'I saw his coffin buried,' said Wimsey mildly. 'That the body was in it is merely an unverified inference.'

'I think,' said Mr Frobisher-Pym, 'this is rather an unseemly kind of jest. There is no reason to imagine that the body was not in the coffin.'

'I saw it in the coffin,' said Haviland, 'and so did my wife.'

'And so did I,' said the vicar. 'I was present when it was transferred from the temporary shell in which it crossed over from the States to a permanent lead-and-oak coffin provided by Joliffe. And, if further witnesses are necessary, you can easily get Joliffe himself and his men, who put the body in and screwed it down.'

'Just so,' said Wimsey. 'I'm not denying that the body was in the coffin when the coffin was placed in the chapel. I only doubt whether it was there when it was put in the ground.'

'That is a most unheard-of suggestion to make, Lord Peter,' said Mr Frobisher-Pym, with severity. 'May I ask if you have anything to go upon? And, if the body is not in the grave, perhaps you wouldn't mind telling us where you imagine it to be?'

'Not at all,' said Wimsey. He perched himself on the edge of the table and sat, swinging his legs and looking down at his own hands, as he ticked his points off on his fingers.

'I think,' he said, 'that this story begins with young Rawlinson. He is a clerk in the office of Mr Graham, who drew up this will, and I fancy he knows something about its conditions. So, of course, does Mr Graham, but I don't somehow suspect *him* of being mixed up in this. From what I can hear, he is not a man to take sides—or not Mr Martin's side, at any rate.

When the news of Mr Burdock's death was cabled over from the States, I think young Rawlinson remembered the terms of the will, and considered that Mr Martin—being abroad and all that—would be rather at a disadvantage. Rawlinson must be rather attached to your brother, by the way— '

'Martin always had a way of picking up good-for-nothing youths and wasting his time with them,' agreed Haviland sulkily.

The vicar seemed to feel that this statement needed some amendment, and murmured that he had always heard how good Martin was with the village lads.





'Quite so,' said Wimsey. 'Well, I think young Rawlinson wanted to give Martin an equal chance of securing the legacy, don't you see. He didn't like to say anything about the will—which might or might not turn up—and possibly he thought that even if it did turn up there might be difficulties. Well, anyway, he decided that the best thing to do was to steal the body and keep it above-ground till Martin came home to see to things himself.'

'This is an extraordinary accusation,' began Mr Frobisher-Pym.

'I dare say I'm mistaken,' said Wimsey, 'but it's just my idea. It makes a damn good story, anyhow—you see! Well, then, young Rawlinson saw that this was too big a job to carry out alone, so he looked round for somebody to help him. And he pitched on Mr Mortimer.'

'Mortimer?'

'I don't know Mr Mortimer personally, but he seems to be a sportin' sort of customer from what I can hear, with certain facilities which everybody hasn't got. Young Rawlinson and Mortimer put their heads together and worked out a plan of action. Of course, Mr Hancock, you helped them enormously with this lying-in-state idea of yours. Without that, I don't know if they could have worked it.'

Mr Hancock made an embarrassed clucking sound.

'The idea was this. Mortimer was to provide an antique fly and four white horses, made up with luminous paint and black cloth to represent the Burdock death-coach. The advantage of that idea was that nobody would feel inclined to inspect the turn-out too closely if they saw it hangin' round the churchyard at unearthly hours. Meanwhile, young Rawlinson had to get himself accepted as a watcher for the chapel, and to find a sporting companion to watch with him and take a hand in the game. He fixed things up with the publican-fellow, and spun a tale for Mr Hancock, so as to get the vigil from four to six. Didn't it strike you as odd, Mr Hancock, that he should be so keen to come all the way from Herriotting?'

'I am accustomed to find keenness in my congregation,' said Mr Hancock stiffly.

'Yes, but Rawlinson didn't belong to your congregation. Anyway it was all worked out, and there was a dress-rehearsal on the Wednesday night, which frightened your man Plunkett into fits, sir.'

'If I thought this was true— ' said Mr Frobisher-Pym.

