

‘That sounds plausible,’ said Mary—‘academically speaking, I mean; but it isn’t a bit like George—I mean, blackmail is so *beastly*, isn’t it?’

‘Well,’ said Peter, ‘I think the best thing is to go and see Goyles. Whatever the key to Wednesday night’s riddle is, he holds it. Parker, old man, we’re nearing the end of the chase.’

Chapter 10

Nothing Abides at the Noon

‘Alas!’ said Hiya, ‘the sentiments which this person expressed with irreproachable honourableness, when the sun was high in the heavens and the probability of secretly leaving an undoubtedly well-appointed home was engagingly remote, seem to have an entirely different significance when recalled by night in a damp orchard, and on the eve of their fulfilment.’

The Waller Of Kai-Lung

And his short minute, after noon, is night.

Donne

WR Goyles was interviewed the next day at the police-station. Mr Murbles was present, and Mary insisted on coming. The young man began by blustering a little, but the solicitor’s dry manner made its impression.

‘Lord Peter Wimsey identifies you,’ said Mr Murbles, ‘as the man who made a murderous attack upon him last night. With remarkable generosity, he has forbore to press the charge. Now we know further that you were present at Riddlesdale Lodge on the night when Captain Cathcart was shot. You will no doubt be called as a witness in the case. But you would greatly assist justice by making a statement to us now. This is a purely friendly and private interview, Mr Goyles. As you see, no representative of the

police is present. We simply ask for your help. I ought, however, to warn you that, whereas it is, of course, fully competent for you to refuse to answer any of our questions, a refusal might lay you open to the gravest imputations.'

'In fact,' said Goyles, 'it's a threat. If I don't tell you, you'll have me arrested on suspicion of murder.'

'Dear me, no, Mr Goyles,' returned the solicitor. 'We should merely place what information we hold in the hands of the police, who would then act as they thought fit. God bless my soul, no—anything like a threat would be highly irregular. In the matter of the assault upon Lord Peter, his lordship will, of course, use his own discretion.'

'Well,' said Goyles sullenly, 'it's a threat, call it what you like. However, I don't mind speaking—especially as you'll be jolly well disappointed. I suppose you gave me away, Mary.'

Mary flushed indignantly.

'My sister has been extraordinarily loyal to you, Mr Goyles,' said Lord Peter. 'I may tell you, indeed, that she put herself into a position of grave personal inconvenience—not to say danger—on your behalf. You were traced to London in consequence of your having left unequivocal traces in your exceedingly hasty retreat. When my sister accidentally opened a telegram addressed to me at Riddlesdale by my family name she hurried immediately to town, to shield you if she could, at any cost to herself. Fortunately I had already received a duplicate wire at my flat. Even then I was not certain of your identity when I accidentally ran across you at the Soviet Club. Your own energetic efforts, however, to avoid an interview gave me complete certainty, together with an excellent excuse for detaining you. In fact, I'm uncommonly obliged to you for your assistance.'

Mr Goyles looked resentful.

'I don't know how you could think, George—' said Mary.

'If he hadn't done that to you,' said Mary slowly, 'I'd never have told you. I'd have died first. But of course, with his revolutionary doctrines—and when you think of red Russia and all the blood spilt in riots and insurrections and things—I suppose it does teach a contempt for human life.'

'My dear,' said the Duchess, 'it seems to me that Mr Goyles shows no especial contempt for his own life. You must try to look at the thing fairly. Shooting people and running away is not very heroic—according to *our* standards.'

'The thing I don't understand,' struck in Wimsey hurriedly, 'is how Gerald's revolver got into the shrubbery.'

'The thing I should like to know about,' said the Duchess, 'is, was Denis really a card-sharper?'

'The thing I should like to know about,' said Parker, 'is the green-eyed cat.'

'Denis *never* gave me a cat,' said Mary. 'That was a tarradiddle.'

'Were you ever in a jeweller's with him in the Rue de la Paix?'

