'Hurray!' said Wimsey. 'Splendid man! I love to see you melt into a refined snigger from time to time. I'll spare you the really outrageous one about the young housewife and the traveller in bicycle-pumps. You know, Charles, I really should like to know who did Cathcart in. Legally, it's enough to prove Jerry innocent, but, Mrs Grimethorpe or no Mrs Grimethorpe, it doesn't do us credit in a professional capacity. "The father weakens, but the governor is firm"; that is, as a brother I am satisfied—I may say light-hearted—but as a sleuth I am cast down, humiliated, thrown back upon myself, a lodge in a garden of cucumbers. Besides, of all defences an alibi is the most awkward to establish, unless a number of independent and disinterested witnesses combine to make it thoroughly air-tight. If Jerry sticks to his denial, the most they can be sure of is that either he or Mrs Grimethorpe is being chivalrous.'

'But you've got the letter.'

'Yes. But how are we going to prove that it came that evening? The envelope is destroyed. Fleming remembers nothing about it. Jerry might have received it days earlier. Or it might be a complete fake. Who is to say that I didn't put it in the window myself and pretend to find it. After all, I'm hardly what you would call disinterested.'

'Bunter saw you find it.'

'He didn't, Charles. At that precise moment he was out of the room fetching shaving-water.'

'Oh, was he?'

'Moreover, only Mrs Grimethorpe can swear to what is really the important point—the moment of Jerry's arrival and departure. Unless he was at Grider's Hole before 12:30 at least, it's immaterial whether he was there or not.'

'Well,' said Parker, 'can't we keep Mrs Grimethorpe up our sleeve, so to speak— '

'Sounds a bit abandoned,' said Lord Peter, 'but we will keep her with pleasure if you like.'

'—and meanwhile,' pursued Mr Parker, unheeding, 'do our best to find the actual criminal?'

'Oh, yes,' said Lord Peter, 'and that reminds me. I made a discovery at the Lodge—at least, I think so. Did you notice that somebody had been forcing one of the study windows?'

'No, really?'

'Yes; I found distinct marks. Of course, it was a long time after the murder, but there were scratches on the catch all right—the sort of thing a penknife would leave.'

'What fools we were not to make an examination at the time!'

'Come to think of it, why should you have? Anyhow, I asked Fleming about it, and he said he did remember, now he came to think of it, that on the Thursday morning he'd found the window open, and couldn't account for it. And here's another thing. I've had a letter from my friend Tim Watchett. Here it is:'

> My Lord,—About our conversation. I have found a Man who was with the Party in question at the 'Pig and Whistle' on the night of the 13th *ult.* and he tells me that the Party borrowed his bicycle, and same was found afterwards in the ditch where Party was picked up with the Handlebars bent and wheels buckled.
>
> Trusting to the Continuance of your esteemed favour.
>
> Timothy Watchett.

'What do you think of that?'

'Good enough to go on,' said Parker. 'At least, we are no longer hampered with horrible doubts.'

'No. And, though she's my sister, I must say that of all the blithering sheasses Mary is the blitheringest. Taking up with that awful bounder to start with— '

'She was jolly fine about it,' said Mr Parker, getting rather red in the face. 'It's just because she's your sister that you can't appreciate what a fine thing she did. How should a big, chivalrous nature like hers see through a man like that? She's so sincere and thorough herself, she judges everyone by the same standard. She wouldn't believe anybody could be so thin and wobbly-minded as Goyles till it was proved to her. And even then she couldn't bring herself to think ill of him till he'd given himself away out of his own mouth. It was wonderful, the way she fought for him. Think what it must have meant to such a splendid, straight-forward woman to— '

'All right, all right,' cried Peter, who had been staring at his friend, transfixed with astonishment. 'Don't get worked up. I believe you. Spare me. I'm only a brother. All brothers are fools. All lovers are lunatics—Shakespeare says so. Do you want Mary, old man? You surprise me, but I believe brothers always are surprised. Bless you, dear children!'