'On Thursday night,' pursued Wimsey, 'the conspirators were ready, hidden in the chancel at two in the morning. They waited till Mrs and Miss Hancock had taken their places, and then made a row to attract their attention. When the ladies courageously advanced to find out what was up, they popped out and bundled 'em into the vestry.'

'Good gracious!' said Mrs Hancock.

'That was when the death-coach affair was timed to drive up to the south door. It came round the Back Lane, I fancy, though I can't be sure. Then Mortimer and the other two took the embalmed body out of the coffin and filled its place up with bags of sawdust. I know it was sawdust, because I found the remains of it on the Lady-chapel floor in the morning. They put the body in the fly, and Mortimer drove off with it. They passed me on the Herriotting Road at half-past two, so they can't have wasted much time over the job. Mortimer may have been alone, or possibly he had someone with him to see to the body while he himself did the headless coachman business in a black mask. I'm not certain about that. They drove through the last gate before you come to the fork at Frimpton, and went across the fields to Mortimer's barn. They left the fly there—I know that, because I saw it, and I saw the bran they used to muffle the horses' hoofs, too. I expect they took it on from there in a car, and fetched the horses up next day—but that's a detail. I don't know, either, where they took the body to, but I expect, if you went and asked Mortimer about it, he would be able to assure you that it was still above ground.'

Wimsey paused. Mr Frobisher-Pym and the Hancocks were looking only puzzled and angry, but Haviland's face was green. Mrs Haviland showed a red, painted spot on each cheek, and her mouth was haggard. Wimsey picked up the *Nüremberg Chronicle* and caressed its covers thoughtfully as he went on.

'Meanwhile, of course, young Rawlinson and his companion were doing the camouflage in the church, to give the idea of a Protestant outrage. Having fixed everything up neat and pretty, all they had to do was to lock themselves up in the furnace-house and chuck the key through the window. You'll probably find it there, Mr Hancock, if you care to look. Didn't you think that story of an assault by two or three men was a bit thin? Hubbard is a hefty great fellow, and Rawlinson's a sturdy lad—and yet, on their own showing, they were bundled





'But what a queer idea!' cried Mrs Burdock. 'Suppose Martin had been at home. It almost seems a mercy that he wasn't, doesn't it? I mean, it would all have been so awkward. What would have happened if he had tried to stop the funeral, for instance?'

'Yes,' said Mrs Hancock. 'Could he have done anything? Who decides about funerals?'

'The executors, as a rule,' said Mr Frobisher-Pym.

'Who are the executors in this case?' enquired Wimsey.

'I don't know. Let me see.' Mr Frobisher-Pym examined the document again. 'Ah, yes! Here we are. 'I appoint my two sons, Martin and Haviland, joint executors of this my will.' What an extraordinary arrangement.'

'I call it a wicked, un-Christian arrangement,' cried Mrs Hancock. 'It might have caused dreadful mischief if the will hadn't been—quite providentially—lost!'

'Hush, my dear!' said her husband.

'I'm afraid,' said Haviland grimly, 'that that was my father's idea. It's no use my pretending he wasn't spiteful; he was, and I believe he hated both Martin and me like poison.'

'Don't say that,' pleaded the vicar.

'I do say it. He made our lives a burden to us, and he obviously wanted to go on making them a burden after he was dead. If he'd seen us cutting each other's throats, he'd only have been too pleased. Come, vicar, it's no use pretending. He hated our mother and was jealous of us. Everybody knows that. It probably pleased his unpleasant sense of humour to think of us squabbling over his body. Fortunately, he over-reached himself when he hid the will here. He's buried now, and the problem settles itself.'

'Are you quite sure of that?' said Wimsey.

'Why, of course,' said the magistrate. 'The property goes to Mr Haviland Burdock as soon as his father's body is underground. Well, his father was buried yesterday.'

'But are you sure of *that*?' repeated Wimsey. He looked from one to the other quizzically, his long lips curling into something like a grin.

'Sure of that?' exclaimed the vicar. 'My dear Lord Peter, you were present at the funeral. You saw him buried yourself.'

