Chapter 11

Meribah

Oh-ho, my friend! You are gotten into Lob's pond.

Jack the Giant-Killer

Lord Peter broke his journey north at York, whither the Duke of Denver had been transferred after the Assizes, owing to the imminent closing-down of Northallerton Gaol. By dint of judicious persuasion, Peter contrived to obtain an interview with his brother. He found him looking ill at ease, and pulled down by the prison atmosphere, but still unquenchably defiant.

'Bad luck, old man,' said Peter, 'but you're keepin' your tail up fine. Beastly slow business, all this legal stuff, what? But it gives us time, an' that's all to the good.'

'It's a confounded nuisance,' said his grace. 'And I'd like to know what Murbles means. Comes down and tries to bully me—damned impudence! Anybody'd think he suspected me.'

'Look here, Jerry,' said his brother earnestly, 'why can't you let up on that alibi of yours? It'd help no end, you know. After all, if a fellow won't say what he's been doin'— '

'It ain't my business to prove anything,' retorted his grace, with dignity. 'They've got to show I was there, murderin' the fellow. I'm not bound to say where I was. I'm presumed innocent, aren't I, till they prove me guilty? I call it a disgrace. Here's a murder committed, and they aren't taking the slightest trouble to find the real criminal. I give 'em my word of honour, to say nothin' of an oath, that I didn't kill Cathcart—though, mind you, the swine deserved it—but they pay no attention. Meanwhile, the real man's escapin' at his confounded leisure. If I were only free, I'd make a fuss about it.'

'Well, why the devil don't you cut it short, then?' urged Peter. 'I don't mean here and now to me'—with a glance at the warder, within earshot—'but to Murbles. Then we could get to work.'

'I wish you'd jolly well keep out of it,' grunted the Duke. 'Isn't it all damnable enough for Helen, poor girl, and mother, and everyone, without you makin' it an opportunity to play Sherlock Holmes? I'd have thought you'd have had the decency to keep quiet, for the family's sake. I may be in a damned rotten position, but I ain't makin' a public spectacle of myself, by Jove!'

'Hell!' said Lord Peter, with such vehemence that the wooden-faced warder actually jumped. 'It's you that's makin' the spectacle! It need never have started, but for you. Do you think I *like* havin' my brother and sister dragged through the Courts, and reporters swarmin' over the place, and paragraphs and news-bills with your name starin' at me from every corner, and all this ghastly business, endin' up in a great show in the House of Lords, with a lot of people togged up in scarlet and ermine, and all the rest of the damn-fool jiggery-pokery? People are beginnin' to look oddly at me in the Club, and I can jolly well hear 'em whisperin' that "Denver's attitude looks jolly fishy, b'gad!" Cut it out, Jerry.'

'Well, we're in for it now,' said his brother, 'and thank heaven there are still a few decent fellows left in the peerage who'll know how to take a gentleman's word, even if my own brother can't see beyond his rotten legal evidence.'

As they stared angrily at one another, that mysterious sympathy of the flesh which we call family likeness sprang out from its hiding-place, stamping their totally dissimilar features with an elfish effect of mutual caricature. It was as though each saw himself in a distorting mirror, while the voices might have been one voice with its echo.

'Look here, old chap,' said Peter, recovering himself, 'I'm frightfully sorry. I didn't mean to let myself go like that. If you won't say anything, you won't. Anyhow, we're all working like blazes, and we're sure to find the right man before very long.'

'You'd better leave it to the police,' said Denver. 'I know you like playin' at detectives, but I do think you might draw the line somewhere.'

'That's a nasty one,' said Wimsey. 'But I don't look on this as a game, and I can't say I'll keep out of it, because I know I'm doin' valuable work. Still, I can—honestly, I can—see your point of view. I'm jolly sorry you find me such an

'I hate you, Peter,' said Lady Mary.

ment—but suppose the message was from Grimethorpe, threatening to split on Cathcart to Jerry.'

'You are suggesting, Lord Peter,' said Mr Murbles, in a tone calculated to chill Peter's blithe impetuosity, 'that, at the very time Mr Cathcart was betrothed to your sister, he was carrying on a disgraceful intrigue with a married woman very much his social inferior.'