'Damn it all, Wimsey,' said Parker, very angry, 'you've no right to talk like that. I only said how greatly I admired your sister—everyone must admire such pluck and staunchness. You needn't be insulting. I know she's Lady Mary Wimsey and damnably rich, and I'm only a common police official with nothing a year and a pension to look forward to, but there's no need to sneer about it.'

'I'm not sneering,' retorted Peter indignantly. 'I can't imagine why anybody should want to marry my sister, but you're a friend of mine and a damn good sort, and you've my good word for what it's worth. Besides—dash it all, man!—to put it on the lowest grounds, do look what it might have been! A Socialist Conchy of neither bowels nor breeding, or a card-sharping dark horse with a mysterious past! Mother and Jerry must have got to the point when they'd welcome a decent, God-fearing plumber, let alone a policeman. Only thing I'm afraid of is that Mary, havin' such beastly bad taste in blokes, won't know how to appreciate a really decent fellow like you, old son.'

Mr Parker begged his friend's pardon for his unworthy suspicions, and they sat a little time in silence. Parker sipped his port, and saw unimaginable visions warmly glowing in its rosy depths. Wimsey pulled out his pocket-book, and began idly turning over its contents, throwing old letters into the fire, unfolding and refolding memoranda, and reviewing a miscellaneous series of other people's visiting-cards. He came at length to the slip of blotting-paper from the study at Riddlesdale, to whose fragmentary markings he had since given scarcely a thought.

Presently Mr Parker, finishing his port and recalling his mind with an effort, remembered that he had been meaning to tell Peter something before the name of Lady Mary had driven all other thoughts out of his head. He turned to his host, open-mouthed for speech, but his remark never got beyond a preliminary click like that of a clock about to strike, for, even as he turned, Lord Peter brought his fist down on the little table with a bang that made the decanters ring, and cried out in the loud voice of complete and sudden enlightenment:

Chapter 13

Manon

'That one word, my dear Watson, should have told me the whole story, had I been the ideal reasoner which you are so fond of depicting.'

Memoirs Of Sherlock Holmes

'THANK God,' said Parker. 'Well, that settles it.'

'It does—and yet again, it doesn't,' retorted Lord Peter. He leaned back against the fat silk cushion in the sofa corner meditatively.

'Of course, it's disagreeable having to give this woman away,' said Parker sensibly and pleasantly, 'but these things have to be done.'

'I know. It's all simply awfully nice and all that. And Jerry, who's got the poor woman into this mess, has to be considered first. I know. And if we don't restrain Grimethorpe quite successfully, and he cuts her throat for her, it'll be simply rippin' for Jerry to think of all his life.... Jerry! I say, you know, what frightful idiots we were not to see the truth right off! I mean—of course, my sister-in-law is an awfully good woman, and all that, but Mrs Grimethorpe—whew! I told you about the time she mistook me for Jerry. One crowded, split second of glorious all-overishness. I ought to have known then. Our voices are alike, of course, and she couldn't see in that dark kitchen. I don't believe there's an ounce of any feeling left in the woman except sheer terror—but, ye gods! what eyes and skin! Well, never mind. Some undeserving fellows have all the luck. Have you got any really good stories? No? Well, I'll tell you some—enlarge your mind and all that. Do you know the rhyme about the young man at the War Office?'

Mr Parker endured five stories with commendable patience, and then suddenly broke down.

'*Manon Lescaut*!'

'Eh?' said Mr Parker.

'Boil my brains!' said Lord Peter. 'Boil 'em and mash 'em and serve 'em up with butter as a dish of turnips, for it's damn well all they're fit for! Look at me!' (Mr Parker scarcely needed this exhortation.) 'Here we've been worryin' over Jerry, an' worryin' over Mary, an' huntin' for Goyleses an' Grimethorpes and God knows who—and all the time I'd got this little bit of paper tucked away in my pocket. The blot upon the paper's rim a blotted paper was to him, and it was nothing more. But *Manon*, *Manon*! Charles, if I'd had the grey matter of a woodlouse that book ought to have told me the whole story. And think what we'd have been saved!'

'I wish you wouldn't be so excited,' said Parker. 'I'm sure it's perfectly splendid for you to see your way so clearly, but I never read *Manon Lescaut*, and you haven't shown me the blotting-paper, and I haven't the foggiest idea what you've discovered.'