'I beg your pardon,' said Wimsey, handing it over to her. 'Yes, as you say, Mr Hancock, it does almost seem as if I was meant to find it.' He glanced down again at the *Chronicle*, mournfully tracing with his finger the outline of a damp stain which had rotted the cover and spread to the inner pages, almost obliterating the colophon.

Haviland Burdock meanwhile had spread the will out on the nearest table. His wife leaned over his shoulder. The Hancocks, barely controlling their curiosity, stood near, awaiting the result. Wimsey, with an elaborate pretence of non-interference in this family matter, examined the wall against which the *Chronicle* had stood, feeling its moist surface and examining the damp-stains. They had assumed the appearance of a grinning face. He compared them with the corresponding mark on the book, and shook his head desolately over the damage.

Mr Frobisher-Pym, who had wandered away some time before and was absorbed in an ancient book of Farriery, now approached, and enquired what the excitement was about.

'Listen to this!' cried Haviland. His voice was quiet, but a suppressed triumph throbbed in it and glittered from his eyes.

'"I bequeath everything of which I die possessed"—there's a lot of enumeration of properties here, which doesn't matter—"to my eldest son, Martin"— '

Mr Frobisher-Pym whistled.

'Listen! "To my eldest son Martin, for so long as my body shall remain above ground. But so soon as I am buried, I direct that the whole of this property shall revert to my younger son Haviland absolutely"— '

'Good God!' said Mr Frobisher-Pym.

'There's a lot more,' said Haviland, 'but that's the gist of it.'

'Let me see,' said the magistrate.

He took the will from Haviland, and read it through with a frowning face.

'That's right,' he said. 'No possible doubt about it. Martin has had his property and lost it again. How very curious. Up till yesterday everything belonged to him, though nobody knew it. Now it is all yours, Burdock. This certainly is the strangest will I ever saw. Just fancy that. Martin the heir, up to the time of the funeral. And now—well, Burdock, I must congratulate you.'

'Thank you,' said Haviland. 'It is very unexpected.' He laughed unsteadily.





into a coal-hole like helpless infants, without a scratch on either of 'em. Look for the men in buckram, my dear sir, look for the men in buckram!'

'Look here, Wimsey, are you sure you're not romancing?' said Mr Frobisher-Pym. 'One would need some very clear proof before— '

'Certainly,' said Wimsey. 'Get a Home Office order. Open the grave. You'll soon see whether it's true or whether it's just my diseased imagination.'

'I think this whole conversation is disgusting,' cried Mrs Burdock. 'Don't listen to it, Haviland. Anything more heartless on the day after father's funeral than sitting here and inventing such a revolting story I simply can't imagine. It is not worth paying a moment's attention to. You will certainly not permit your father's body to be disturbed. It's horrible. It's a desecration.'

'It is very unpleasant indeed,' said Mr Frobisher-Pym gravely, 'but if Lord Peter is seriously putting forward this astonishing theory, which I can scarcely credit— '

Wimsey shrugged his shoulders.

'—then I feel bound to remind you, Mr Burdock, that your brother, when he returns, may insist on having the matter investigated.'

'But he can't, can he?' said Mrs Burdock.

'Of course he can, Winnie,' snapped her husband savagely. 'He's an executor. He has as much right to have the governor dug up as I have to forbid it. Don't be a fool.'

'If Martin had any decency, he would forbid it, too,' said Mrs Burdock.

'Oh, well!' said Mrs Hancock, 'shocking as it may seem, there's the money to be considered. Mr Martin might think it a duty to his wife, and his family, if he should ever have any— '

'The whole thing is preposterous,' said Haviland decidedly. 'I don't believe a word of it. If I did, naturally I should be the first person to take action in the matter—not only in justice to Martin, but on my own account. But if you ask me to believe that a responsible man like Mortimer would purloin a corpse and desecrate a church—the thing only has to be put into plain words to show how absurd and unthinkable it is. I suppose Lord Peter Wimsey, who consorts, as I understand, with criminals and police officers, finds the idea conceivable. I can only say that I do not. I am sorry that his mind should have become so blunted to all decent feeling. That's all. Good afternoon.'