'I beg your pardon, Polly,' said Wimsey.

'It's all right,' said Mary, 'I—as a matter of fact, it wouldn't surprise me frightfully. Denis was always—I mean, he had rather Continental ideas about marriage and that sort of thing. I don't think he'd have thought that mattered very much. He'd probably have said there was a time and place for everything.'

'One of those watertight compartment minds,' said Wimsey thoughtfully. Mr Parker, despite his long acquaintance with the seamy side of things in London, had his brows set in a gloomy frown of as fierce a provincial disapproval as ever came from Barrow-in-Furness.

'If you can upset this Grimethorpe's alibi,' said Sir Impey, fitting his right-hand fingertips neatly between the fingers of his left hand, 'we might make some sort of a case of it. What do you think, Murbles?'

'After all,' said the solicitor, 'Grimethorpe and the servant both admit that he, Grimethorpe, was not at Grider's Hole on Wednesday night. If he can't prove he was at Stapley he may have been at Riddlesdale.'

'By Jove!' cried Wimsey; 'driven off alone, stopped somewhere, left the gee, sneaked back, met Cathcart, done him in, and toddled home next day with a tale about machinery.'

'Or he may even have been to Stapley,' put in Parker; 'left early or gone late, and put in the murder on the way. We shall have to check the precise times very carefully.'

'Hurray!' cried Wimsey. 'I think I'll be gettin' back to Riddlesdale.'

'I'd better stay here,' said Parker. 'There may be something from Paris.'

'Right you are. Let me know the minute anything comes through. I say, old thing!'

'Yes?'

'Does it occur to you that what's the matter with this case is that there are too many clues? Dozens of people with secrets and elopements bargin' about all over the place— '

irritatin' sort of person. I suppose it's hard for you to believe I feel anything. But I do, and I'm goin' to get you out of this, if Bunter and I both perish in the attempt. Well, so long—that warder's just wakin' up to say, "Time, gentlemen." Cheer-oh, old thing! Good luck!'

He rejoined Bunter outside.

'Bunter,' he said, as they walked through the streets of the old city, 'is my manner *really* offensive, when I don't mean it to be?'

'It is possible, my lord, if your lordship will excuse my saying so, that the liveliness of your lordship's manner may be misleading to persons of limited— '

'Be careful, Bunter!'

'Limited imagination, my lord.'

'Well-bred English people never have imagination, Bunter.'

'Certainly not, my lord. I meant nothing disparaging.'

'Well, Bunter—oh, lord! there's a reporter! Hide me, quick!'

'In here, my lord.'

Mr Bunter whisked his master into the cool emptiness of the Cathedral.

'I venture to suggest, my lord,' he urged in a hurried whisper, 'that we adopt the attitude and external appearance of prayer, if your lordship will excuse me.'

Peeping through his fingers, Lord Peter saw a verger hastening towards them, rebuke depicted on his face. At that moment, however, the reporter entered in headlong pursuit, tugging a note-book from his pocket. The verger leapt swiftly on this new prey.

'The winder h'under which we stand,' he began in a reverential monotone, 'is called the Seven Sisters of York. They say— '

Master and man stole quietly out.

For his visit to the market town of Stapley Lord Peter attired himself in an aged Norfolk suit, stockings with sober tops, an ancient hat turned down all round, stout shoes, and carried a heavy ashplant. It was with regret that he abandoned his favourite stick—a handsome malacca, marked off in inches for detective convenience, and concealing a sword in its belly and a compass in its head. He decided, however, that it would prejudice the natives against him, as having a town-bred, not to say supercilious, air about it. The sequel to this commendable devotion to his art forcibly illustrated the truth of Gertrude Rhead's observation, 'All this self-sacrifice is a sad mistake.'

The little town was sleepy enough as he drove into it in one of the Riddlesdale dog-carts, Bunter beside him, and the under-gardener on the back seat. For choice, he would have come on a market-day, in the hope of meeting Grimethorpe himself, but things were moving fast now, and he dared not lose a day. It was a raw, cold morning, inclined to rain.