Lord Peter passed the relic over without comment.

'I observe,' said Parker, 'that the paper is rather crumpled and dirty, and smells powerfully of tobacco and Russian leather, and deduce that you have been keeping it in your pocket-book.'

'No!' said Wimsey incredulously. 'And when you actually saw me take it out! Holmes, how do you do it?'

'At one corner,' pursued Parker, 'I see two blots, one rather larger than the other. I think someone must have shaken a pen there. Is there anything sinister about the blot?'

'I haven't noticed anything.'

'Some way below the blots the Duke has signed his name two or three times—or, rather, his title. The inference is that his letters were not to intimates.'

'The inference is justifiable, I fancy.'

'Colonel Marchbanks has a neat signature.'

'He can hardly mean mischief,' said Peter. 'He signs his name like an honest man! Proceed.'

'There's a sprawly message about five something of fine something. Do you see anything occult there?'

'The number five may have a cabalistic meaning, but I admit I don't know what it is. There are five senses, five fingers, five great Chinese precepts, five books of Moses, to say nothing of the mysterious entities hymned in the Dilly Song—"Five are the flamboys under the pole." I must admit that I have always panted to know what the five flamboys were. But, not knowing, I get no help from it in this case.'

'Well, that's all, except a fragment consisting of "oe" on one line, and "is fou— " below it.'

'What do you make of that?'

'"Is found," I suppose.'

'Do you?'

'That seems the simplest interpretation. Or possibly "his foul"—there seems to have been a sudden rush of ink to the pen just there. Do you think it is "his foul"? Was the Duke writing about Cathcart's foul play? Is that what you mean?'

'No, I don't make that of it. Besides, I don't think it's Jerry's writing.'

'Whose is it?'

'I don't know, but I can guess.'

'And it leads somewhere?'

'It tells the whole story.'

'Oh, cough it up, Wimsey. Even Dr Watson would lose patience.'

'Tut, tut! Try the line above.'

'Well, there's only "oe."'

'Yes, well?'

'Well, I don't know. Poet, poem, manœuvre, Loeb edition, Citroën—it might be anything.'

'Dunno about that. There aren't lashings of English words with "oe" in them—and it's written so close it almost looks like a diphthong at that.'

'Perhaps it isn't an English word.'

'Exactly; perhaps it isn't.'

'Oh! Oh, I see. French?'

'Ah, you're gettin' warm.'

'Sœur—œuvre—œuf—bœuf— '

'No, no. You were nearer the first time.'

'Sœur—Cœur!'

'Ah, Mr Grimethorpe,' exclaimed Wimsey cheerfully, 'there you are. Awfully pleased to see you and thank you, don'tcherknow, for puttin' me up. I was just saying so to Mrs Grimethorpe, an' asking her to say good-bye to you for me. Must be off now, I'm afraid. Bunter and I are ever so grateful to you both for all your kindness. Oh, and I say, could you find me the stout fellows who hauled us out of that Pot of yours last night—if it is yours. Nasty, damp thing to keep outside the front door, what? I'd like to thank 'em.'

'Dom good thing for unwelcome guests,' said the man ferociously. 'An' tha'd better be off afore Ah throws thee out.'

'I'm just off,' said Peter. 'Good-bye again, Mrs Grimethorpe, and a thousand thanks.'

He collected Bunter, rewarded his rescuers suitably, took an affectionate farewell of the enraged farmer, and departed, sore in body and desperately confused in mind.

'Yes, for some time.'

'Since my brother was here in August?'

'Yes. But he could get no proof. If he had had proof he would have killed me. You have seen him. He is a devil.'

'M'm.'

Wimsey was silent. The woman glanced fearfully at his face and seemed to read some hope there, for she clutched him by the arm.

'If you call me to give evidence,' she said, 'he will know. He *will* kill me. For God's sake, have pity. That letter is my death-warrant. Oh, for the mother that bore you, have mercy upon me. My life is a hell, and when I die I shall go to hell for my sin. Find some other way—you can—you must.'

Wimsey gently released himself.