Mr Frobisher-Pym jumped up.

'Come, come, Burdock, don't take that attitude. I am sure Lord Peter intended no discourtesy. I must say I think he's all wrong, but, 'pon my soul, things have been so disturbed in the village these last few days, I'm not surprised anybody should think there was something behind it. Now, let's forget about it—and hadn't we better be moving out of this terribly cold room? It's nearly dinner-time. Bless me, what will Agatha think of us?'

Wimsey held out his hand to Burdock, who took it reluctantly.

'I'm sorry,' said Wimsey. 'I suffer from hypertrophy of the imagination, y'know. Over-stimulation of the thyroid probably. Don't mind me. I apologise, and all that.'

'I don't think, Lord Peter,' said Mrs Burdock acidly, 'you ought to exercise your imagination at the expense of good taste.'

Wimsey followed her from the room in some confusion. Indeed, he was so disturbed that he carried away the *Nüremberg Chronicle* beneath his arm, which was an odd thing for him to do under the circumstances.

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'I am gravely distressed,' said Mr Hancock.

He had come over, after Sunday evening service, to call upon the Frobisher-Pyms. He sat upright on his chair, his thin face flushed with anxiety.

'I could never have believed such a thing of Hubbard. It has been a grievous shock to me. It is not only the great wickedness of stealing a dead body from the very precincts of the church, though that is grave enough. It is the sad hypocrisy of his behaviour—the mockery of sacred things—the making use of the holy services of his religion to further worldly ends. He actually attended the funeral, Mr Frobisher-Pym, and exhibited every sign of grief and respect. Even now he hardly seems to realise the sinfulness of his conduct. I feel it very much, as a priest and as a pastor—very much indeed.'

'Oh, well, Hancock,' said Mr Frobisher-Pym, 'you must make allowances, you know. Hubbard's not a bad fellow, but you can't expect refinement of feeling from a man of his class. The point is, what are we to do about it? Mr Burdock must be told, of course. It's a most awkward situation. Dear me! Hubbard confessed the whole conspiracy, you say? How did he come to do that?'

'I taxed him with it,' said the parson. 'When I came to think over Lord Peter Wimsey's remarks, I was troubled in my mind. It seemed to me—I cannot say





I read it, but it wasn't really exciting; not half as gruesome as old Harrison Ainsworth. What's the name of the place?'

'Nüremberg?' suggested Wimsey.

'That's it, of course—the *Nüremberg Chronicle*. I wonder if that's still in its old place. It was over here by the window, if I remember rightly.'

He led the way to the end of one of the bays, which ran up close against a window. Here the damp seemed to have done its worst. A pane of glass was broken, and rain had blown in.

'Now where has it gone to? A big book, it was, with a stamped leather binding. I'd like to see the old *Chronicle* again. I haven't set eyes on it for donkey's years.'

His glance roamed vaguely over the shelves. Wimsey, with the book-lover's instinct, was the first to spot the *Chronicle*, wedged at the extreme end of the shelf, against the outer wall. He hitched his finger into the top edge of the spine, but finding that the rotting leather was ready to crumble at a touch, he dislodged a neighbouring book and drew the *Chronicle* gently out, using his whole hand.

'Here he is—in pretty bad condition, I'm afraid. Hullo!'

As he drew the book away from the wall, a piece of folded parchment came away with it and fell at his feet. He stooped and picked it up.

'I say, Burdock—isn't this what you've been looking for?'

Haviland Burdock, who had been rooting about on one of the lower shelves, straightened himself quickly, his face red from stooping.

'By Jove!' he said, turning first redder and then pale with excitement. 'Look at this, Winnie. It's the governor's will. What an extraordinary thing! Whoever would have thought of looking for it here, of all places?'

'Is it really the will?' cried Mrs Hancock.

'No doubt about it, I should say,' observed Wimsey coolly. 'Last Will and Testament of Simon Burdock.' He stood, turning the grimy document over and over in his hands, looking from the endorsement to the plain side of the folded parchment.