'Which is the best inn to put up at, Wilkes?'

'There's t' "Bricklayers' Arms", my lord—a fine, well-thought of place, or t' "Bridge and Bottle", i' t' square, or t' "Rose and Crown", t'other side o' square.'

'Where do the folks usually put up on market-days?'

'Mebbe "Rose and Crown" is most popular, so to say—Tim Watchett, t' landlord, is a rare gossip. Now Greg Smith ower t'way at "Bridge and Bottle", he's nobbut a grimly, surly man, but he keeps good drink.'

'H'm—I fancy, Bunter, our man will be more attracted by surliness and good drink than by a genial host. The "Bridge and Bottle" for us, I fancy, and, if we draw blank there, we'll toddle over to the "Rose and Crown", and pump the garrulous Watchett.'

Accordingly they turned into the yard of a large, stony-faced house, whose long-unpainted sign bore the dim outline of a 'Bridge Embattled', which local etymology had (by a natural association of ideas) transmogrified into the 'Bridge and Bottle'. To the grumpy ostler who took the horse Peter, with his most companionable manner, addressed himself:

'Nasty raw morning, isn't it?'

'Eea.'

'Give him a good feed. I may be here some time.'

'Ugh!'

'Not many people about today, what?'

'Ugh!'

'But I expect you're busy enough market-days.'

'Eea.'

'People come in from a long way round, I suppose.'

'Co-oop!' said the ostler. The horse walked three steps forward.

'Wo!' said the ostler. The horse stopped, with the shafts free of the tugs; the man lowered the shafts, to grate viciously on the gravel.

'And I fancy I know where to go next for information on the second point,' said Wimsey suddenly. 'Grider's Hole.'

'Whew-w!' Parker whistled. 'I was forgetting that. That's where that bloodthirsty farmer fellow lives, isn't it, who set the dogs on you?'

'With the remarkable wife. Yes. See here, how does this strike you? This fellow is ferociously jealous of his wife, and inclined to suspect every man who comes near her. When I went up there that day, and mentioned that a friend of mine might have been hanging about there the previous week, he got frightfully excited and threatened to have the fellow's blood. Seemed to know who I was referrin' to. Now, of course, with my mind full of № 10—Goyles, you know—I never thought but what he was the man. But supposin' it was Cathcart? You see, we know now, Goyles hadn't even been in the neighbourhood til the Wednesday, so you wouldn't expect what's-his-name—Grimethorpe—to know about him, but Cathcart might have wandered over to Grider's Hole any day and been seen. And look here! Here's another thing that fits in. When I went up there Mrs Grimethorpe evidently mistook me for somebody she knew, and hurried down to warn me off. Well, of course, I've been thinkin' all the time she must have seen my old cap and Burberry from the window and mistaken me for Goyles, but, now I come to think of it, I told the kid who came to the door that I was from Riddlesdale Lodge. If the child told her mother, she must have thought it was Cathcart.'

'No, no, Wimsey, that won't do,' put in Parker; 'she must have known Cathcart was dead by that time.'

'Oh, damn it! Yes, I suppose she must. Unless that surly old devil kept the news from her. By Jove! that's just what he would do if he'd killed Cathcart himself. He'd never say a word to her—and I don't suppose he would let her look at a paper, even if they take one in. It's a primitive sort of place.'

'But didn't you say Grimethorpe had an alibi?'

'Yes, but we didn't really test it.'

'And how d'you suppose he knew Cathcart was going to be in the thicket that night?'

Peter considered.

'Perhaps he sent for him,' suggested Mary.

'That's right, that's right,' cried Peter eagerly. 'You remember we thought Cathcart must somehow or other have heard from Goyles, making an appoint-

secret, and a general vague suggestion of something between a burglary and a *crime passionel*. And here you come explaining the footprints, exculpating the unknown man, abolishing the discrepancies, clearing up the motives of the young woman, and most carefully throwing back suspicion to where it rested in the first place. What *do* you expect?'