'Don't do that, Mrs Grimethorpe. We might be seen. I am deeply sorry for you, and, if I can get my brother out of this without bringing you in, I promise you I will. But you see the difficulty. Why don't you leave this man? He is openly brutal to you.'

She laughed.

'Do you think he'd leave me alive while the law was slowly releasing me? Knowing him, do you think so?'

Wimsey really did not think so.

'I will promise you this, Mrs Grimethorpe. I will do all I can to avoid having to use your evidence. But if there should be no other way, I will see that you have police protection from the moment that the subpoena is served on you.'

'And for the rest of my life?'

'When you are once in London we will see about freeing you from this man.'

'No. If you call upon me, I am a lost woman. But you will find another way?'

'I will try, but I can promise nothing. I will do everything that is possible to protect you. If you care at all for my brother— '

'I don't know. I am so horribly afraid. He was kind and good to me. He was—so different. But I am afraid—I'm afraid.'

Wimsey turned. Her terrified eyes had seen the shadow cross the threshold. Grimethorpe was at the door, glowering in upon them.

'Cœur. Hold on a moment. Look at the scratch in front of that.'

'Wait a bit—er—cer— '

'How about *percer*?'

'I believe you're right. "Percer le cœur."'

'Yes. Or "perceras le cœur."'

'That's better. It seems to need another letter or two.'

'And now your "is found" line.'

'*Fou!*'

'Who?'

'I didn't say "who"; I said "*fou*".'

'I know you did. I said who?'

'Who?'

'Who's *fou*?'

'Oh, is. By Jove, "suis"! "Je suis fou."'

'*À la bonne heure!* And I suggest that the next words are "*de douleur*", or something like it.'

'They might be.'

'Cautious beast! I say they are.'

'Well, and suppose they are?'

'It tells us everything.'

'Nothing!'

'Everything, I say. Think. This was written on the day Cathcart died. Now who in the house would be likely to write these words, "*perceras le cœur…je suis fou de douleur*"? Take everybody. I know it isn't Jerry's fist, and he wouldn't use those expressions. Colonel or Mrs Marchbanks? Not Pygmalion likely! Freddy? Couldn't write passionate letters in French to save his life.'

'No, of course not. It would have to be either Cathcart or—Lady Mary.'

'Rot! It couldn't be Mary.'

'Why not?'

'Not unless she changed her sex, you know.'

'Of course not. It would have to be "je suis folle." Then Cathcart— '

'Of course. He lived in France all his life. Consider his bank-book. Consider— '

'Lord! Wimsey, we've been blind.'

'Yes.'

'And listen! I was going to tell you. The Sûreté write me that they've traced one of Cathcart's bank-notes.'

'Where to?'

'To a Mr François who owns a lot of house property near the Etoile.'

'And lets it out in *appartements*!'

'No doubt.'

'When's the next train? Bunter!'

'My lord!'

Mr Bunter hurried to the door at the call.

'The next boat-train for Paris?'

'Eight-twenty, my lord, from Waterloo.'

'We're going by it. How long?'

'Twenty minutes, my lord.'

'Pack my toothbrush and call a taxi.'

'Certainly, my lord.'

'But, Wimsey, what light does it throw on Cathcart's murder? Did this woman— '

'I've no time,' said Wimsey hurriedly. 'But I'll be back in a day or two. Meanwhile— '

He hunted hastily in the bookshelf.

'Read this.'

He flung the book at his friend and plunged into his bedroom.

At eleven o'clock, as a gap of dirty water disfigured with oil and bits of paper widened between the *Normannia* and the quay; while hardened passengers fortified their sea-stomachs with cold ham and pickles, and the more nervous studied the Boddy jackets in their cabins; while the harbour lights winked and swam right and left, and Lord Peter scraped acquaintance with a second-rate cinema actor in the bar, Charles Parker sat, with a puzzled frown, before the fire at 110 Piccadilly, making his first acquaintance with the delicate masterpiece of the Abbé Prévost.

Her lips twitched a little at that, but she said nothing.

'I had hoped that with your help we might agree on some explanation—less than the truth, perhaps, but sufficient to clear my brother. As it is, I fear I shall have to produce the proof I hold, and let matters take their course.'