'Well, well!' said Mr Hancock. 'How strange! It seems almost providential that you should have taken that book down.'

'What does the will say?' demanded Mrs Burdock, in some excitement.

said to my husband—didn't I, Philip?—that your father had chosen the laziest woman in Little Doddering. She ought to have kept up big fires here, *at least* twice a week! It's really shameful, the way she has let things go.'

'Yes, isn't it?' agreed Haviland.

Wimsey said nothing. He was nosing along the shelves, every now and then taking a volume down and glancing at it.

'It was always rather a depressing room,' went on Haviland. 'I remember, when I was a kid, it used to overawe me rather. Martin and I used to browse about among the books, you know, but I think we were always afraid that something or somebody would stalk out upon us from the dark corners. What's that you've got there, Lord Peter? Oh, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*. Dear me! How those pictures did terrify me in the old days! And there was a *Pilgrim's Progress*, with a most alarming picture of Apollyon straddling over the whole breadth of the way, which gave me many nightmares. Let me see. It used to live over in this bay, I think. Yes, here it is. How it does bring it all back, to be sure! Is it valuable, by the way?'

'No, not really. But this first edition of Burton is worth money; badly spotted, though—you'd better send it to be cleaned. And this is an extremely fine Boccaccio; take care of it.'

'John Boccace—*The Dance of Machabree*. It's a good title, anyhow. Is that the same Boccaccio that wrote the naughty stories?'

'Yes,' said Wimsey, a little shortly. He resented this attitude towards Boccaccio.

'Never read them,' said Haviland, with a wink at his wife, 'but I've seen 'em in the windows of those surgical shops—so I suppose they're naughty, eh? The vicar's looking shocked.'

'Oh, not at all,' said Mr Hancock, with a conscientious assumption of broad-mindedness. 'Et ego in Arcadia—that is to say, one doesn't enter the Church without undergoing a classical education, and making the acquaintance of much more worldly authors even than Boccaccio. Those wood-cuts are very fine, to my uninstructed eye.'

'Very fine indeed,' said Wimsey.

'There's another old book I remember, with jolly pictures,' said Haviland. 'A chronicle of some sort—what's 'is name—place in Germany—*you* know—where that hangman came from. They published his diary the other day.





why—that there might be some truth in the story, wild as it appeared. I was so worried about it that I swept the floor of the Lady-chapel myself last night, and I found quite a quantity of sawdust among the sweepings. That led me to search for the key of the furnace-house, and I discovered it in some bushes at a little distance—in fact, within a stone's throw—of the furnace-house window. I sought guidance in prayer—and from my wife, whose judgment I greatly respect—and I made up my mind to speak to Hubbard after Mass. It was a great relief to me that he did not present himself at Early Celebration. Feeling as I did, I should have had scruples.'

'Just so, just so,' said the magistrate, a little impatiently. 'Well, you taxed him with it, and he confessed?'

'He did. I am sorry to say he showed no remorse at all. He even laughed. It was a most painful interview.'

'I am sure it must have been,' said Mrs Frobisher-Pym sympathetically.

'We must go and see Mr Burdock,' said the magistrate, rising. 'Whatever old Burdock may or may not have intended by that iniquitous will of his, it's quite evident that Hubbard and Mortimer and Rawlinson were entirely in the wrong. Upon my word, I've no idea whether it's an indictable offence to steal a body. I must look it up. But I should say it was. If there is any property in a corpse, it must belong to the family or the executors. And in any case, it's sacrilege, to say nothing of the scandal in the parish. I must say, Hancock, it won't do us any good in the eyes of the Nonconformists. However, no doubt you realise that. Well, it's an unpleasant job, and the sooner we tackle it the better. I'll run over to the vicarage with you and help you to break it to the Burdocks. How about you, Wimsey? You were right, after all, and I think Burdock owes you an apology.'

'Oh, I'll keep out of it,' said Wimsey. 'I shan't be exactly *persona grata*, don't you know. It's going to mean a deuce of a big financial loss to the Haviland Burdocks.'

'So it is. Most unpleasant. Well, perhaps you're right. Come along, vicar.'