'Oh, yes; heaps of times. And he gave me a diamond and tortoiseshell comb. But never a cat.'

'Then we may disregard the whole of last night's elaborate confession,' said Lord Peter, looking through Parker's notes, with a smile. 'It's really not bad, Polly, not bad at all. You've quite a talent for romantic fiction—no, I mean it! Just here and there you need more attention to detail. For instance, you *couldn't* have dragged that badly wounded man all up the path to the house without getting blood all over your coat, you know. By the way, did Goyles know Cathcart at all?'

'Not to my knowledge.'

'Because Parker and I had an alternative theory, which would clear Goyles from the worst part of the charge, anyhow. Tell her, old man; it was your idea.'

Thus urged, Parker outlined the blackmail and suicide theory.

'Good gracious!' said Mary.

'Well, go on. You knocked up Freddy and the Pettigrew-Robinsons. Then you had to bolt into your room to destroy your farewell letter and take your clothes off.'

'Yes. I'm afraid I didn't do that very naturally. But I couldn't expect anybody to believe that I went burglar-hunting in a complete set of silk undies and a carefully knotted tie with a gold safety-pin.'

'No. I see your difficulty.'

'It turned out quite well, too, because they were all quite ready to believe that I wanted to escape from Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson—except Mrs P. herself, of course.'

'Yes; even Parker swallowed that, didn't you, old man?'

'Oh, quite, quite so,' said Parker gloomily.

'I made a dreadful mistake about that shot,' resumed Lady Mary. 'You see, I explained it all so elaborately—and then I found that nobody had heard a shot at all. And afterwards they discovered that it had all happened in the shrubbery—and the time wasn't right, either. Then at the inquest I *had* to stick to my story—and it got to look worse and worse—and then they put the blame on Gerald. In my wildest moments I'd never thought of that. Of course, I see now how my wretched evidence helped.'

'Hence the ipecacuanha,' said Peter.

'I'd got into such a frightful tangle,' said poor Lady Mary, 'I thought I had better shut up altogether for fear of making things still worse.'

'And did you still think Goyles had done it?'

'I—I didn't know what to think,' said the girl. 'I don't know. Peter, who else *could* have done it?'

'Honestly, old thing,' said his lordship, 'if he didn't do it, I don't know who did.'

'He ran away, you see,' said Lady Mary.

'He seems rather good at shootin' and runnin' away,' said Peter grimly.

'Never mind what I think,' said the young man, roughly. 'I gather you've told 'em all about it now, anyhow. Well, I'll tell you my story as shortly as I can, and you'll see I know damn all about it. If you don't believe me I can't help it. I came along at about a quarter to three, and parked the 'bus in the lane.'

'Where were you at 11:50?'

'On the road from Northallerton. My meeting didn't finish till 10:45. I can bring a hundred witnesses to prove it.'

Winsey made a note of the address where the meeting had been held, and nodded to Goyles to proceed.

'I climbed over the wall and walked through the shrubbery.'

'You saw no person, and no body?'

'Nobody, alive or dead.'

'Did you notice any blood or footprints on the path?'

'No. I didn't like to use my torch, for fear of being seen from the house. There was just light enough to see the path. I came to the door of the conservatory just before three. As I came up I stumbled over something. I felt it, and it was like a body. I was alarmed. I thought it might be Mary—ill or fainted or something. I ventured to turn on my light. Then I saw it was Cathcart, dead.'

'You are sure he was dead?'

'Stone dead.'

'One moment,' interposed the solicitor. 'You say you saw that it was Cathcart. Had you known Cathcart previously?'

'No, never. I meant that I saw it was a dead man, and learnt afterwards that it was Cathcart.'

'In fact, you do not, now, know of your own knowledge, that it was Cathcart?'

'Yes—at least, I recognized the photographs in the papers afterwards.'

'It is very necessary to be accurate in making a statement, Mr Goyles. A remark such as you made just now might give a most unfortunate impression to the police or to a jury.'