That, at last, struck under her guard. A dull flush crept up her cheeks; one hand tightened upon the handle of the churn, where she had rested it.

'What do you mean by proof?'

'I can prove that on the night of the 13th my brother slept in the room I occupied last night,' said Wimsey, with calculated brutality.

She winced. 'It is a lie. You cannot prove it. He will deny it. I shall deny it.'

'He was not there?'

'No.'

'Then how did this come to be wedged in the sash of the bedroom window?'

At sight of the letter she broke down, crumpling up in a heap against the table. The set lines of her face distorted themselves into a mere caricature of terror.

'No, no, no! It is a lie! God help me!'

'Hush!' said Wimsey peremptorily. 'Someone will hear you.' He dragged her to her feet. 'Tell the truth, and we will see if we can find a way out. It is true—he was here that night?'

'You know it.'

'When did he come?'

'At a quarter past twelve.'

'Who let him in?'

'He had the keys.'

'When did he leave you?'

'A little after two.'

'Yes, that fits in all right. Three quarters of an hour to go and three quarters to come back. He stuck this into the window, I suppose, to keep it from rattling?'

'There was a high wind—I was nervous. I thought every sound was my husband coming back.'

'Where was your husband?'

'At Stapley.'

'Had he suspected this?'

'He seems to be a very honourable man.' The cold voice wavered a trifle, then steadied again.

'Yes. Undoubtedly, from his point of view, he is doing the right thing. You will understand, however, that, as his brother, I am naturally anxious to have the matter put in its proper light.'

'I don't understand why you are telling me all this. I suppose, if the thing is disgraceful, he doesn't want it known.'

'Obviously. But to us—to his wife and young son, and to his sister and myself—his life and safety are matters of the first importance.'

'Of more importance than his honour?'

'The secret is a disgraceful one in a sense, and will give pain to his family. But it would be an infinitely greater disgrace that he should be executed for murder. The stigma in that case would involve all those who bear his name. The shame of the truth will, I fear, in this very unjust society of ours, rest more upon the witness to his alibi than upon himself.'

'Can you in that case expect the witness to come forward?'

'To prevent the condemnation of an innocent man? Yes, I think I may venture to expect even that.'

'I repeat—why are you telling me all this?'

'Because, Mrs Grimethorpe, you know, even better than I, how innocent my brother is of this murder. Believe me, I am deeply distressed at having to say these things to you.'

'I know nothing about your brother.'

'Forgive me, that is not true.'

'I know nothing. And surely, if the Duke will not speak, you should respect his reasons.'

'I am not bound in any way.'

'I am afraid I cannot help you. You are wasting time. If you cannot produce your missing witness, why do you not set about finding the real murderer? If you do so you surely need not trouble about this alibi. Your brother's movements are his own business.'

'I could wish,' said Wimsey, 'you had not taken up this attitude. Believe me, I would have done all I could to spare you. I have been working hard to find, as you say, the real murderer, but with no success. The trial will probably take place at the end of the month.'

Chapter 14

The Edge of the Axe Towards Him

Scene 1. Westminster Hall. Enter as to the Parliament, Bolingbroke, Aumerle, Northumberland, Percy, Fitzwater, Surrey, the Bishop of Carlisle, the Abbot of Westminster, and another Lord, Herald, Officers, and Bagot.
BOLINGBROKE: Call forth Bagot.
Now, Bagot, freely speak thy mind;
What thou dost know of noble Gloucester's death;
Who wrought it with the king, and who performed
The bloody office of his timeless end.
BAGOT: Then set before my face the Lord Aumerle.

King Richard II

THE historic trial of the Duke of Denver for murder opened as soon as Parliament reassembled after the Christmas vacation. The papers had leaderettes on 'Trial by his Peers,' by a Woman Barrister, and 'The Privilege of Peers: should it be abolished?' by a Student of History. The *Evening Banner* got into trouble for contempt by publishing an article entitled 'The Silken Rope' (by an Antiquarian), which was deemed to be prejudicial, and the *Daily Trumpet*—the Labour organ—inquired sarcastically why, when a peer was tried, the fun of seeing the show should be reserved to the few influential persons who could wangle tickets for the Royal Gallery.

