and me, that is— '

'A good idea,' said Wimsey, cordially.

Mrs Munns gave a loud shriek.

'The ladies,' said Mr Munns, 'gets nervous at times.' He shrugged his shoulders.

'I daresay a drop of Scotch wouldn't do Mrs Munns's nerves any harm,' said Wimsey.

'If you dare, Joe Munns,' said the landlady, 'if you dare to go out at this time of night, hob-nobbing with Jimmy Rowe and making a fool of yourself with burglars and such— '

Mr Munns executed a sudden volte-face.

'You shut up!' he shouted. 'Always sticking your face in where you aren't wanted.'

'Are you speaking to me?'

'Yes. Shut up!'

Mrs Munns sat down suddenly on a kitchen chair and began to sniff.

'I'll just hop round to the "Dragon" now, sir,' said Mr Munns, 'before old Jimmy goes to bed. And then we'll go into this here.'

He departed. Possibly he forgot what he had said about no money passing, for he certainly took the note which Wimsey absent-mindedly held out to him.

'Your drink's getting cold,' said Wimsey to Sheila.

She came across to him.

'Can't we get rid of these people?'

'In half a jiff. It's not good having a row with them. I'd do it like a shot, only, you see, you've got to stay on here for a bit, in case George comes back.'

'Of course. I'm sorry for all this upset, Mrs Munns,' she added, a little stiffly, 'but I'm so worried about my husband.'

'Husband?' snorted Mrs Munns. 'A lot husbands are to worry about. Look at that Joe. Off he goes to the Dragon, never mind what I say to him. They're

Her anxiety to shelve the subject of chemistry seemed to be conquering her reluctance to get on with the story.

'You were making chemical experiments—although Lady Dormer was so ill?' said Parker, severely.

'It was just to occupy my mind,' she muttered.

'What was the experiment?'

'I don't remember.'

'You can't remember at all?'

'NO!' she almost shouted at him.

'Never mind. You took the brandy upstairs?'

'Yes—at least, it isn't really upstairs. It's all on the same landing, only there are six steps up to Auntie's room. Nurse Armstrong met me at the door, and said "He's better now," and I went in and saw General Fentiman sitting in a chair, looking very queer and gray. He was behind a screen where Auntie couldn't see him, or it would have been a great shock to her. Nurse said, "I've given him his drops and I think a little brandy will put him right again." So we gave him the brandy—only a small dose, and after a bit, he got less deathly-looking and seemed to be breathing better. I told him we were sending for the doctor, and he said he'd rather go round to Harley Street. I thought it was rash, but Nurse Armstrong said he seemed really better, and it would be a mistake to worry him into doing what he didn't want. So I told Nellie to warn the doctor and send William for a taxi. General Fentiman seemed stronger then, so we helped him downstairs and he went off in the taxi.'

Out of this spate of words, Parker fixed on the one thing he had not heard before.

'What drops were those the Nurse gave him?'

'His own. He had them in his pocket.'

'Do you think she could possibly have given him too much? Was the quantity marked on the bottle?'

'I haven't the remotest idea. You'd better ask her.'

'Yes, I shall want to see her, if you will kindly tell me where to find her.'

'I've got the address upstairs. Is that all you want?'

'I should just like, if I may, to see Lady Dormer's room and the studio.'

'What for?'

This roused the girl a little. 'Decent servants don't knock at doors,' she said, with a contemptuous rudeness; 'she came in, of course.'

'I beg your pardon,' retorted Parker, stung. 'I thought she might have knocked at the door of your private room.'

'No.'

'What did she say to you?'

'Can't you ask *her* all these questions?'

'I have done so. But servants are not always accurate; I should like your corroboration.' Parker had himself in hand again now, and spoke pleasantly.

'She said that Nurse Armstrong had sent her for some brandy, because General Fentiman was feeling faint, and told her to call me. So I said she had better go and telephone Dr Penberthy while I took the brandy.'

All this was muttered hurriedly, and in such a low tone that the detective could hardly catch the words.

'And then did you take the brandy straight upstairs?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Taking it straight out of Nellie's hands? Or did she put it down on the table or anywhere?'

'How the hell should I remember?'

Parker disliked a swearing woman, but he tried hard not to let this prejudice him.

'You can't remember—at any rate, you know you went straight on up with it? You didn't wait to do anything else?'

She seemed to pull herself together and make an effort to remember.

'If it's so important as that, I think I stopped to turn down something that was boiling.'

'Boiling? On the fire?'

'On the gas-ring,' she said, impatiently.

'What sort of thing.'

'Oh, nothing—some stuff.'

'Tea or cocoa, or something like that, do you mean?'

'No—some chemical things,' she said, letting the words go reluctantly.

'Were you making chemical experiments?'

'Yes—I did a bit—just for fun—a hobby, you know—I don't do anything at it now. I took up the brandy— '

dirt, that's what husbands are, the whole pack of them. And I don't care what anybody says.'

'Are they?' said Wimsey. 'Well, I'm not one—yet—so you needn't mind what you say to me.'