So saying, Mr Murbles blew his nose, and resettled his pince-nez.

‘What next?’ inquired Peter.

‘I fancied I heard somebody coming up the path. I did not think it wise to be found there with the corpse, so I cleared out.’

‘Oh,’ said Peter, with an indescribable expression, ‘that was a very simple solution. You left the girl you were going to marry to make for herself the unpleasant discovery that there was a dead man in the garden and that her gallant wooer had made tracks. What did you expect *her* to think?’

‘Well, I thought she’d keep quiet for her own sake. As a matter of fact, I didn’t think very clearly about anything. I knew I’d broken in where I had no business, and that if I was found with a murdered man it might look jolly queer for me.’

‘In fact,’ said Mr Murbles, ‘you lost your head, young man, and ran away in a very foolish and cowardly manner.’

‘You needn’t put it that way,’ retorted Mr Goyles. ‘I was in a very awkward and stupid situation to start with.’

‘Yes,’ said Lord Peter ironically, ‘and 3 A.M. is a nasty, chilly time of day. Next time you arrange an elopement, make it for six o’clock in the evening, or twelve o’clock at night. You seem better at framing conspiracies than carrying them out. A little thing upsets your nerves, Mr Goyles. I don’t really think, you know, that a person of your temperament should carry fire-arms. What in the world, you blitherin’ young ass, made you loose off that pop-gun at me last night? You *would* have been in a damned awkward situation then, if you’d accidentally hit me in the head or the heart or anywhere that mattered. If you’re so frightened of a dead body, why go about shootin’ at people? Why, why, why? That’s what beats me. If you’re tellin’ the truth now, you never stood in the slightest danger. Lord! and to think of the time and trouble we’ve had to waste catchin’ you—you ass! And poor old Mary, workin’ away and half-killin’ herself, because she thought

‘No—at least—no, I didn’t see him. But there was poor Denis’s body, and Gerald bending over it. My first idea was that Gerald had killed George. That’s why I said, “O God! you’ve killed him!”’ (Peter glanced across at Parker and nodded.) ‘Then Gerald turned him over, and I saw it was Denis—and then I’m sure I heard something moving a long way off in the shrubbery—a noise like twigs snapping—and it suddenly came over me, where was George? Oh, Peter, I saw everything then, so clearly. I saw that Denis must have come on George waiting there, and attacked him—I’m sure Denis must have attacked him. Probably he thought it was a burglar. Or he found out who he was and tried to drive him away. And in the struggle George must have shot him. It was awful!’

Peter patted his sister on the shoulder. ‘Poor kid,’ he said.

‘I didn’t know what to do,’ went on the girl. ‘I’d so awfully little time, you see. My one idea was that nobody must suspect anybody had been there. So I had quickly to invent an excuse for being there myself. I shoved my suit-case behind the cactus-plants to start with. Jerry was taken up with the body and didn’t notice—you know, Jerry never *does* notice things till you shove them under his nose. But I knew if there’d been a shot Freddy and the Marchbankses must have heard it. So I pretended I’d heard it too, and rushed down to look for burglars. It was a bit lame, but the best thing I could think of. Gerald sent me up to alarm the house, and I had the story all ready by the time I reached the landing. Oh, and I was quite proud of myself for not forgetting the suit-case!’

‘You dumped it into the chest,’ said Peter.

‘Yes. I had a horrible shock the other morning when I found you looking in.’

‘Nothing like the shock I had when I found the silver sand there.’

‘Silver sand?’

‘Out of the conservatory.’

'Quite so,' said Peter. 'Well, the rumpled bed disposes of your story about never having gone to bed at all, doesn't it?'

'And I thought it was such a good story!'

'Want of practice,' replied her brother kindly.

'You'll do better next time. It's just as well, really, that it's so hard to tell a long, consistent lie. *Did* you, as a matter of fact, hear Gerald go out at 11:30, as Pettigrew-Robinson (damn his ears!) said?'