'I've always said,' growled Peter, 'that the professional advocate was the most immoral fellow on the face of the earth, and now I know for certain.'

'Well, well,' said Mr Murbles, 'all this just means that we mustn't rest upon our oars. You must go on, my dear boy, and get more evidence of a positive kind. If this Mr Goyles did not kill Cathcart we must be able to find the person who did.'

'Anyhow,' said Biggs, 'there's one thing to be thankful for—and that is, that you were still too unwell to go before the Grand Jury last Thursday, Lady Mary'—Lady Mary blushed—'and the prosecution will be building their case on a shot fired at three A.M. Don't answer any questions if you can help it, and we'll spring it on 'em.'

'But will they believe anything she says at the trial after that?' asked Peter dubiously.

'All the better if they don't. She'll be their witness. You'll get a nasty heckling, Lady Mary, but you mustn't mind that. It's all in the game. Just stick to your story and we'll deliver the goods. See!' Sir Impey wagged a menacing finger.

'I see,' said Mary. 'And I'll be heckled like anything. Just go on stubbornly saying, "I am telling the truth now." That's the idea, isn't it?'

'Exactly so,' said Biggs. 'By the way, Denver still refuses to explain his movements, I suppose?'

'Cat-e-gori-cally,' replied the solicitor. 'The Wimseys are a very determined family,' he added, 'and I fear that, for the present, it is useless to pursue that line of investigation. If we could discover the truth in some other way, and confront the Duke with it, he might then be persuaded to add his confirmation.'

'Well, now,' said Parker, 'we have, as it seems to me, still three lines to go upon. First, we must try to establish the Duke's alibi from external sources. Secondly, we can examine the evidence afresh with a view to finding the real murderer. And thirdly, the Paris police may give us some light upon Cathcart's past history.'

'Coom on oop!' said the ostler, and walked calmly off into the stable, leaving the affable Lord Peter as thoroughly snubbed as that young sprig of the nobility had ever found himself.

'I am more and more convinced,' said his lordship, 'that this is Farmer Grimethorpe's usual house of call. Let's try the bar. Wilkes, I shan't want you for a bit. Get yourself lunch if necessary. I don't know how long we shall be.'

'Very good, my lord.'

In the bar of the 'Bridge and Bottle' they found Mr Greg Smith gloomily checking a long invoice. Lord Peter ordered drinks for Bunter and himself. The landlord appeared to resent this as a liberty, and jerked his head towards the barmaid. It was only right and proper that Bunter, after respectfully returning thanks to his master for his half-pint, should fall into conversation with the girl, while Lord Peter paid his respects to Mr Smith.

'Ah!' said his lordship, 'good stuff, that, Mr Smith. I was told to come here for real good beer, and, by Jove! I've been sent to the right place.'

'Ugh!' said Mr Smith, ''tisn't what it was. Nowt's good these times.'

'Well, I don't want better. By the way, is Mr Grimethorpe here today?'

'Eh?'

'Is Mr Grimethorpe in Stapley this morning, d'you know?'

'How'd I know?'

'I thought he always put up here.'

'Ah!'

'Perhaps I mistook the name. But I fancied he'd be the man to go where the best beer is.'

'Ay?'

'Oh, well, if you haven't seen him, I don't suppose he's come over today.'

'Coom where?'

'Into Stapley.'

'Doosn't 'e live here? He can go and coom without my knowing.'

'Oh, of course!' Wimsey staggered under the shock, and then grasped the misunderstanding. 'I don't mean Mr Grimethorpe of Stapley, but Mr Grimethorpe of Grider's Hole.'

'Why didn't tha say so? Oh, him? Ay.'

'He's here today?'

'Nay, I knaw nowt about 'un.'

'He comes in on market-days, I expect.'

'Sometimes.'

'It's a longish way. One can put up for the night, I suppose?'

'Doosta want t'stay t'night?'

'Well, no, I don't think so. I was thinking about my friend Mr Grimethorpe. I daresay he often has to stay the night.'

'Happen a does.'

'Doesn't he stay here, then?'

