

'Not possible, ma'am. Where should we get the apparatus at half-past three on a Sunday morning? The poor gentleman would be dead long before—'

There was a silence, during which the sounds of the wakening day came through the shuttered windows. A motor-horn sounded distantly.

'I give in,' she said. 'We must let him go. Take the ropes off him. You will free him, won't you?' she went on, turning piteously to Wimsey. 'Devil as you are, you are not such a devil as that! You will go straight back and save him!'

'Let him go, nothing!' broke in one of the men. 'He doesn't go to peach to the police, my lady; don't you think it. The President's done in, that's all, and we'd all better make tracks while we can. It's all up, boys. Chuck this fellow down the cellar and fasten him in, so he can't make a row and wake the place up. I'm going to destroy the ledgers. You can see it done if you don't trust me. And you, Thirty, you know where the switch is. Give us a quarter of an hour to clear, and then you can blow the place to glory.'

'No! You can't go—you can't leave him to die—your President—your leader—my—I won't let it happen. Set this devil free. Help me, one of you, with the ropes—'

'None of that, now,' said the man who had spoken before. He caught her by the wrists, and she twisted, shrieking, in his arms, biting and struggling to get free.

'Think, think,' said the man with the tready voice. 'It's getting on to morning. It'll be light in an hour or two. The police may be here any minute.'

'The police!' She seemed to control herself by a violent effort. 'Yes, yes, you are right. We must not imperil the safety of all for the sake of one man. *He* himself would not wish it. That is so. We will put this cartion in the cellar where it cannot harm us, and depart, every one to his own place, while there is time.'

'And the other prisoner?'

'He? Poor fool—he can do no harm. He knows nothing. Let him go,' she answered contemptuously.

In a few minutes' time Wimsey found himself bundled unceremoniously into the depths of the cellar. He was a little puzzled. That they

should refuse to let him go, even at the price of Number One's life, he could understand. He had taken the risk with his eyes open. But that they should leave him as a witness against them seemed incredible.

The men who had taken him down strapped his ankles together and departed, switching the lights out as they went.

'Hi! Kamerad!' said Wimsey. 'It's a bit lonely sitting here. You might leave the light on.'

'It's all right, my friend,' was the reply. 'You will not be in the dark long. They have set the time-fuse.'

The other man laughed with rich enjoyment, and they went out together. So that was it. He was to be blown up with the house. In that case the President would certainly be dead before he was extricated. This worried Wimsey; he would rather have been able to bring the big crook to justice. After all, Scotland Yard had been waiting six years to break up this gang.

He waited, straining his ears. It seemed to him that he heard footsteps over his head. The gang had all crept out by this time....

There was certainly a creak. The trap-door had opened; he felt, rather than heard, somebody creeping into the cellar.

'Hush!' said a voice in his ear. Soft hands passed over his face, and went fumbling about his body. There came the cold touch of steel on his wrists. The ropes slackened and dropped off. A key clicked in the handcuffs. The strap about his ankles was unbuckled.

'Quick! quick! they have set the time-switch. The house is mined. Follow me as fast as you can. I strole back—I said I had left my jewellery. It was true. I left it on purpose. *He* must be saved—only you can do it. Make haste!'

Wimsey, staggering with pain, as the blood rushed back into his bound and numbed arms, crawled after her into the room above. A moment, and she had flung back the shutters and thrown the window open.

'Now go! Release him! You promise?'

'I promise. And I warn you, madame, that this house is surrounded. When my safe-door closed it gave a signal which sent my servant to Scotland Yard. Your friends are all taken—'

'Ah! But you go—never mind me—quick! The time is almost up,' 'Come away from this!'

He caught her by the arm, and they went running and stumbling across the little garden. An electric torch shone suddenly in the bushes.

'That you, Parker?' cried Wimsey. 'Get your fellows away. Quick! the house is going up in a minute.'