'I fancy I did hear somebody moving about,' said Mary, 'but I didn't think much about it.'

'Quite right,' said Peter. 'When I hear people movin' about the house at night, I'm much too delicate-minded to think anything at all.'

'Of course,' interposed the Duchess, 'particularly in England, where it is so oddly improper to think. I will say for Peter that, if he can put a continental interpretation on anything, he will—so considerate of you, dear, as soon as you took to doing it in silence and not mentioning it, as you so intelligently did as a child. You were really a very observant little boy, dear.'

'And still is,' said Mary, smiling at Peter with surprising friendliness.

'Old bad habits die hard,' said Wimsey. 'To proceed. At three o'clock you went down to meet Goyles. Why did he come all the way up to the house? It would have been safer to meet him in the lane.'

'I knew I couldn't get out of the lodge-gate without waking Hardraw, and so I'd have to get over the palings somewhere. I might have managed alone, but not with a heavy suit-case. So, as George would have to climb over, anyhow, we thought he'd better come and help carry the suit-case. And then we couldn't miss each other by the conservatory door. I sent him a little plan of the path.'

'Was Goyles there when you got downstairs?'

at least you wouldn't have run away unless there was something to run from!'

'You must make allowance for a nervous temperament,' said Mary in a hard voice.

'If you knew what it felt like to be shadowed and followed and badgered—' began Mr Goyles.

'But I thought you Soviet Club people enjoyed being suspected of things,' said Lord Peter. 'Why, it ought to be the proudest moment of your life when you're really looked on as a dangerous fellow.'

'It's the sneering of men like you,' said Goyles passionately, 'that does more to breed hatred between class and class—'

'Never mind about that,' interposed Mr Murbles. 'The law's the law for everybody, and you have managed to put yourself in a very awkward position, young man.' He touched a bell on the table, and Parker entered with a constable. 'We shall be obliged to you,' said Mr Murbles, 'if you will kindly have this young man kept under observation. We make no charge against him so long as he behaves himself, but he must not attempt to abscond before the Riddlesdale case comes up for trial.'

'Certainly not, sir,' said Mr Parker.

'One moment,' said Mary. 'Mr Goyles, here is the ring you gave me. Good-bye. When next you make a public speech calling for decisive action I will come and applaud it. You speak so well about that sort of thing. But otherwise, I think we had better not meet again.'

'Of course,' said the young man bitterly, 'your people have forced me into this position, and you turn round and sneer at me too.'

'I didn't mind thinking you were a murderer,' said Lady Mary spitefully, 'but I *do* mind your being such an ass.'

Before Mr Goyles could reply, Mr Parker, bewildered but not wholly displeased, manœuvred his charge out of the room. Mary walked over to the window, and stood biting her lips.

Presently Lord Peter came across to her. 'I say, Polly, old Murbles has asked us to lunch. Would you like to come? Sir Impey Biggs will be there.'

'I don't want to meet him today. It's very kind of Mr Murbles—' 'Oh, come along, old thing. Biggs is some celebrity, you know, and perfectly toppin' to look at, in a marbly kind of way. He'll tell you all about his canaries—'

Mary giggled through her obstinate tears.

'It's perfectly sweet of you, Peter, to try and amuse the baby. But I can't. I'd make a fool of myself. I've been made enough of a fool of for one day.'

'Bosh,' said Peter. 'Of course, Goyles didn't show up very well this morning, but, then, he was in an awfully difficult position. *Do* come.'

'I hope Lady Mary consents to adorn my bachelor establishment,' said the solicitor, coming up. 'I shall esteem it a very great honour. I really do not think I have entertained a lady in my chambers for twenty years—dear me, twenty years indeed it must be.'

'In that case,' said Lady Mary, 'I simply *can't* refuse.'