Wimsey and his hostess sat discussing the matter by the fire for half an hour or so, when Mr Frobisher-Pym suddenly put his head in and said:

'I say, Wimsey—we're all going over to Mortimer's. I wish you'd come and drive the car. Merridew always has the day off on Sunday, and I don't care about driving at night, particularly in this fog.'

'Right you are,' said Wimsey. He ran upstairs, and came down in a few moments wearing a heavy leather flying-coat, and with a parcel under his arm. He greeted the Burdocks briefly, climbed into the driving-seat, and was soon steering cautiously through the mist along the Herriotting Road.

He smiled a little grimly to himself as they came up under the trees to the spot where the phantom coach had passed him. As they passed the gate through which the ingenious apparition had vanished, he indulged himself by pointing it out, and was rewarded by hearing a snarl from Haviland. At the well-remembered fork, he took the right-hand turning into Frimpton and drove steadily for six miles or so, till a warning shout from Mr Frobisher-Pym summoned him to look out for the turning up to Mortimer's.

Mr Mortimer's house, with its extensive stabling and farm buildings, stood about two miles back from the main road. In the darkness Wimsey could see little of it; but he noticed that the ground-floor windows were all lit up, and, when the door opened to the magistrate's imperative ring, a loud burst of laughter from the interior gave evidence that Mr Mortimer was not taking his misdoings too seriously.

'Is Mr Mortimer at home?' demanded Mr Frobisher-Pym, in the tone of a man not to be trifled with.

'Yes, sir. Will you come in, please?'

They stepped into a large, old-fashioned hall, brilliantly lit, and made cosy with a heavy oak screen across the door. As Wimsey advanced, blinking, from the darkness, he saw a large, thick-set man, with a ruddy face, advancing with hand outstretched in welcome.

'Frobisher-Pym! By Jove! how decent of you to come over! We've got some old friends of yours here. Oh!' (in a slightly altered tone) 'Burdock! Well, well— '

'Damn you!' said Haviland Burdock, thrusting furiously past the magistrate, who was trying to hold him back. 'Damn you, you swine! Chuck this bloody farce. What have you done with the body?'

'The body, eh?' said Mr Mortimer, retreating in some confusion.

'Yes, curse you! Your friend Hubbard's split. It's no good denying it. What the devil do you mean by it? You've got the body here somewhere. Where is it? Hand it over!'





'I must have picked it up in the barn,' said Wimsey. 'Curious, if true. Why should Mr Mortimer be lashing the stuffing out of his greys in an old fly at dead of night—and with muffled hoofs and no heads to boot? It's not a kind thing to do. It frightened Plunkett very much. It made me think I was drunk —a thought I hate to think. Ought I to tell the police? Are Mr Mortimer's jokes any business of mine? What do *you* think, Polly?'

The mare, hearing her name, energetically shook her head.

'You think not? Perhaps you are right. Let us say that Mr Mortimer did it for a wager. Who am I to interfere with his amusements? All the same,' added his lordship, 'I'm glad to know it wasn't Lumsden's whisky.'

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'This is the library,' said Haviland, ushering in his guests. 'A fine room—and a fine collection of books, I'm told, though literature isn't much in my line. It wasn't much in the governor's line, either, I'm afraid. The place wants doing up, as you see. I don't know whether Martin will take it in hand. It's a job that'll cost money, of course.'

Wimsey shivered a little as he gazed round—more from sympathy than from cold, though a white November fog lay curled against the tall windows and filtered damply through the frames.

A long, mouldering room, in the frigid neo-classical style, the library was melancholy enough in the sunless grey afternoon, even without the signs of neglect which wrung the book-collector's heart. The walls, panelled to half their height with book-cases, ran up in plaster to the moulded ceiling. Damp had blotched them into grotesque shapes, and here and there were ugly cracks and squamous patches, from which the plaster had fallen in yellowish flakes. A wet chill seemed to ooze from the books, from the calf bindings peeling and perishing, from the stains of greenish mildew which spread horridly from volume to volume. The curious musty odour of decayed leather and damp paper added to the general cheerlessness of the atmosphere.

