
Opening Extract from...

Sidney Chambers and the Persistence of Love

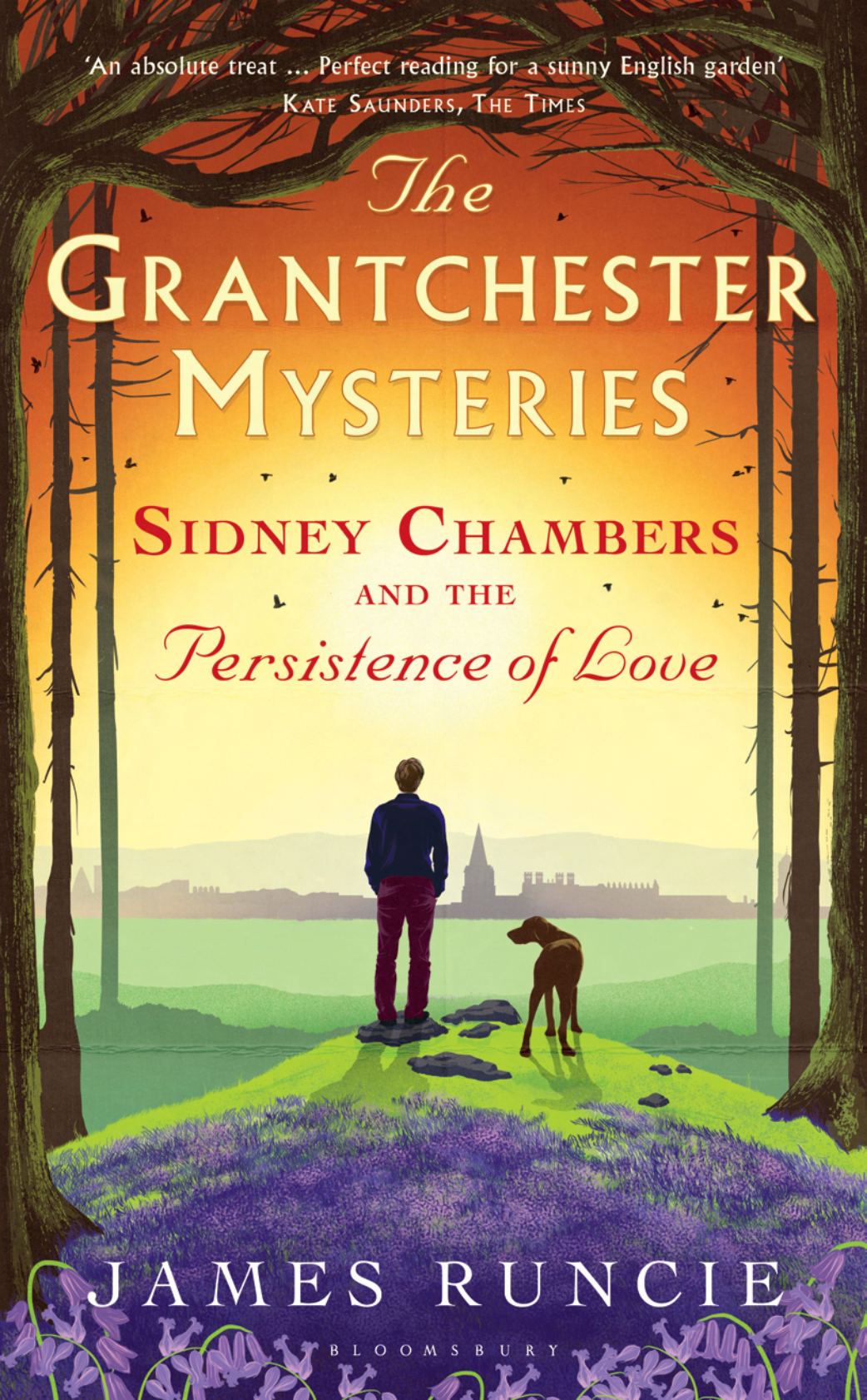
Written by James Runcie

Published by Bloomsbury Publishing

'An absolute treat ... Perfect reading for a sunny English garden'
KATE SAUNDERS, THE TIMES