The garden seemed suddenly full of shouting, hurrying men. Wimsey, floundering in the darkness, was brought up violently against the wall. He made a leap at the coping, caught it, and hoisted himself up. His hands groped for the woman; he swung her up beside him. They jumped; everyone was jumping; the woman caught her foot and fell with a gasping cry. Wimsey tried to stop himself, tripped over a stone, and came down headlong. Then, with a flash and a roar, the night went up in fire.

Wimsey picked himself painfully out from among the débris of the garden wall. A faint moaning near him proclaimed that his companion was still alive. A lantern was turned suddenly upon them.

'Here you are!' said a cheerful voice. 'Are you all right, old thing? Good lord! what a hairy monster!'

'All right,' said Wimsey. 'Only a bit winded. Is the lady safe? H'm—arm broken, apparently—otherwise sound. What's happened?'

'About half a dozen of 'em got blown up; the rest we've bagged.' Wimsey became aware of a circle of dark forms in the wintry dawn. 'Good Lord, what a day! What a come-back for a public character! You old stinker—to let us go on for two years thinking you were dead! I bought a bit of black for an arm-band. I did, really. Did anybody know, besides Bunter?'

'Only my mother and sister. I put it in a secret trust—you know, the thing you send to executors and people. We shall have an awful time with the lawyers, I'm afraid, proving I'm me. Hullo! Is that friend Sugg?'

'Yes, my lord,' said Inspector Sugg, grinning and nearly weeping with excitement. 'Damned glad to see your lordship again. Fine piece of work, your lordship. They're all wanting to shake hands with you, sir.'

'Oh, Lord! I wish I could get washed and shaved first. Awfully glad to see you all again, after two years' exile in Lambeth. Been a good little show, hasn't it?'

'Is he safe?'

Wimsey started at the agonised cry.

'But you have given me the word. Was that a lie?'

'No—the word's all right. But, you see, it's one of these new-style electric doors. In fact, it's really the very latest thing in doors. I'm rather proud of it. It opens to the words "Open Sesame" all right—but to my *voice only*.'

'Your voice? I will choke your voice with my own hands. What do you mean—your voice only?'

'Just what I say. Don't clutch my throat like that, or you may alter my voice so that the door won't recognise it. That's better. It's apt to be rather pernickety about voices. It got stuck up for a week once, when I had a cold and could only implore it in a hoarse whisper. Even in the ordinary way, I sometimes have to try several times before I hit on the exact right intonation.'

She turned and appealed to a short, thick-set man standing beside her.

'Is this true? Is it possible?'

'Perfectly, ma'am, I'm afraid,' said the man civilly. From his voice Wimsey took him to be a superior workman of some kind—probably an engineer.

'Is it an electrical device? Do you understand it?'

'Yes, ma'am. It will have a microphone arrangement somewhere, which converts the sound into a series of vibrations controlling an electric needle. When the needle has traced the correct pattern, the circuit is completed and the door opens. The same thing can be done by light vibrations equally easily.'

'Couldn't you open it with tools?'

'In time, yes, ma'am. But only by smashing the mechanism, which is probably well protected.'

'You may take that for granted,' interjected Wimsey reassuringly.

She put her hands to her head.

'I'm afraid we're done in,' said the engineer, with a kind of respect in his tone for a good job of work.

'No—wait! Somebody must know—the workmen who made this thing?'

'In Germany,' said Wimsey briefly.

'Or—yes, yes, I have it—a gramophone. This—this—*he*—shall be made to say the word for us. Quick—how can it be done?'

'Where was I? Ah! the inner compartment. As I say, it is a little snug—the more so that it is not ventilated in any way. Did I mention that the book lay on a steel shelf?'

'You did.'