Mr Murbles and Detective Inspector Parker, in close consultation, went about with preoccupied faces, while Sir Impey Biggs retired into a complete eclipse for three days, revolved about by Mr Glibbery, K.C., Mr Brownrigg-Fortescue, K.C., and a number of lesser satellites. The schemes of the Defence were kept dark indeed—the more so that they found themselves on the eve of

the struggle deprived of their principal witness, and wholly ignorant whether or not he would be forthcoming with his testimony.

Lord Peter had returned from Paris at the end of four days, and had burst in like a cyclone at Great Ormond Street. 'I've got it,' he said, 'but it's touch and go. Listen!'

For an hour Parker had listened, feverishly taking notes.

'You can work on that,' said Wimsey. 'Tell Murbles. I'm off.'

His next appearance was at the American Embassy. The Ambassador, however, was not there, having received a royal mandate to dine. Wimsey damned the dinner, abandoned the polite, horn-rimmed secretaries, and leapt back into his taxi with a demand to be driven to Buckingham Palace. Here a great deal of insistence with scandalized officials produced first a higher official, then a very high official, and, finally, the American Ambassador and a Royal Personage while the meat was yet in their mouths.

'Oh, yes,' said the Ambassador, 'of course it can be done— '

'Surely, surely,' said the Personage genially, 'we mustn't have any delay. Might cause an international misunderstanding, and a lot of paragraphs about Ellis Island. Terrible nuisance to have to adjourn the trial—dreadful fuss, isn't it? Our secretaries are everlastingly bringing things along to our place to sign about extra policemen and seating accommodation. Good luck to you, Wimsey! Come and have something while they get your papers through. When does your boat go?'

'Tomorrow morning, sir. I'm catching the Liverpool train in an hour—if I can.'

'You surely will,' said the Ambassador cordially, signing a note. 'And they say the English can't hustle.'

So, with his papers all in order, his lordship set sail from Liverpool the next morning, leaving his legal representatives to draw up alternative schemes of defence.

'Then the peers, two by two, in their order, beginning with the youngest baron.'

Garter King-of-Arms, very hot and bothered, fussed unhappily around the three hundred or so British peers who were sheepishly struggling into their

'I'll go to her there,' said Wimsey, stepping briskly out. He passed through a stone-paved scullery, and across a yard, in time to see Mrs Grimethorpe emerging from a dark doorway opposite.

Framed there, the cold sunlight just lighting upon her still, dead-white face and heavy, dark hair, she was more wonderful than ever. There was no trace of Yorkshire descent in the long, dark eyes and curled mouth. The curve of nose and cheekbones vouched for an origin immensely remote; coming out of the darkness, she might have just risen from her far tomb in the Pyramids, dropping the dry and perfumed grave-bands from her fingers.

Lord Peter pulled himself together.

'Foreign,' he said to himself matter-of-factly. 'Touch of Jew perhaps, or Spanish, is it? Remarkable type. Don't blame Jerry. Couldn't live with Helen myself. Now for it.'

He advanced quickly.

'Good morning,' she said, 'are you better?'

'Perfectly all right, thank you—thanks to your kindness, which I do not know how to repay.'

'You will repay any kindness best by going at once,' she answered in her remote voice. 'My husband does not care for strangers, and 'twas unfortunate the way you met before.'

'I will go directly. But I must first beg for the favour of a word with you.' He peered past her into the dimness of the dairy. 'In here, perhaps?'

'What do you want with me?'

She stepped back, however, and allowed him to follow her in.

'Mrs Grimethorpe, I am placed in a most painful position. You know that my brother, the Duke of Denver, is in prison, awaiting his trial for a murder which took place on the night of October 13th?'

Her face did not change. 'I have heard so.'

'He has, in the most decided manner, refused to state where he was between eleven and three on that night. His refusal has brought him into great danger of his life.'

She looked at him steadily.

'He feels bound in honour not to disclose his whereabouts, though I know that, if he chose to speak, he could bring a witness to clear him.'