The Grantchester Mysteries

Sidney Chambers and the Persistence of Love



JAMES RUNCIE

BLOOMSBURY

The
GRANTCHESTER MYSTERIES

SIDNEY CHAMBERS
AND
THE
Persistence of Love

JAMES RUNCIE

BLOOMSBURY
LONDON • OXFORD • NEW YORK • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Publishing
An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square
London
WC1B 3DP
UK

1385 Broadway
New York
NY 10018
USA

www.bloomsbury.com

First published in Great Britain 2017

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: HB: 978-1-4088-7902-3
ePub: 978-1-4088-7903-0

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

The Bluebell Wood

Saturday 8 May, 1971

May was Sidney's best-loved month. After an overture of daffodils and tulips, the summer orchestra tuned to the sound of blackbirds, wood pigeons and the returning swifts. Each day outpaced its predecessor with new provision: an acceleration of green, a stretching light. The smell of wild garlic rose up in the hedgebanks. Warmth returned, and Hildegard served up the first asparagus of the year, with salmon, early peas, mint and new potatoes, followed by Sidney's favourite fruit: rhubarb, poached with ginger and honey.

Now aged seven and a half, Anna was just finishing her first year of Junior School and she was in the middle of a wild-flower project inspired by W. Keble Martin's *Concise British Flora in Colour*. Two years before, she had written to the author for advice, and the ninety-year-old priest had replied on a postcard to say that the natural world offered endless discovery, infinite possibilities. If she learned to appreciate the landscape around her then she would never be bored or lonely. Curiosity would keep her young.

Father and daughter were out walking through Nine Acre Wood by the River Ouse with Byron, their beloved

Labrador, alongside them. They ambled past the oak and ash trees, tall by a stream edged with swathes of ramsons and marsh marigolds, then went on through high cow parsley and flowering crab apple until they reached a sunlit clearing filled with early wood violets, herb Robert, meadow buttercups and sanicle.

This was a time for simple pleasures; a father, a lively young daughter and their dog out together in the countryside. A fringe had just been cut into Anna's short blonde hair and she was dressed tomboyishly, in dungarees over a long-sleeved yellow T-shirt. She put the flowers she had gathered in a hessian shopping bag: pink campion, ragged Robin, shepherd's-purse and germander speedwell. She liked getting home and making arrangements in glasses of water and painting them before putting them in her new press. Sometimes she was hesitant about doing so. She didn't like the flowers dying sooner than they needed to.

They stopped to rest, taking in the next vista and removing the sticky willy that had attached itself to their legs. They laughed when Byron attempted to chase a squirrel up a tree. He was so busy looking up that he ran straight into the trunk.

It was only when they were checking and consoling him that they noticed a strange shape under a group of silver birch ahead. By the stream, and next to a clump of monkshood and a swathe of bluebells that had yet to come into full flower, was the body of a man. He was not lying in the comfortable arrangement of someone asleep or at rest but the skewed position of a person who had either suffered a heart attack or been felled by an assailant. He lay on his

front, the bulk of his face hidden by an Australian bush hat, and he was wearing a well-worn anorak, jeans and hiking boots. A long grey ponytail, tied with an elastic band, stretched across his right shoulder and by his gloved hands (*Gloves,* Sidney thought, *in May?*) lay a basket of wild flowers.

'Is he dead, Daddy?'

'He might be sleeping.'

'I think he's dead.'

'Stay back, darling.'

'I want to see him.'

Sidney knelt down and checked for signs of life. There were none.

'What are we going to do?' Anna asked.

'The first thing is to pray for him.'

'So he is dead?'

'I am afraid so.'

'I'm scared.'

'Don't be.'

'Is he in heaven?'

'I don't know.'

'Aren't you supposed to know?'

Any words spoken in the silence seemed an affront to the dead.

Sidney stretched out his left arm and gathered his daughter to him. She knelt down beside him, put her hands together and closed her eyes.

Her father prayed: 'Go forth upon thy journey from this world, O Christian soul, in the name of God the Father Almighty who created thee; in the name of Jesus Christ who suffered for thee; in the name of the Holy Spirit who

strengthened thee; in communion with the blessed saints, and aided by angels and archangels, and all the armies of the heavenly host. May thy portion this day be in peace, and thy dwelling in the heavenly Jerusalem. Amen.'

Sidney turned to his daughter. 'We need to fetch help. Let's see if we can go back to the road and find a phone box.'