'Yes. The steel shelf is balanced on a very delicate concealed spring. When the weight of the book—a heavy one, as I said—is lifted, the shelf rises almost imperceptibly. In rising it makes an electrical contact. Imagine to yourself, madame; our revered President steps in—propping the false door open behind him—he sees the book—quickly he snatches it up. To make sure that it is the right one, he opens it—he studies the pages. He looks about for the other objects I have mentioned, which bear the marks of finger-prints. And silently, but very, very quickly—you can imagine it, can you not?—the secret panel, released by the rising of the shelf, leaps across like a panther behind him. Rather a trite simile, but apt, don't you think?'

'My God! oh, my God! Her hand went up as though to tear the choking mask from her face. 'You—you devil—devil! What is the word that opens the inner door? Quick! I will have it torn out of you—the word!'

'It is not a hard word to remember, madame—though it has been forgotten before now. Do you recollect, when you were a child, being told the tale of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves"? When I had that door made, my mind reverted, with rather a pretty touch of sentimentality, in my opinion, to the happy hours of my childhood. The words that open the door are—"Open Sesame".'

'Ah! How long can a man live in this devil's trap of yours?'

'Oh,' said Wimsey cheerfully, 'I should think he might hold out a few hours if he kept cool and didn't use up the available oxygen by shouting and hammering. If we went there at once, I dare say we should find him fairly all right.'

'I shall go myself. Take this man and—do your worst with him. Don't finish him till I come back. I want to see him die!'

'One moment,' said Wimsey, unmoved by this amiable wish. 'I think you had better take me with you.'

'Why—why?'

'Because, you see, I'm the only person who can open the door.'

'Good Lord!' he cried. 'I forgot the gentleman in the safe. Here, fetch a car, quickly. I've got the great big top Moriarty of the whole bunch quietly asphyxiating at home. Here—hop in, and put the lady in too. I promised we'd get back and save him—though' (he finished the sentence in Parker's ear) 'there may be murder charges too, and I wouldn't give much for his chance at the Old Bailey. Whack her up. He can't last much longer shut up there. He's the bloke you've been wanting, the man at the back of the Morrison case and the Hope-Wilmington case, and hundreds of others.'

The cold morning had turned the streets grey when they drew up before the door of the house in Lambeth. Wimsey took the woman by the arm and helped her out. The mask was off now, and showed her face, haggard and desperate, and white with fear and pain.

'Russian, eh?' whispered Parker in Wimsey's ear.

'Something of the sort. Damn! the front door's blown shut, and the blighter's got the key with him in the safe. Hop through the window, will you?'

Parker bundled obligingly in, and in a few seconds threw open the door to them. The house seemed very still. Wimsey led the way to the back room, where the strong-room stood. The outer door and the second door stood propped open with chairs. The inner door faced them like a blank green wall.

'Only hope he hasn't upset the adjustment with thumping at it,' muttered Wimsey. The anxious hand on his arm clutched feverishly. He pulled himself together, forcing his tone to one of cheerful commonplace.

'Come on, old thing,' he said, addressing himself conversationally to the door. 'Show us your paces. Open Sesame, confound you. Open Sesame!'

The green door slid suddenly away into the wall. The woman sprang forward and caught in her arms the humped and senseless thing that rolled out from the safe. Its clothes were torn to ribbons, and its battered hands dripped blood.

'It's all right,' said Wimsey, 'it's all right! He'll live—to stand his trial.'

hidden behind the hinge of that door is another door, a sliding panel, set so closely in the thickness of the wall that you would hardly see it unless you knew it was there. This door was also left open. Our revered Number One had nothing to do but to walk straight through into the inner compartment of the safe, which, by the way, is built into the chimney of the old basement kitchen, which runs up the house at that point. I hope I make myself clear?

‘Yes, yes—get on. Make your story short.’

Winsey bowed, and, speaking with even greater deliberation than ever, resumed:

‘Now, this interesting list of the Society’s activities, which I have had the honour of compiling, is written in a very large book—bigger, even, than Monsieur le Président’s ledger which he uses downstairs. (I trust, by the way, madame, that you have borne in mind the necessity of putting that ledger in a safe place. Apart from the risk of investigation by some officious policeman, it would be inadvisable that any junior member of the Society should get hold of it. The feeling of the meeting would, I fancy, be opposed to such an occurrence.)’