'Naay.'

'Oh!' said Wimsey, and thought impatiently: 'If all these natives are as oyster-like I *shall* have to stay the night....' 'Well, well,' he added aloud, 'next time he drops in say I asked after him.'

'And who mought tha be?' inquired Mr Smith in a hostile manner.

'Oh, only Brooks of Sheffield,' said Lord Peter, with a happy grin. 'Good morning. I won't forget to recommend your beer.'

Mr Smith grunted. Lord Peter strolled slowly out, and before long Mr Bunter joined him, coming out with a brisk step and the lingering remains of what, in anyone else, might have been taken for a smirk.

'Well?' inquired his lordship. 'I hope the young lady was more communicative than that fellow.'

'I found the young person' ('Snubbed again,' muttered Lord Peter) 'perfectly amiable, my lord, but unhappily ill-informed. Mr Grimethorpe is not unknown to her, but he does not stay here. She has sometimes seen him in company with a man called Zedekiah Bone.'

'Well,' said his lordship, 'suppose you look for Bone, and come and report progress to me in a couple of hours' time. I'll try the "Rose and Crown". We'll meet at noon under that thing.'

'That thing,' was a tall erection in pink granite, neatly tooled to represent a craggy rock, and guarded by two petrified infantry-men in trench helmets. A thin stream of water gushed from a bronze knob half-way up, a roll of honour was engraved on the octagonal base, and four gas-lamps on cast-iron standards put the finishing touch to a very monument of incongruity. Mr Bunter looked carefully at it, to be sure of recognizing it again, and moved respectfully away. Lord Peter walked ten brisk steps in the direction of the 'Rose and Crown', then a thought struck him.

remainder of the wine into the fire. The mocking smile came back to his face: '

> What I like about Clive
> Is that he is no longer alive—
> There is a great deal to be said
> For being dead.

What classic pith and brevity in those four lines! However, in the matter of this case, we've a good deal to tell you, sir.'

With the assistance of Parker, he laid before the two men of law the whole train of the investigation up to date, Lady Mary coming loyally up to the scratch with her version of the night's proceedings.

'In fact, you see,' said Peter, 'this Mr Goyles has lost a lot by *not* being a murderer. We feel he would have cut a fine, sinister figure as a midnight assassin. But things bein' as they are, you see, we must make what we can of him as a witness, what?'

'Well, Lord Peter,' said Mr Murbles slowly, 'I congratulate you and Mr Parker on a great deal of industry and ingenuity in working the matter out.'

'I think we may say we have made some progress,' said Parker.

'If only negatively,' added Peter.

'Exactly,' said Sir Impey turning on him with staggering abruptness. 'Very negatively indeed. And, having seriously hampered the case for the defence, what are you going to do next?'

'That's a nice thing to say,' cried Peter indignantly, 'when we've cleared up such a lot of points for you!'

'I daresay,' said the barrister, 'but they're the sorts of points which are much better left muffled up.'

'Damn it all, we want to get at the truth!'

'Do you?' said Sir Impey drily. 'I don't. I don't care twopence about the truth. I want a case. It doesn't matter to me who killed Cathcart, provided I can prove it wasn't Denver. It's really enough if I can throw reasonable doubt on its being Denver. Here's a client comes to me with a story of a quarrel, a suspicious revolver, a refusal to produce evidence of his statements, and a totally inadequate and idiotic alibi. I arrange to obfuscate the jury with mysterious footprints, a discrepancy as to time, a young woman with a

'Mr Featherstone was a very singular man,' said Mr Murbles. 'And yet—I don't know. He may have been profoundly wise. He had the reputation for extreme avarice. Never bought a new suit, never took a holiday, never married, lived all his life in the same dark, narrow chambers he occupied as a briefless barrister. Yet he inherited a huge income from his father, all of which he left to accumulate. The port was laid down by the old man, who died in 1860, when my client was thirty-four. He—the son, I mean—was ninety-six when he deceased. He said no pleasure ever came up to the anticipation, and so he lived like a hermit—doing nothing, but planning all the things he might have done. He wrote an elaborate diary, containing, day by day, the record of this visionary existence which he had never dared put to the test of actuality. The diary described minutely a blissful wedded life with the woman of his dreams. Every Christmas and Easter Day a bottle of the '47 was solemnly set upon his table and solemnly removed, unopened, at the close of his frugal meal. An earnest Christian, he anticipated great happiness after death, but, as you see, he put the pleasure off as long as possible. He died with the words, "He is faithful that promised"—feeling to the end the need of assurance. A very singular man, very singular indeed—far removed from the adventurous spirit of the present generation.'