'Do you know who he is, Daddy?'

The man seemed familiar but Sidney couldn't quite place him. Just before he walked away, he remembered the gloves and looked at the basket the man had been carrying. It contained blue drifts of wolfsbane interspersed with old man's beard, sun spurge, racemes of yellow laburnum, black bryony, corncockle, foxgloves and cuckoo pint. There was a small bunch of creamy yellow euphonium-shaped flowers with deep purple-netted veins and broad leaves with white sticky hairs. Sidney realised it must be henbane, part of the deadly nightshade family, and asked himself one perplexing question: why were all the plants the man had been gathering poisonous?

His old friend and colleague, Inspector Keating, arrived within the hour. 'Take Anna and the dog home,' he said. 'This is no place for a child.'

Sidney had tried to distract his daughter by collecting more wild flowers as they waited near the roadside, but it was hard to think of anything other than the drama of the dead man. He wondered how often she would ask him about the discovery of the body and whether he could downplay the situation, concentrating on other matters, pretending nothing unusual had happened in the hope that Anna was still so

young that she might one day think the whole thing had been a dream.

When they got home and told Hildegard, all in a rush so that it was hard to take in, Anna asked again if the man would go to heaven and what it was like.

'It's a place without fear, my darling,' said Sidney, 'where people who have worried so much in life find a happiness that they had never been able to imagine.'

'Why can't they? If they *could* imagine it, wouldn't more people want to go there?'

Although it was possible the man had died from natural causes, and there was probably a good enough reason for the plants he had been gathering, Sidney could not help but brood on the nature of fate, the chance of discovery and the possible sequence of events that had led up to that moment. He went to his study where he began to pray, seeking some kind of guidance, the beginning of understanding. Was it a sin to be so suspicious so frequently, or was he using the natural intuition that God had given him? Was his role as an accidental detective making him less loving and less effective as a priest?

Byron slept under the kitchen table as Hildegard tried to distract their daughter from what she had seen with cooking and baking. She taught Anna how to bake *Leipziger Lerche*, the family's favourite German cupcake. Sidney referred to them as 'posh Bakewell tarts' and they cooked them in the same way Hildegard's mother had always done, roasting the almonds in the oven before wrapping them in a towel and bashing them to bits with a rolling pin. Anna helped to fold, knead and roll out the pastry before cutting it out and lining

the special moulds they had brought back from their last trip to Germany. She placed a little slip of marzipan and a dollop of apricot jam in the bottom of each case and her mother let her ladle in scoops of the filling. Hildegard then re-rolled the remaining pastry and cut it into narrow lengths. Anna laid two strips into a cross on the top of each filled case, creating a partial lid, before they were put in the oven for twenty minutes. As the buns baked, Hildegard went over to the piano in the drawing room and made up songs with her daughter. Sidney smiled as he watched how lovingly and cleverly his wife distracted Anna from the memory of the dead body under a tree.

That night he tucked his daughter in. He sat on the edge of the bed, finding room amidst the dolls, teddies and knitted animals. Anna sniffed at her special little rabbit as her father read from *Tom's Midnight Garden*. They had reached that part of the story where the hero can no longer find his dream garden and his friend Hatty has disappeared. What is real and who are the ghosts? Anna asked. Was the man they had found today already a ghost?

Outside it began to rain. Sidney could not help but feel responsible for bringing Anna's childhood closer to an end with the first sight of a dead body. When they reached the closing of the chapter, and Anna was about to snuggle down to sleep, she stopped to listen to the rain against the hard dark glass.

'Look, Daddy,' she said, 'the windows are crying.'

Two days later Inspector Keating came up to Ely for a couple of pints in the Prince Albert. The dead man had

been identified as Lenny Goddard, a local folk-singer, poet, forager, painter, decorator, real-ale drinker, knife sharpener and odd-job man. He lived on a houseboat on the Great Ouse, and he was married to one of Sidney's former parishioners.

'Stella Goddard. She says you know her.'

'I do, now you come to mention it. I think she's his third wife. She must be quite a bit younger than Lenny. She used to be a folk-singer too. I must have heard them sing together at some point, but it was in pubs or at summer parties when I was probably concentrating on something else. I thought I'd seen him before but I just didn't recognise him. He's aged quite badly.'