'Oh, dear, dear!' said Wimsey, peering dismally into this sepulchre of forgotten learning. With his shoulders hunched like the neck-feathers of a chilly bird, with his long nose and half-shut eyes, he resembled a dilapidated heron, brooding over the stagnation of a wintry pool.

'What a freezing-cold place!' exclaimed Mrs Hancock. 'You really ought to scold Mrs Lovall, Mr Burdock. When she was put in here as caretaker, I

'Not to the village, sir, though you can get through this way. It comes out by Mr Mortimer's stables.'

'Ah, yes. This his land?'

'No, sir, it's Mr Topham's land, but Mr Mortimer rents this field and the next for fodder.'

'Oh, yes.' Wimsey peered across the hedge. 'Lucerne, I suppose. Or clover.'

'Clover, sir. And the mangolds is for the cattle.'

'Oh—Mr Mortimer keeps cattle as well as horses?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very jolly. Have a gasper?' Wimsey had sidled across to the barn in his interest, and was gazing absently into its dark interior. It contained a number of farm implements and a black fly of antique construction, which seemed to be undergoing renovation with black varnish. Wimsey pulled some vestas from his pocket. The box was apparently damp, for, after one or two vain attempts he abandoned it, and struck a match on the wall of the barn. The flame, lighting up the ancient fly, showed it to be incongruously fitted with rubber tyres.

'Very fine stud, Mr Mortimer's, I understand,' said Wimsey carelessly.

'Yes, sir, very fine indeed.'

'I suppose he hasn't any greys, by any chance. My mother—queenly woman, Victorian ideas, and all that—is rather keen on greys. Sports a carriage and pay-ah, don't you know.'

'Yes, sir? Well, Mr Mortimer would be able to suit the lady, I think, sir. He has several greys.'

'No? has he though? I must really go over and see him. Is it far?'

'Matter of five or six mile by the fields, sir.'

Wimsey looked at his watch.

'Oh, dear! I'm really afraid it's too far for this morning. I absolutely promised to get back to lunch. I must come over another day. Thanks *so* much. Is that girth right now? Oh, really, I'm immensely obliged. Get yourself a drink, won't you—and tell Mr Mortimer not to sell his greys till I've seen them. Well, *good* morning, and many thanks.'

He set Polly Flinders on the homeward path and trotted gently away. Not till he was out of sight of the barn did he pull up and, stooping from the saddle, thoughtfully examine his boots. They were liberally plastered with bran.





He strode threateningly round the screen into the lamplight. A tall, thin man rose up unexpectedly from the depths of an arm-chair and confronted him.

'Hold hard, old man!'

'Good God!' said Haviland, stepping heavily back on Wimsey's toes. 'Martin!'

'Sure,' said the other. 'Here I am. Come back like a bad half-penny. How are you?'

'So *you're* at the bottom of this!' stormed Haviland. 'I might have known it. You damned, dirty hound! I suppose you think it's decent to drag your father out of his coffin and tote him about the country like a circus. It's degrading. It's disgusting. It's abominable. You must be perfectly dead to all decent feeling. You don't deny it, I suppose?'

'I say, Burdock!' expostulated Mortimer.

'Shut up, curse you!' said Haviland. 'I'll deal with you in a minute. Now, look here, Martin, I'm not going to stand any more of this disgraceful behaviour. You'll give up that body, and— '

'Just a moment, just a moment,' said Martin. He stood, smiling a little, his hands thrust into the pockets of his dinner-jacket. 'This *éclaircissement* seems to be rather public. Who are all these people? Oh, it's the vicar, I see. I'm afraid we owe you a little explanation, vicar. And, er— '

'This is Lord Peter Wimsey,' put in Mr Frobisher-Pym, 'who discovered your—I'm afraid, Burdock, I must agree with your brother in calling it your disgraceful plot.'

'Oh, Lord!' said Martin. 'I say, Mortimer, you didn't know you were up against Lord Peter Wimsey, did you? No wonder the cat got out of the bag. The man's known to be a perfect Sherlock. However, I seem to have got home at the crucial moment, so there's no harm done. Diana, this is Lord Peter Wimsey—my wife.'