Mr Murbles inhabited a delightful old set of rooms in Staple Inn, with windows looking out upon the formal garden, with its odd little flower-beds and tinkling fountain. The chambers kept up to a miracle the old-fashioned law atmosphere which hung about his own prim person. His dining-room was furnished in mahogany, with a Turkey carpet and crimson curtains. On his sideboard stood some pieces of handsome Sheffield plate and a number of decanters with engraved silver labels round their necks. There was a bookcase full of large volumes bound in law calf, and an oil-painting of a harsh-featured judge over the mantelpiece.

engagement had been announced and there'd be a ghastly lot of talk and people trying to persuade me. And Denis might have made things horribly uncomfortable for Gerald—he was rather that sort. So we decided the best thing to do would be just to run away and get married first, and escape the wrangling.'

'Quite so,' said Peter. 'Besides, it would look rather well in the paper, wouldn't it? "Peer's Daughter Weds Socialist—Romantic Side-car Elopement—£6 a Week Plenty," says Her Ladyship."

'Pig!' said Lady Mary.

'Very good,' said Peter, 'I get you! So it was arranged that the romantic Goyles should fetch you away from Riddlesdale—why Riddlesdale? It would be twice as easy from London or Denver.'

'No. For one thing he had to be up North. And everybody knows one in town, and—anyhow, we didn't want to wait.'

'Besides, one would miss the Young Lochinvar touch. Well, then, why at the unearthly hour of 3 A.M.?'

'He had a meeting on Wednesday night at Northallerton. He was going to come straight on and pick me up, and run me down to town to be married by special license. We allowed ample time. George had to be at the office next day.'

'I see. Well, I'll go on now, and you stop me if I'm wrong. You went up at 9:30 on Wednesday night. You packed a suit-case. You—did you think of writing any sort of letter to comfort your sorrowing friends and relations?'

'Yes, I wrote one. But I—'

'Of course. Then you went to bed, I fancy, or, at any rate, turned the clothes back and lay down.'

'Yes. I lay down. It was a good thing I did, as it happened—' 'True, you wouldn't have had much time to make the bed look probable in the morning, and we should have heard about it. By the way, Parker, when Mary confessed her sins to you last night, did you make any notes?'

'Yes,' said Parker, 'if you can read my shorthand.'

‘Well, it seemed all right at first, but, as things went on, I got more and more depressed. Do you know, there was something a little alarming about Denis. He was so extraordinarily reserved. I know I wanted to be left alone, but—well, it was uncanny! He was correct. Even when he went off the deep end and was passionate—which didn’t often happen—he was correct about it. Extraordinary. Like one of those odd French novels, you know, Peter: frightfully hot stuff, but absolutely impersonal.’

‘Charles, old man!’ said Lord Peter.

‘M’m?’

‘That’s important. You realize the bearing of that?’

‘No.’

‘Never mind. Drive on, Polly.’

‘Aren’t I making your head ache?’

‘Damnably; but I like it. Do go on. I’m not sprouting a lily with anguish moist and fever-dew, or anything like that. I’m getting really thrilled. What you’ve just said is more illuminating than anything I’ve struck for a week.’

‘Really?’ Mary stared at Peter with every trace of hostility vanished. ‘I thought you’d never understand that part.’

‘Lord!’ said Peter. ‘Why not?’

Mary shook her head. ‘Well, I’d been corresponding all the time with George, and suddenly he wrote to me at the beginning of this month to say he’d come back from Germany, and had got a job on the *Thunderlap*—the Socialist weekly, you know—at a beginning screw of £4 a week, and wouldn’t I chuck these capitalists and so on, and come and be an honest working woman with him. He could get me a secretarial job on the paper. I was to type and so on for him, and help him get his articles together. And he thought between us we should make £6 or £7 a week, which would be heaps to live on. And I was getting more frightened of Denis every day. So I said I would. But I knew there’d be an awful row with Gerald. And really I was rather ashamed—the

Lady Mary felt a sudden gratitude for this discreet and solid Victorianism.