'Well, now he's died quite badly. I didn't know you were such a folkie. You're normally more of a jazz man.'

'I don't mind the odd ballad. I just think you need to watch out when they put their fingers over one ear.'

'Or poison in each other's stomachs.'

'You are suspicious?'

'I know *you* are. You mentioned the flowers he was gathering. We've had them checked and you're right. There's enough there to kill a whole village.'

'So I suppose you'd like me to ask a few questions, Geordie?'

'Word will get round. People will come and express their sympathy. It's been a horrible thing for Anna, a shocking discovery. You must be perplexed.'

'I am.'

'You can't understand it. You'll have to go and see the widow, and perhaps some of the people closest to Lenny.

They'll be upset. You'll be upset. Things will come out. You know the drill.'

Sidney went first to Anna's school to tell them what had happened and ask them to make allowances if she behaved a little oddly in the coming days. Her form teacher, Tom Tranton, was a small and portly botanist who had instigated the annual tradition of the Junior School wild-flower project and he affectionately referred to his pupils as 'the seedlings'. He sported a pair of dark-green corduroy trousers and a mustard-coloured pullover that looked as if it hadn't been taken off since 1954. This was worn under an old tweed jacket with so many rips and tears that he often joked that he slept outdoors. ('I've just come from the hedge! Woke up next to a lovely little grasshopper. We had quite a conversation. They do love a natter.')

Like a primary-school Keble Martin, Tom Tranton was famous amongst his former pupils for meticulous botanical drawings on the blackboard that displayed plant life and the process of photosynthesis. Everyone thought it a shame when he wiped the board clean.

'That is nature for you, boys and girls. So much of life disappears in the winter. But it all comes back in the spring. Remember that. There may be death, but there is also life. Always.'

As a not-so-secret atheist, Tranton held his prayer book upside down in chapel as a tribute to Darwin, and was keen to tell his pupils that all human beings, no matter what their status, were made up of the same constituent elements.

'Even the Archbishop of Canterbury,' he insisted, 'is sixty per cent water.'

Born in 1910, he was now teaching the grandchildren of his first pupils and he had introduced Lenny Goddard to botany in the late 1930s.

'I showed him how to dig up horseradish; even though it used to be illegal to do that round here. That boy was a natural chemist.'

Sidney asked how easy it would be to make poison from the flowers Lenny had been collecting.

'I thought you were here to talk about Anna?'

'I might as well kill two birds with one stone.'

'You know that's not technically possible, don't you?'

'Could you answer my question?'

Tranton was unperturbed. 'Monkshood is one of the most poisonous plants in the country. Henbane contains toxic tropane alkaloids that can dampen the nervous system and cause paralysis. It's quite easy to cause a lot of damage if you know your chemistry. But it takes a bit of work to kill someone.'

'And would Lenny Goddard be capable of that?'

'I should say so. But it's not in his nature. He was a gentle soul. Popular too. I can't imagine him having any enemies, if you're thinking along those lines. His only vice was that he was too easily led astray.'

'Might he have been gathering them for someone else to make the poison on his behalf ?'

'You are ascribing very malign intentions to the man, Mr Chambers. Perhaps the flowers were intended as decoration, or for something entirely different?'

'It seems an odd selection.'

'Lenny Goddard was not the type of man to go round poisoning people. He was a folk-singer and a bit of a hippy. I can't imagine anyone wanting to harm him, or him wanting to hurt anyone else for that matter.'

'Then why those flowers?'

'Perhaps you'd better ask his wife.'

'Do you know something I don't, Tom?'

'Rather a lot, probably. Is there anything specific you have in mind?'

The Goddards' houseboat was moored south of Ely, on the edge of Wicken Fen, at Pope's Corner. Lenny had taken it out of the water to re-blacken the hull after an eel had wrapped itself around the bow's thruster tube. Removed from the river, the boat looked as if it too was in the middle of a post-mortem.

Sidney wondered if the sense of absence could spread through a boat as quickly as it could fill a house. He told Lenny's widow that he had come to listen and to offer any support he could. He spoke to her about the pain of loss; that no matter how much we might fear or anticipate death, its finality always silenced us and reminded us of our own mortality. Grief could not be rushed. Attention had to be paid.