'How curious and pathetic,' said Mary.

'Perhaps he had at some time set his heart on something unattainable,' said Parker.

'Well, I don't know,' said Mr Murbles. 'People used to say that the dream-lady had not always been a dream, but that he never could bring himself to propose.'

'Ah,' said Sir Impey briskly, 'the more I see and hear in the courts the more I am inclined to feel that Mr Featherstone chose the better part.'

'And are determined to follow his example—in that respect at any rate? Eh, Sir Impey!' replied Mr Murbles, with a mild chuckle.

Mr Parker glanced towards the window. It was beginning to rain.

Truly enough the '47 port was a dead thing; the merest ghost of its old flame and flavour hung about it. Lord Peter held his glass poised a moment.

'It is like the taste of a passion that has passed its noon and turned to weariness,' he said, with sudden gravity. 'The only thing to do is to recognize bravely that it is dead, and put it away.' With a determined movement, he flung the

'Bunter!'

Mr Bunter hurried back to his side.

'Oh, nothing!' said his lordship. 'Only I've just thought of a name for it.'

'For— '

'That memorial,' said Lord Peter. 'I choose to call it "Meribah."'

'Yes, my lord. The waters of strife. Exceedingly apt, my lord. Nothing harmonious about it, if I may say so. Will there be anything further, my lord?'

'No, that's all.'

Mr Timothy Watchett of the 'Rose and Crown' was certainly a contrast to Mr Greg Smith. He was a small, spare, sharp-eyed man of about fifty-five, with so twinkling and humorous an eye and so alert a cock of the head that Lord Peter summed up his origin the moment he set eyes on him.

'Morning, landlord,' said he genially, 'and when did *you* last see Piccadilly Circus?'

''Ard to say, sir. Gettin' on for thirty-five year, I reckon. Many's the time I said to my wife, "Liz, I'll tike you ter see the 'Olborn Empire afore I die." But, with one thing and another, time slips aw'y. One day's so like another—blowed if I ever remember 'ow old I'm gettin', sir.'

'Oh, well, you've lots of time yet,' said Lord Peter.

'I 'ope so, sir. I ain't never wot you may call got used ter these Northerners. That slow, they are, sir—it fair giv' me the 'ump when I first come. And the w'y they speak—that took some gettin' used to. Call that English, I useter say, give me the Frenchies in the Chantycleer Restaurong, I ses. But there, sir, custom's everything. Blowed if I didn't ketch myself a-syin' 'yon side the square' the other day. Me!'

'I don't think there's much fear of your turning into a Yorkshire man,' said Lord Peter, 'didn't I know you the minute I set eyes on you? In Mr Watchett's bar I said to myself, 'My foot is on my native paving-stones.''

'That's raight, sir. And, bein' there, sir, what can I 'ave the pleasure of offerin' you?... Excuse me, sir, but 'aven't I seen your fice somewhere?'

'I don't think so,' said Peter; 'but that reminds me. Do you know one Mr Grimethorpe?'

'I know five Mr Grimethorpes. W'ich of 'em was you meanin', sir?'

'Mr Grimethorpe of Grider's Hole.'

The landlord's cheerful face darkened.

'Friend of yours, sir?'

'Not exactly. An acquaintance.'

'There naow!' cried Mr Watchett, smacking his hand down upon the counter. 'I knowed as I knowed your fice! Don't you live over at Riddlesdale, sir?'

'I'm stayin' there.'