‘I fear we may have to wait a few moments for Sir Impey,’ said Mr Murbles, consulting his watch. ‘He is engaged in Quangle & Hamper v. *Truth*, but they expect to be through this morning—in fact, Sir Impey fancied that midday would see the end of it. Brilliant man, Sir Impey. He is defending *Truth*.’

‘Astonishin’ position for a lawyer, what?’ said Peter.

‘The newspaper,’ said Mr Murbles, acknowledging the pleasure with a slight unbending of the lips, ‘against these people who profess to cure fifty-nine different diseases with the same pill. Quangle & Hamper produced some of their patients in court to testify to the benefits they’d enjoyed from the cure. To hear Sir Impey handling them was an intellectual treat. His kindly manner goes a long way with old ladies. When he suggested that one of them should show her leg to the Bench the sensation in court was really phenomenal.’

‘And did she show it?’ inquired Lord Peter.

‘Panting for the opportunity, my dear Lord Peter, panting for the opportunity.’

‘I wonder they had the nerve to call her.’

‘Nerve?’ said Mr Murbles. ‘The nerve of men like Quangle & Hamper has not its fellow in the universe, to adopt the expression of the great Shakespeare. But Sir Impey is not the man to take liberties with. We are really extremely fortunate to have secured his help.—Ah, I think I hear him!’

A hurried footstep on the stair indeed announced learned counsel, who burst in, still in wig and gown, and full of apology.

‘Extremely sorry, Murbles,’ said Sir Impey. ‘We became excessively tedious at the end, I regret to say. I really did my best, but dear old Dowson is getting as deaf as a post, you know, and terribly fumbling in his movements.—And how are you, Wimsey?’

You look as if you'd been in the wars. Can we bring an action for assault against anybody?'

'Much better than that,' put in Mr Murbles; 'attempted murder, if you please.'

'Excellent, excellent,' said Sir Impey.

'Ah, but we've decided not to prosecute,' said Mr Murbles, shaking his head.

'Really! Oh, my dear Wimsey, this will never do. Lawyers have to live, you know. Your sister? I hadn't the pleasure of meeting you at Riddlesdale, Lady Mary. I trust you are fully recovered.'

'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?'

'Why not?' said Mary. 'George doesn't believe in those old-fashioned ideas about property. Besides, if you'd given it to me, it would be *my* money. We believe in men and women being equal. Why should the one always be the bread-winner more than the other?'

'I can't imagine, dear,' said the Dowager. 'Still, I could hardly expect poor Mr Goyles to live on unearned increment when he didn't believe in inherited property.'

'That's a fallacy,' said Mary, rather vaguely. 'Anyhow,' she added hastily, 'that's what happened. Then, after the war, George went to Germany to study Socialism and Labour questions there, and nothing seemed any good. So when Denis Cathcart turned up, I said I'd marry him.'

'Why?' asked Peter. 'He never sounded to me a bit the kind of bloke for you. I mean, as far as I could make out, he was Tory and diplomatic and—well, quite trusted old tawny, so to speak, I shouldn't have thought you had an idea in common.'

'No; but then he didn't care twopence whether I had any ideas or not. I made him promise he wouldn't bother me with diplomas and people, and he said no, I could do as I liked, provided I didn't compromise him. And we were to live in Paris and go our own ways and not bother. And anything was better than staying here, and marrying somebody in one's own set, and opening bazars and watching polo and meeting the Prince of Wales. So I said I'd marry Denis, because I didn't care about him, and I'm pretty sure he didn't care a half-penny about me, and we should have left each other alone. I did so want to be left alone!'

'Was Jerry all right about your money?' inquired Peter.

'Oh, yes. He said Denis was no great catch—I do wish Gerald wasn't so vulgar, in that flat, early-Victorian way—but he said that, after George, he could only thank his stars it wasn't worse.'

'Make a note of that, Charles,' said Wimsey.