As Stella Goddard made him a cup of tea, Sidney surveyed the possessions that must have belonged to the dead man – guitars, books, sheet music, clothes hanging out to dry, a display of wild flowers, a half-finished painting of a sunset, Tupperware boxes filled with herbs, and a hookah

pipe on the table. There was a dog bowl and three cans of Pedigree Chum, but no sign of an animal on deck.

Stella was smaller than he had remembered, slighter, with paler skin and darker hair, and brown eyes that could soon spark up into argument. She wore a floral blouse with a long denim skirt. It was functional clothing meant for a life on the water, her only concession to fashion being the brown woven-leather espadrille wedges, chosen to give her extra height.

'I've often wondered what it might be like to live on a boat,' said Sidney.

'It's harder work than anyone thinks it is. But once you're used to it you can't imagine living any other way. I'm sorry that you and your daughter discovered the body. I was on a trip downriver. Is she all right?'

'That's kind of you to think of her at a time like this. It's hard to tell. I'm never quite sure what's going on in her head, even though she's only seven.'

'Little girls like their secrets.'

'Have you thought about the funeral? Is there anything I can do?'

'We want a private cremation, and then the ashes scattered in the bluebell wood where he was found. It was his favourite place. I've been thinking a little bit about it. It's almost ironic. Perhaps Lenny had an instinctive fear that he was going to die and went there on purpose?'

'Was he worried about his health?'

'It was bad enough without him worrying about it,' Stella replied. 'Still, it's strange . . .'

'I'm sorry. It's impossible to define a loss at first. I suppose that's why we use the word.'

'Lost to decide what to think or do? Lost for something to say? There doesn't seem much point in anything any more. I like to think of him with a smile on his face amidst the wild flowers. Sometimes we used to go out at dawn with the dew on the grass and dance barefoot. Lenny always said that he liked the way I moved. When I was little I wanted to be a ballet dancer.'

'But you didn't become one?'

'My feet grew too big. I've got over it now. Lenny didn't think it mattered – not being what you originally wanted to be. You had to discover what you *could* be instead and be content with that. Anyway, he was never that good a dancer himself. He could never find the right balance. He kept you so tight and close that you could hardly move and then when he loosened up, he let you whirl away from him. That sums him up, I suppose. Never could hold on to him.'

'Perhaps he liked his freedom. Is that why he didn't join you on your trip?'

'He wanted to stay behind and work on the boat. We were going to go on our own adventure in September; just the two of us. I shouldn't have left him alone. He must have gone on the walk for a change of air. I still can't take it in. You kiss your husband goodbye, you don't really think about it at the time, you're too busy with everything else you have to worry about, and then when you come back he's gone and you remember all the things you should have said and all the different ways in which you would have said goodbye if you had known it was going to be for the last time. I can't even remember if I told him that I loved him. "See you!" – I think those were my last words – and he said,

"You're all right, love." Then he smiled. I think I was the first to turn away and look back at the river ahead. The journey. I wish I'd watched him for longer now; waited until he was a speck.'

Stella had been travelling up to the Norfolk Broads on Linda and Tony Clarke's narrowboat while Lenny stayed and did the repairs to his own. They had made their way up the River Ouse to Denver Sluice, past Downham Market and on to King's Lynn.

'We were going to return via the old course of the River Nene, but it's getting a bit shallow there and besides we'd heard the news by then.'

'How did you find out?'

'My sister phoned all the lock-keepers. We were at Salters Lode.'

'So not far?'

'About eighteen miles. It's half an hour in the car but four by boat.'

'Did she come and get you?'

'Linda came with me. Tony took their boat back. She showed the shock more than I did. I think I was too numb. We went to see the body together. He'd always had a lot of colour to his face had Lenny, first from health and then through drink, but that day it was paler than I had ever seen it. I couldn't decide if he was an old man or a little boy. He didn't seem to be anything any more, this body lying in front of me – the figure of a man who had been all that I had ever loved and, at the same time, that infuriating husband I was still learning how to understand. I knew Dr Robinson had told Lenny off about his health often enough – the high

blood pressure and the drinking – but I didn't think he'd drop dead like that. There was no warning.'

Well there was, Sidney thought, but now was not the time to talk about the doctor. He realised he should be getting going. Byron had fallen asleep and began to make his little dreaming noises, thinking of all the squirrels that had got away.

