'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.'

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?'

'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.

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.'

whom he had so adequately procured it—and began to strop it thoughtfully upon the palm of his hand.

Presently Wimsey pulled himself together and staggered to the window for a little cooling draught of moor air. As he did so, a loud hullabaloo smote his ear, and he perceived, in the courtyard below, Farmer Grimethorpe striding among his dogs; when they howled he struck at them with a whip, and they howled again. Suddenly he glanced up at the window, with an expression of such livid hatred that Wimsey stepped hurriedly back as though struck.

While Bunter shaved him he was silent.

The interview before Lord Peter was a delicate one; the situation, however one looked at it, unpleasant. He was under a considerable debt of gratitude to his hostess; on the other hand, Denver's position was such that minor considerations really had to go to the wall. His lordship had, nevertheless, never felt quite such a cad as he did while descending the staircase at Grider's Hole.

In the big farm kitchen he found a stout country-woman, stirring a pot of stew. He asked for Mr Grimethorpe, and was told that he had gone out.

'Can I speak to Mrs Grimethorpe, please?'

The woman looked doubtfully at him, wiped her hands on her apron, and, going into the scullery, shouted, 'Mrs Grimethorpe!' A voice replied from somewhere outside.

'Gentleman wants see tha.'

'Where is Mrs Grimethorpe?' broke in Peter hurriedly.

'I' t'dairy, recken.'

'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.

'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.

'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.

ideas about honour, going obstinately off to prison, rather than tell his solicitor where he had been. Denver misleading them all into the wildest and most ingenious solutions of a mystery which now stood out clear as seven sunbeams. Denver, whose voice the woman had thought she recognized on the memorable day when she flung herself into the arms of his brother. Denver calmly setting in motion the enormous, creaking machinery of a trial by his noble peers in order to safeguard a woman's reputation.

This very day, probably, a Select Committee of lords was sitting 'to inspect the Journals of this House upon former trials of peers in criminal cases, in order to bring the Duke of Denver to a speedy trial, and to report to the House what they should think proper thereupon.' There they were: moving that an address be presented to His Majesty by the lords with white staves, to acquaint His Majesty of the date proposed for the trial; arranging for fitting up the Royal Gallery at Westminster; humbly requesting the attendance of a sufficient police force to keep clear the approaches leading to the House; petitioning His Majesty graciously to appoint a Lord High Steward; ordering, in sheeplike accordance with precedent, that all lords be summoned to attend in their robes; that every lord, in giving judgment, disclose his opinion upon his honour, laying his right hand upon his heart; that the Sergeant-at-Arms be within the House to make proclamations in the King's name for keeping silence—and so on, and on, unendingly. And there, jammed in the window-sash, was the dirty little bit of paper which, discovered earlier, would have made the whole monstrous ceremonial unnecessary.

Wimsey's adventure in the bog had unsettled his nerves. He sat down on the bed and laughed, with the tears streaming down his face.

Mr Bunter was speechless. Speechlessly he produced a razor —and to the end of his days Wimsey never knew how or from

read it his eyebrows went up and his mouth pursed itself into an indescribable expression of whimsical enlightenment. Bunter, returning with the hot water, found his master transfixed, the paper in one hand, and his socks in the other, and whistling a complicated passage of Bach under his breath.

'Bunter,' said his lordship, 'I am, without exception, the biggest ass in Christendom. When a thing is close under my nose I can't see it. I get a telescope, and look for the explanation in Stapley. I deserve to be crucified upside-down, as a cure for anæmia of the brain. Jerry! Jerry! But, naturally, of course, you rotten ass, isn't it obvious? Silly old blighter. Why couldn't he tell Murbles or me?'

Mr Bunter advanced, the picture of respectful inquiry.

'Look at it—look at it!' said Wimsey, with a hysterical squeak of laughter. 'O Lord! O Lord! Stuck into the window-frame for anybody to find. *Just* like Jerry. Signs his name to the business in letters a foot long, leaves it conspicuously about, and then goes away and is chivalrously silent.'

Mr Bunter put the jug down upon the washstand in case of accident, and took the paper.

It was the missing letter from Tommy Freeborn.

No doubt about it. There it was—the evidence which established the truth of Denver's evidence. More—which established his alibi for the night of the 13th.

Not Cathcart—Denver.

Denver suggesting that the shooting party should return in October to Riddlesdale, where they had opened the grouse season in August. Denver sneaking hurriedly out at 11:30 to walk two miles across the fields on a night when Farmer Grimethorpe had gone to buy machinery. Denver carelessly plugging a rattling sash on a stormy night with an important letter bearing his title on it for all to see. Denver padding back at three in the morning like a homing tom-cat, to fall over his guest's dead body by the conservatory. Denver, with his kind, stupid, English-gentleman

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.

'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.

'Well, Bunter, I think I'll get up. I don't suppose we're altogether welcome here. I didn't fancy the look in our host's eye last night.'