A young and pretty woman in a black evening dress greeted Wimsey with a shy smile, and turned deprecatingly to her brother-in-law.

'Haviland, we want to explain— '

He paid no attention to her.

'Now then, Martin, the game's up.'

'I think it is, Haviland. But why make all this racket?'

'Racket! I like that. You take your own father's body out of its coffin— '

'No, no, Haviland. I knew nothing about it. I swear that. I only got the news of his death a few days ago. We were right out in the wilds, filming a show in the Pyrenees, and I came straight back as soon as I could get away. Mortimer here, with Rawlinson and Hubbard, staged the whole show by themselves. I never heard a word about it till yesterday morning in Paris, when I found his letter waiting at my old digs. Honestly, Haviland, I had nothing to do with it. Why should I? I didn't need to.'

'What do you mean?'

'Well, if I'd been here, I should only have had to speak to stop the funeral altogether. Why on earth should I have gone to the trouble of stealing the body? Quite apart from the irreverence and all that. As it is, when Mortimer told me about it, I must say I was a bit revolted at the idea, though I appreciated the kindness and the trouble they'd been to on my account. I think Mr Hancock has most cause for wrath, really. But Mortimer has been as careful as possible, sir—really he has. He has placed the old governor quite reverently and decently in what used to be the chapel, and put flowers round him and so on. You will be quite satisfied, I'm sure.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mortimer. 'No disrespect intended, don't you know. Come and see him.'

'This is dreadful,' said the vicar helplessly.

'They had to do the best they could, don't you see, in my absence,' said Martin. 'As soon as I can, I'll make proper arrangements for a suitable tomb—above ground, of course. Or possibly cremation would fit the case.'

'What!' gasped Haviland. 'Do you mean to say you imagine I'm going to let my father stay unburied, simply because of your disgusting greed about money?'

'My dear chap, do you think I'm going to let you put him underground, simply to enable you to grab my property?'

'I'm the executor of his will, and I say he shall be buried, whether you like it or not!'

'And *I'm* an executor too—and I say he shan't be buried. He can be kept absolutely decently above ground, and he shall be.'

'But hear me,' said the vicar, distracted between these two disagreeable and angry young men.





unlikely that the mysterious coach should have been taken into a field from which there was no way out. Wimsey decided to seek farther.

The third gate was in bad repair. It sagged heavily from its hinges; the hasp was gone, and gate and post had been secured with elaborate twists of wire. Wimsey dismounted and examined these, convincing himself that their rusty surface had not been recently disturbed.

There remained only two more gates before he came to the cross-roads. One led into plough again, where the dark ridge-and-furrow showed no sign of disturbance, but at sight of the last gate Wimsey's heart gave a leap.

There was plough-land here also, but round the edge of the field ran a wide, beaten path, rutted and water-logged. The gate was not locked, but opened simply with a spring catch. Wimsey examined the approach. Among the wide ruts made by farm-wagons was the track of four narrow wheels—the unmistakable prints of rubber tyres. He pushed the gate open and passed through.

The path skirted two sides of the plough; then came another gate and another field, containing a long barrow of mangold wurzels and a couple of barns. At the sound of Polly's hoofs, a man emerged from the nearest barn, with a paint-brush in his hand, and stood watching Wimsey's approach.

"Morning!' said the latter genially.

"Morning, sir.'

'Fine day after the rain.'

'Yes, it is, sir.'

'I hope I'm not trespassing?'

'Where was you wanting to go, sir?'

'I thought, as a matter of fact—hullo!'

'Anything wrong, sir?'

Wimsey shifted in the saddle.

'I fancy this girth's slipped a bit. It's a new one.' (This was a fact.) 'Better have a look.'

The man advanced to investigate, but Wimsey had dismounted and was tugging at the strap, with his head under the mare's belly.

'Yes, it wants taking up a trifle. Oh! Thanks most awfully. Is this a short cut to Abbotts Bolton, by the way?'