'I like your dog,' said Stella.

'He's slowing up a bit, I'm afraid. Arthritis.'

'Labradors can be prone to it. You have to watch their weight.'

'As we all must do, I suppose.' Sidney finished his tea. 'Could I just ask why your husband was out gathering wild flowers? Was that something he did regularly?'

Stella poured out another cup. 'He liked to forage. He went out every day, rain or shine. We ate off the land and the river, fishing and shooting, poaching, snaring and netting. Lenny could get you anything: larks, plovers, game birds, you name it. We tried to live as naturally and as cheaply as possible, just like our grandparents did. As you can probably tell, we don't have much money.'

'Your husband's selection of flowers still seems a bit odd, don't you think? Henbane in particular has a terrible smell. I can't imagine what he would use it for.'

'Do you want me to spell it out?'

At last, Sidney thought. 'If you don't mind . . .'

'You know you can use all those plants for recreational purposes?'

'But they're poisonous.'

'Not if you know what to do with them. Lenny harvested the seeds and the leaves for his special recipes. You'd be

surprised what you can do with deadly nightshade just by rubbing it on your skin. I once thought I could fly. We had the police round thinking we had marijuana, but we showed them that we were just mucking around with sage leaves, magic mushrooms and the roots we'd gathered. There was nothing they could do about it. You know that you can get a version of cocaine from scurvy grass? And there's nothing like a cup of tea made from angel's trumpet. That's one of Tony's specialities.'

'Mr Clarke?'

'We make all kinds of stuff. I'd let you try some but I wouldn't like to lead you astray.'

'I think I must have misread the situation, Mrs Goddard.'

'We make our own alcohol too. Linda's an expert on sloe gin, carrot wine and strawberry wheat beer. Perhaps you'd like to try some of that instead?'

Sidney continued. 'Wolfsbane and laburnum, the plants that your husband was gathering, are particularly poisonous. I presume Lenny knew that? I still wonder if he had other intentions?'

'I can't imagine that he did.'

'And those plants aren't stimulants.'

'What are you imagining? You don't think he was planning to do me in, do you? We loved each other.'

Sidney and Geordie took their pints out to the back garden of the Prince Albert and discussed the results of Lenny Goddard's post-mortem. The coroner had found traces of aconitine, a neurotoxin commonly found in monkshood. So strong it was once used as an arrow-tip

poison, it had almost certainly been mixed with alcohol, probably a sloe gin.

'The questions are if he was aware he had taken it,' said Geordie, 'whether there's any of it left and who gave it to him.'

'The wife and the best friends are expert distillers.'

'We'll have to ask them.'

'I suppose it could have been a rogue batch.'

'They overdid the stimulants, you mean; an accident?'

'It's possible.'

'I can't imagine Lenny swallowed it all deliberately and then went out for a walk as if nothing was wrong.'

'So I think we can rule out suicide,' said Sidney.

'But surely he would have known something was up?'

'Unless it was a gradual process; a succession of small doses. That's how the Victorian poisoners did it.'

'Still. He must have felt ill. And if he was aware that he had taken poison, then wouldn't he have gone to hospital or made himself sick?' Geordie asked.

'Perhaps he realised what had happened but knew that he still had time to take revenge on whoever did it?'

'How's the wife?'

'She says she loved him and I believe her. But I can't understand why Lenny remained behind; why didn't he go on the boat trip with the rest of them?'

'Perhaps he didn't love his wife as much as she thinks he did? Perhaps there's someone else? I'll make some enquiries.'

'I suppose,' Sidney continued, 'that she still could have killed him if she'd found out about an infidelity?'

'"Love to hatred turned" . . .'

'But it could, also, just as easily, have been any one of the others.'

'Or all three of them acting together. Or someone entirely different,' said Geordie. 'Have you spoken to the Clarke couple yet?'

'I have less of an excuse to visit them.'

'I'm sure you can think of something to occupy their time. Rather convenient, don't you think, that the widow and the two best friends are all away from the scene of the crime; a joint alibi if ever there was one?'

'Or a coincidence.'

'I don't believe in them, Sidney. It looks to me like they're trying too hard. Have a word.'