‘It is secure,’ she answered hastily. ‘*Mon dieu!* get on with your story.’

‘Thank you—you have relieved my mind. Very good. This big book lies on a steel shelf at the back of the inner compartment. Just a moment. I have not described this inner compartment to you. It is six feet high, three feet wide, and three feet deep. One can stand up in it quite comfortably, unless one is very tall. It suits me nicely—as you may see, I am not more than five feet eight and a half. The President has the advantage of me in height; he might be a little cramped, but there would be room for him to squat if he grew tired of standing. By the way, I don’t know if you know it, but you have tied me up rather tightly.’

‘I would have you tied till your bones were locked together. Beat him, you! He is trying to gain time.’

‘If you beat me,’ said Winsey, ‘I’m damned if I’ll speak at all. Control yourself, madame; it does not do to move hastily when your king is in check.’

‘Get on!’ she cried again, stamping with rage.

‘Beast! liar!’ she said, and struck him on the mouth. ‘You know he would never do that. He is faithful to his friends. What have you done with him? Speak—or I will make you speak. You two, there—bring the irons. He *shall* speak!’

‘I can only form a guess, madame,’ replied Wimsey, ‘and I shall not guess any the better for being stimulated with hot irons, like Panaloon at the circus. Calm yourself, and I will tell you what I think. I think—indeed, I greatly fear—that Monsieur le Président in his hurry to examine the interesting exhibits in my safe may, quite inadvertently, no doubt, have let the door of the inner compartment close behind him. In which case—’

He raised his eyebrows, his shoulders being too sore for shrugging, and gazed at her with a limpid and innocent regret.

‘What do you mean?’

Wimsey glanced round the circle.

‘I think,’ he said, ‘I had better begin from the beginning by explaining to you the mechanism of my safe. It is rather a nice safe,’ he added plaintively. ‘I invented the idea myself—not the principle of its working; of course; that is a matter for scientists—but just the idea of the thing.’

The combination I gave you is perfectly correct as far as it goes. It is a three-alphabet thirteen-letter lock by Bunn & Fishett—a very good one of its kind. It opens the outer door, leading into the ordinary strong-room, where I keep my cash and my Froth Blower’s cuff-links and all that. But there is an inner compartment with two doors, which open in quite a different manner. The outermost of these two inner doors is merely a thin steel skin, painted to look like the back of the safe and fitting closely, so as not to betray any join. It lies in the same plane as the wall of the room, you understand, so that if you were to measure the outside and the inside of the safe you would discover no discrepancy. It opens outwards with an ordinary key, and, as I truly assured the President, it was left open when I quitted my flat.’

‘Do you think,’ said the woman sneeringly, ‘that the President is so simple as to be caught in a so obvious trap? He will have wedged open that inner door undoubtedly.’

‘Undoubtedly, madame. But the sole purpose of that outer inner door, if I may so express myself, is to appear to be the only inner door. But

Solution to the Puzzle in ‘Uncle Meleager’s Will’

NOTES TO THE SOLUTION

- I. 1. VIRGO: The sign of the zodiac between LEO (strength) and LIBRA (justice). Allusion to parable of The Ten Virgins.
I. 3. R.S.: Royal Society, whose ‘fellows’ are addicted to studies usually considered dry-as-dust.

- IV. 3. TESTAMENT (or will); search is to be directed to the Old Testament. Ref. to parable of New Cloth and Old Garment.

- XIV. 3. HI: He would answer to Hi!
Or to any loud cry.

The Hunting of the Snark.

- I. 5. TRANS.: Abbreviation of Translation; ref. to building of Babel.

- XI. 5. SCENT: Even the scent of roses
Is not what they suppose,
But more than mind discloses
And more than men believe.