'I knowed it,' retorted Mr Watchett triumphantly. He dived behind the counter and brought up a bundle of newspapers, turning over the sheets excitedly with a well-licked thumb. 'There! Riddlesdale! That's it, of course.'

He smacked open a *Daily Mirror* of a fortnight or so ago. The front page bore a heavy block headline: THE RIDDLESDALE MYSTERY. And beneath was a lifelike snapshot entitled, '*Lord Peter Wimsey, the Sherlock Holmes of the West End, who is devoting all his time and energies to proving the innocence of his brother, the Duke of Denver.*' Mr Watchett gloated.

'You won't mind my syin' 'ow proud I am to 'ave you in my bar, my lord. —'Ere, Jem, you attend ter them gentlemen; don't you see they're wytin'?— Follered all yer caises I 'ave, my lord, in the pipers—jest like a book they are. An' ter think— '

'Look here, old thing,' said Lord Peter, 'd'you mind not talkin' quite so loud. Seein' dear old Felix is out of the bag, so to speak, do you think you could give me some information and keep your mouth shut, what?'

'Come be'ind into the bar-parlour, my lord. Nobody'll 'ear us there,' said Mr Watchett eagerly, lifting up the flap. 'Jem, 'ere! Bring a bottle of—what'll you 'ave, my lord?'

'Well, I don't know how many places I may have to visit,' said his lordship dubiously.

'Jem, bring a quart of the old ale.—It's special, that's wot it is, my lord. I ain't never found none like it, except it might be once at Oxford. Thanks, Jem. Naow you get along sharp and attend to the customers. Now, my lord.'

Mr Watchett's information amounted to this. That Mr Grimethorpe used to come to the 'Rose and Crown' pretty often, especially on market-days. About ten days previously he had come in lateish, very drunk and quarrelsome, with his wife, who seemed, as usual, terrified of him. Grimethorpe had demanded spirits, but Mr Watchett had refused to serve him. There had been a row, and Mrs Grimethorpe had endeavoured to get her husband away.

'Entirely, thank you,' said Mary with emphasis.

'Mr Parker—of course your name is very familiar. Wimsey, here, can't do a thing without you, I know. Murbles, are these gentlemen full of valuable information? I am immensely interested in this case.'

'Not just this moment, though,' put in the solicitor.

'Indeed, no. Nothing but that excellent saddle of mutton has the slightest attraction for me just now. Forgive my greed.'

'Well, well,' said Mr Murbles, beaming mildly, 'let's make a start. I fear, my dear young people, I am old-fashioned enough not to have adopted the modern practice of cocktail-drinking.'

'Quite right too,' said Wimsey emphatically. 'Ruins the palate and spoils the digestion. Not an English custom—rank sacrilege in this old Inn. Came from America—result, prohibition. That's what happens to people who don't understand how to drink. God bless me, sir, why, you're giving us the famous claret. It's a sin so much as to mention a cocktail in its presence.'

'Yes,' said Mr Murbles, 'yes, that's the Lafite '75. It's very seldom, very seldom, I bring it out for anybody under fifty years of age—but you, Lord Peter, have a discrimination which would do honour to one of twice your years.'

'Thanks very much, sir; that's a testimonial I deeply appreciate. May I circulate the bottle, sir?'

'Do, do—we will wait on ourselves, Simpson, thank you. After lunch,' continued Mr Murbles, 'I will ask you to try something really curious. An odd old client of mine died the other day, and left me a dozen of '47 port.'

'Gad!' said Peter. ''47! It'll hardly be drinkable, will it, sir?'

'I very greatly fear,' replied Mr Murbles, 'that it will not. A great pity. But I feel that some kind of homage should be paid to so notable an antiquity.'

'It would be something to say that one had tasted it,' said Peter. 'Like goin' to see the divine Sarah, you know. Voice gone, bloom gone, savor gone—but still a classic.'

'Ah,' said Mr Murbles. 'I remember her in her great days. We old fellows have the compensation of some very wonderful memories.'

'Quite right, sir,' said Peter, 'and you'll pile up plenty more yet. But what was this old gentleman doing to let a vintage like that get past its prime?'