'No, my lord. He made a deal of opposition about having your lordship conveyed to this room.'

'Why, whose room is it?'

'His own and Mrs Grimethorpe's, my lord. It appeared most suitable, there being a fireplace, and the bed already made up. Mrs Grimethorpe showed great kindness, my lord, and the man Jake pointed out to Grimethorpe that it would doubtless be to his pecuniary advantage to treat your lordship with consideration.'

'H'm. Nice, graspin' character, ain't he? Well, it's up and away for me. O Lord! I *am* stiff. I say, Bunter, have I any clothes to put on?'

'I have dried and brushed your lordship's suit to the best of my ability, my lord. It is not as I should wish to see it, but I think your lordship will be able to wear it to Riddlesdale.'

'Well, I don't suppose the streets will be precisely crowded,' retorted his lordship. 'I *do* so want a hot bath. How about shavin' water?'

'I can procure that from the kitchen, my lord.'

Bunter padded away, and Lord Peter, having pulled on a shirt and trousers with many grunts and groans, roamed over to the window. As usual with hardy country dwellers, it was tightly shut, and a thick wedge of paper had been rammed in to keep the sash from rattling. He removed this and flung up the sash. The wind rollicked in, laden with peaty moor scents. He drank it in gladly. It was good to see the jolly old sun after all—he would have hated to die a sticky death in Peter's Pot. For a few minutes he stood there, returning thanks vaguely in his mind for the benefits of existence. Then he withdrew to finish dressing. The wad of paper was still in his hand, and he was about to fling it into the fire, when a word caught his eye. He unrolled the paper. As he

He set the tray tenderly upon Lord Peter's ready knees.

'They must be jolly well dragged out of their sockets,' said his lordship, 'holdin' me up all that ghastly long time. I'm so beastly deep in debt to you already, Bunter, it's not a bit of use tryin' to repay it. You know I won't forget, anyhow, don't you? All right, I won't be embarrassin' or anything—thanks awfully, anyhow. That's that. What? Did they give you anywhere decent to sleep? I didn't seem to be able to sit up an' take notice last night.'

'I slept excellently, I thank your lordship.' Mr Bunter indicated a kind of truckle-bed in a corner of the room. 'They would have given me another room, my lord, but in the circumstances, I preferred to remain with your lordship, trusting you would excuse the liberty. I told them that I feared the effects of prolonged immersion upon your lordship's health. I was uneasy, besides, about the intention of Grimethorpe. I feared he might not feel altogether hospitably disposed, and that he might be led into some hasty action if we were not together.'

'I shouldn't wonder. Most murderous-lookin' fellow I ever set eyes on. I'll have to talk to him this morning—or to Mrs Grimethorpe. I'd take my oath she could tell us something, what?'

'I should say there was very little doubt of it, my lord.'

'Trouble is,' pursued Wimsey, with his mouth full of egg, 'I don't know how to get at her. That jolly husband of hers seems to cherish the most unpleasant suspicions of anything that comes this way in trousers. If he found out we'd been talkin' to her, what you may call privately, he might, as you say, be hurried by his feelin's into doin' something regrettable.'

'Just so, my lord.'

'Still, the fellow must go an' look after his bally old farm some time, and then, p'raps, we'll be able to tackle her. Queer sort of woman—damn fine one, what? Wonder what she made of Cathcart?' he added musingly.

Mr Bunter volunteered no opinion on this delicate point.

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 she-asses 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

'Bunter—where—you all right? Never said thank you—dunno what I'm doing—anywhere to sleep—what?'

He drifted away into oblivion. The old song came up mockingly, and wound its horrible fancies into his dreams:

> Then we shall coom an' ate oop doocks
> On Ilkla' Moor bar t'at....
> An' that is how—an' that is how—is how....

When Wimsey next opened his eyes a pale November sun was struggling in at the window. It seemed that the fog had fulfilled its mission and departed. For some time he lay, vaguely unaware of how he came to be where he was; then the outlines of recollection straightened themselves, the drifting outposts of dreams were called back, the burden of his preoccupation settled down as usual. He became aware of an extreme bodily lassitude, and of the dragging pain of wrenched shoulder muscles. Examining himself perfunctorily, he found a bruised and tender zone beneath the armpits and round his chest and back, where the rescuing rope had hauled at him. It was painful to move, so he lay back and closed his eyes once more.

Presently the door opened to admit Bunter, neatly clothed and bearing a tray from which rose a most excellent odour of ham and eggs.

'Hullo, Bunter!'

'Good morning, my lord! I trust your lordship has rested.'

'Feel as fit as a fiddle, thanks—come to think of it, why fiddle?—except for a general feeling of havin' been violently massaged by some fellow with cast-iron fingers and knobbly joints. How about you?'

'The arms are a trifle fatigued, thank you, my lord; otherwise, I am happy to say, I feel no trace of the misadventure. Allow me, my lord.'