G. K. Chesterton: The Song of Quoodle.

- VI.7. ICTUS: Blow; add V (five) and you get VICTUS (vanquished); the ictus is the stress in a foot of verse; if the stress be misplaced the line goes lamely.
- I.8. SPINOZA: He wrote on the properties of optical glasses; also on metaphysics.
- IV.13. THIRTY-ONE: Seven (months) out of the twelve of the sun's course through the heavens have thirty-one days.
- XIV.13. ET: Conjunction. In astrology an aspect of the heavenly bodies. That Cicero was the master of this word indicates that it is a Latin one.
- X.14. BEZOAR: The bezoar stone was supposed to be a prophylactic against poison.
- II.1. PLAUD: If you would laud, then plaud (var. of applaud); Plaud-it also means 'cheer.'
- IO.II. ALIENA: *As You Like It*. II.1.130.
- I.III. R.D.: 'Refer to Drawer.'
- 4.III. CANTICLES: The Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis are known as the Canticles, but the Book of Canticles (the Vulgate name for the Song of Songs, in which the solution is found) occurs earlier in the Bible.
- 2.VI.. EST: *ὅν καὶ μὴ ὅν* [Greek: *on kai me on*] = *est and non est*—the problem of being and not-being. Ref. Marlowe: *Doctor Faustus* I.1.
- 12.X. TOB: Add *it* to get Tobit; the tale of Tobit and the Fish is in the Apocrypha (the book of hidden things).
- I.XI. MANES: 'Un lion est une mâchoire et non pas une crinière'; Emile Faguet: *Lit. du XVIII^e siècle*. Manes: benevolent spirits of the dead.

'Because I say she must not,' said the President sternly, checking the quick reply that rose to his companion's lips. 'If it is the will of the meeting, I will go. Give me the key of the house.'

One of the men extracted it from Wimsey's jacket-pocket and handed it over.

'Is the house watched?' he demanded of Wimsey.

'No.'

'That is the truth?'

'It is the truth.'

The President turned at the door.

'If I have not returned in two hours' time,' he said, 'act for the best to save yourselves, and do what you like with the prisoner. Number Two will give orders in my absence.'

He left the room. Number Two rose from her seat with a gesture of command.

'Ladies and gentlemen. Supper is now considered over. Start the dancing again.'

Down in the cellar the time passed slowly, in the contemplation of apparatus Number 5. The miserable Jukes, alternately wailing and raving, at length shrieked himself into exhaustion. The four members guarding the prisoners whispered together from time to time.

'An hour and a half since the President left,' said one.

Wimsey glanced up. Then he returned to his examination of the room. There were many curious things in it, which he wanted to memorise.

Presently the trap-door was flung open. 'Bring him up!' cried a voice.

Wimsey rose immediately, and his face was rather pale.

The members of the gang were again seated round the table. Number Two occupied the President's chair, and her eyes fastened on Wimsey's face with a tigerish fury, but when she spoke it was with a self-control which roused his admiration.

'The President has been two hours gone,' she said. 'What has happened to him? Traitor twice over—what has happened to him?'

'How should I know?' said Wimsey. 'Perhaps he has looked after Number One and gone while the going was good!'

She sprang up with a little cry of rage, and came close to him.

vanity which had led him directly to the name and address of the stout man, and he felt a certain affection for the trinkets on that account.

The President looked round.

‘It is the wish of the meeting, then, that I should go?’ he said, in an ominous voice.

Forty-five hands were raised in approbation. Only the woman known as Number Two remained motionless and silent, her strong white hands clenched on the arm of the chair.

The President rolled his eyes slowly round the threatening ring till they rested upon her.

‘Am I to take it that this vote is unanimous?’ he enquired.

The woman raised her head.

‘Don’t go,’ she gasped faintly.

‘You hear,’ said the President, in a faintly derisive tone. ‘This lady says, don’t go.’