Tony Clarke had lived on or near the water for all his life. His father had been one of the last eel trappers. He used to take his young son out in the early mornings. They set off on a long shallow punt through the fenland mists, moored and then waded through the water, pulling out the old baited wicker traps before submerging the new; each one marked with a willow stake. Tony said he knew every bend in the River Ouse, and his boat was filled with nests, rods, traps and fishing equipment, as well as bottles of home-made alcohol, dried herbs, framed fish, a small aquarium and a pet toad in a tank.

His wife was out walking. 'I think she's gone to the wood where you found Lenny. She's always doing it. She likes to have her thoughts.'

'Leaving you alone.'

'It was how I was brought up, on my own, by the water, paring the willow, waiting for the fish.'

'And did Lenny Goddard like to be alone too? I don't quite understand why he didn't come with you on the trip up to the Wash.'

'He said he wanted to work on his own boat.'

'But couldn't he have done that when he got back?'

'I don't know. He had his moods. Linda said we shouldn't make a fuss but leave him be. Besides, we like Stella. She's company enough.'

'And you didn't offer to stay and help?'

'Lenny liked to do things his way. He wasn't even prepared to share a lock, he was that stubborn. I said it was a bit hypocritical for a communist who believed that everything should be held in common, but he just laughed. In a way, I admired him for it. He was his own man. You didn't ever argue with Lenny.'

'And did people want to?'

'Sometimes; but never on the river. He knew his way around the tides and currents. After my old man died, Lenny was the only person who came close to knowing as much as me. You wouldn't catch him banging his head on a low tunnel, or snagging his boat in a sluice or doing something daft like fall in and drown.'

'So he was a careful man?'

'On the water, yes. He wasn't so good on land.'

'What do you mean?'

'Oh, I don't know.'

'Were you surprised by his death?'

'His health was never that good. Weak heart. Drink. Other stuff you don't need to know about.'

'I think I already do. Your special tea. Some sloe gin, perhaps?'

'That's all gone now. Like most of my friends. Most of them are dying off these days. That's why I keep myself to myself. If you practise solitude then you're ready for it when you're the last to go.'

'But, still, you went on the boat trip and Lenny didn't. It seems the wrong way round. I would have thought that you were the one most likely to stay at home.'

'Perhaps I felt like the company?'

'And were the three of you together all the time as you travelled downriver?'

'Not all the time. Sometimes the girls went exploring.'

'Would they ever have had time to get back to Ely without you noticing?'

'Only if they had a car. Why are you asking? I'm not sure why either of them would have wanted to do that.'

'And would you – if you got fed up?'

'There was no need to go off anywhere at any time. The river's all home. We went down the River Lark and moored there so Stella and Linda could look at the meadow near Prickwillow. They liked to give the dog some proper exercise. I think they even did a bit of skinny-dipping.'

'I wasn't sure Mrs Goddard had a dog.'

'Whisky. He was a black retriever. The name must have seemed like a good idea at the time. People in pubs always thought it was funny when they first heard it – *you don't want to let him out on the rocks* – but Lenny soon got bored of the joke.'

'You say he "was" a black retriever.'

'He disappeared. I thought he'd drowned, but Stella said he was an excellent swimmer and someone must have stolen

him. God knows who would want to do that. We last saw him at Eau Brink. Annoying he was, always pestering, wanting food, getting in the way. I'm surprised it took them so long to notice he'd gone. So they reported him missing.'

'And never found him?'

'I don't think so.'

'You wouldn't know?'

'Well, I haven't seen him. We looked everywhere; asked all the lock-keepers. I can't imagine anyone stealing him. Perhaps he got run over.'

'So Stella Goddard has lost both her dog and her husband in the space of a few days?'

'That's right.'

'It's strange,' said Sidney, 'that she didn't say anything about the dog. We even talked about them; how Labradors are prone to arthritis. She could have mentioned it then.'

'Perhaps she was too upset?'

'Perhaps she was. But still, it's strange.'

A week later Lenny Goddard's body was released to the crematorium. On the coffin was a spray of white roses and lilies on a bed of trailing ivy, Timothy and rye grass. Anna had brought wild flowers too: comfrey and corncockle, harebells and forget-me-nots. Hildegard had doubts about her daughter attending Lenny Goddard's funeral, but Sidney thought it might be good for her. Younger children are often more resilient than people think, he said. It would help her make sense of what she had seen.