'It's the same thing,' said the lady, viciously, 'husbands and parricides, there's not a half-penny to choose between them. Only parricides aren't respectable—but then, they're easier got rid of.'

'Oh!' replied Wimsey, 'but I'm not a parricide either—not Mrs Fentiman's parricide at any rate, I assure you. Hullo! here's Joe. Did you get the doings, old man? You did? Good work. Now, Mrs Munns, have just a spot with us. You'll feel all the better for it. And why shouldn't we go into the sitting-room where it's warmer?'

Mrs Munns complied. 'Oh, well,' she said, 'here's friends all round. But you'll allow it all looked a bit queer, now, didn't it? And the police this morning, asking all those questions, and emptying the dust-bin all over the back-yard.'

'Whatever did they want with the dust-bin?'

'Lord knows; and that Cummins woman looking on all the time over the wall. I can tell you, I was vexed. "Why, Mrs Munns," she said, "have you been poisoning people?" she said. "I always told you," she said "your cooking 'ud do for somebody one of these days." The nasty cat.'

'What a rotten thing to say,' said Wimsey, sympathetically. 'Just jealousy, I expect. But what did the police find in the dust-bin?'

'Find? Them find anything? I should like to see them finding things in my dust-bin. The less I see of their interfering ways the better I'm pleased. I told them so. I said, "If you want to come upsetting my dust-bin," I said, "you'll have to come with a search-warrant," I said. That's the law and they couldn't deny it. They said Mrs Fentiman had given them leave to look, so I told them Mrs Fentiman had no leave to give them. It was my dust-bin, I told them, not hers. So they went off with a flea in their ear.'

'That's the stuff to give 'em, Mrs Munns.'

'Not but what I'm respectable. If the police come to me in a right and lawful manner, I'll gladly give them any help they want. I don't want to get into trouble, not for any number of captains. But interference with a free-born

woman and no search-warrant I will *not* stand. And they can either come to me in a fitting way or they can go and whistle for their bottle.'

'What bottle?' asked Wimsey, quickly.

'The bottle they were looking for in my dust-bin, what the captain put there after breakfast.'

Sheila gave a faint cry.

'What bottle was that, Mrs Munns?'

'One of them little tablet bottles,' said Mrs Munns, 'same as you have standing on the wash-hand stand, Mrs Fentiman. When I saw the Captain smashing it up in the yard with a poker— '

'There now, Primrose,' said Mr Munns, 'can't you see as Mrs Fentiman ain't well?'

'I'm quite all right,' said Sheila, hastily, pushing away the hair which clung damply to her forehead. 'What was my husband doing?'

'I saw him,' said Mrs Munns, 'run out into the back-yard—just after your breakfast it was, because I recollect Munns was letting the officers into the house at the time. Not that I knew then who it was, for, if you will excuse me mentioning of it, I was in the outside lavatory, and that was how I come to see the Captain. Which ordinarily, you can't see the dust-bin from the house, my lord I should say, I suppose, if you really are one, but you meet so many bad characters nowadays that one can't be too careful—on account of the lavatory standing out as you may say and hiding it.'

'Just so,' said Wimsey.

'So when I saw the captain breaking the bottle as I said, and throwing the bits into the dust-bin, "Hullo!" I said, "that's funny," and I went to see what it was and I put it in an envelope, thinking, you see, as it might be something poisonous, and the cat such a dreadful thief as he is, I never can keep him out of that dust-bin. And when I came in, I found the police here. So after a bit, I found them poking about in the yard and I asked them what they were doing there. Such a mess as they'd made, you never would believe. So they showed me a little cap they'd found, same as it might be off that tablet-bottle. Did I know where the rest of it was? they said. And I said, what business had they got with the dust-bin at all. So they said— '

'Yes, I know,' said Wimsey. 'I think you acted very sensibly, Mrs Munns. And what did you do with the envelope and things?'

'I just want to have any details you can give me about General Fentiman's visit to his sister. Mrs Mitcham brought him up to her bedroom, I understand.'

She gave a sulky nod.

'You were there?'

She made no answer.

'Were you with Lady Dormer?' he insisted, rather more sharply.

'Yes.'

'And the nurse was there too?'

'Yes.'

She would not help him at all.

'What happened?'

'Nothing happened. I took him up to the bed and said, "Auntie, here's General Fentiman."'

'Lady Dormer was conscious, then?'

'Yes.'

'Very weak, of course?'

'Yes.'

'Did she say anything?'

'She said "Arthur!" that's all. And he said, "Felicity!" And I said, "You'd like to be alone," and went out.'

'Leaving the nurse there?'

'I couldn't dictate to the nurse. She had to look after her patient.'

'Quite so. Did she stay there throughout the interview?'

'I haven't the least idea.'

'Well,' said Parker, patiently, 'you can tell me this. When you went in with the brandy, the nurse was in the bedroom then?'

'Yes, she was.'

'Now, about the brandy. Nellie brought that up to you in the studio, she tells me.'

'Yes.'

'Did she come into the studio?'

'I don't understand.'

'Did she come right into the room, or did she knock at the door and did you come out to her on the landing?'