‘I submit that what Number Two says is neither here nor there,’ said the man with the treacly voice. ‘Our own ladies might not like us to be going, if they were in madam’s privileged position.’ His voice was an insult.

‘Hear, hear!’ cried another man. ‘This is a democratic society, this is. We don’t want no privileged classes.’

‘Very well,’ said the President. ‘You hear, Number Two. The feeling of the meeting is against you. Have you any reasons to put forward in favour of your opinion?’

‘A hundred. The President is the head and soul of our Society. If anything should happen to him—where should we be? You’—she swept the company magnificently with her eyes—‘you have all blundered. We have your carelessness to thank for all this. Do you think we should be safe for five minutes if the President were not here to repair your follies?’

‘Something in that,’ said a man who had not hitherto spoken.

‘Pardon my suggesting,’ said Wimsey maliciously, ‘that, as the lady appears to be in a position peculiarly favourable for the reception of the President’s confidences, the contents of my modest volume will probably be no news to her. Why should not Number Two go herself?’

1.XV. SAINT: Evidence of miraculous power is required for canonisation.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV	XV
1	V	I	R	G	O			S			M	I	D	A	S
2	E	N	D	I	V	E		C		V	A	N	I	T	A
3	R	S		T	E	S	T	A	M	E	N	T		H	I
4	S	E	C	A	N	T		R		L	E	A	V	E	N
5	T	R	A	N	S			L			S	C	E	N	T
6		T	N	A			S	E	G			T	R	E	
7			T			I	C	T	U	S			S		
8	S	P	I	N	O	Z	A		A	U	C	T	I	O	N
9			C			E	L	A	N	D			C		
10		A	L	T			A	D	O			F	L	U	
11	P	L	E	A	S			M			A	R	E	N	A
12	L	I	S	T	E	N		E		T	W	I	S	T	S
13	A	E		T	H	I	R	T	Y	O	N	E		E	T
14	U	N	H	O	O	D		U		B	E	Z	O	A	R
15	D	A	M	O	N			S			D	E	R	M	A

Colophon

Lord Peter Vieux The Body was Dorothy L. Sayers' (1893–1957) first collection of Lord Peter Wimsey short stories. It was originally published in 1928 by Victor Gollancz Limited in London (UK).

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github.com/georgd/EB-Garamond
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'Then I am willing to give you the information you want. The word of the combination is UNRELIABILITY.'

'And the inner door?'

'In anticipation of the visit of the police, the inner door—which might have presented difficulties—is open.'

'Good! You understand that if the police interfere with our messenger—'

'That would not help me, would it?'

'It is a risk,' said the President thoughtfully, 'but a risk which I think we must take. Carry the prisoner down to the cellar. He can amuse himself by contemplating apparatus Number 5. In the meantime, Numbers Twelve and Forty-six—'

'No, no!'

A sullen mutter of dissent arose and swelled threateningly.

'No,' said a tall man with a voice like treacle. 'No—why should any members be put in possession of this evidence? We have found one traitor among us to-night and more than one fool. How are we to know that Numbers Twelve and Forty-six are not fools and traitors also?'

The two men turned savagely upon the speaker, but a girl's voice struck into the discussion, high and agitated.

'Hear, hear! That's right, I say. How about us? We ain't going to have our names read by somebody we don't know nothing about. I've had enough of this. They might sell the 'ole lot of us to the narks.'

'I agree,' said another member. 'Nobody ought to be trusted, nobody at all.'

The President shrugged his shoulders.

'Then what, ladies and gentlemen, do you suggest?'

There was a pause. Then the same girl shrilled out again:

'I say Mr President oughter go himself. He's the only one as knows all the names. It won't be no cop to him. Why should we take all the risk and trouble and him sit at home and collar the money? Let him go himself, that's what I say.'

A long rustle of approbation went round the table.

'I second that motion,' said a stout man who wore a bunch of gold seals at his fob. Wimsey smiled as he looked at the seals; it was that trifling