

Chapter 1

Of His Malice Aforethought

O, who hath done this deed?

Othello

LORD Peter Winsey stretched himself luxuriously between the sheets provided by the Hôtel Meurice. After his exertions in the unravelling of the Battersea Mystery, he had followed Sir Julian Freke's advice and taken a holiday. He had felt suddenly weary of breakfasting every morning before his view over the Green Park; he had realized that the picking up of first editions at sales afforded insufficient exercise for a man of thirty-three; the very crimes of London were over-sophisticated. He had abandoned his flat and his friends and fled to the wilds of Corsica. For the last three months he had forsaken letters, newspapers, and telegrams. He had tramped about the mountains, admiring from a cautious distance the wild beauty of Corsican peasant-women, and studying the vendetta in its natural haunt. In such conditions murder seemed not only reasonable, but lovable. Bunter, his confidential man and assistant sleuth, had nobly sacrificed his civilized habits, had let his master go dirty and even unshaven, and had turned his faithful camera from the recording of fingerprints to that of craggy scenery. It had been very refreshing.

Now, however, the call of the blood was upon Lord Peter. They had returned late last night in a vile train to Paris, and had picked up their luggage. The autumn light, filtering through the curtains, touched caressingly the silver-topped bottles on the dressing-table,

outlined an electric lamp-shade and the shape of the telephone. A noise of running water near by proclaimed that Bunter had turned on the bath (h. & c.) and was laying out scented soap, bath-salts, the huge bath-sponge, for which there had been no scope in Corsica, and the delightful flesh-brush with the long handle, which rasped you so agreeably all down the spine. ‘Contrast,’ philosophized Lord Peter sleepily, ‘is life. Corsica—Paris—then London.... Good morning, Bunter.’

‘Good morning, my lord. Fine morning, my lord. Your lordship’s bath-water is ready.’

‘Thanks,’ said Lord Peter. He blinked at the sunlight.

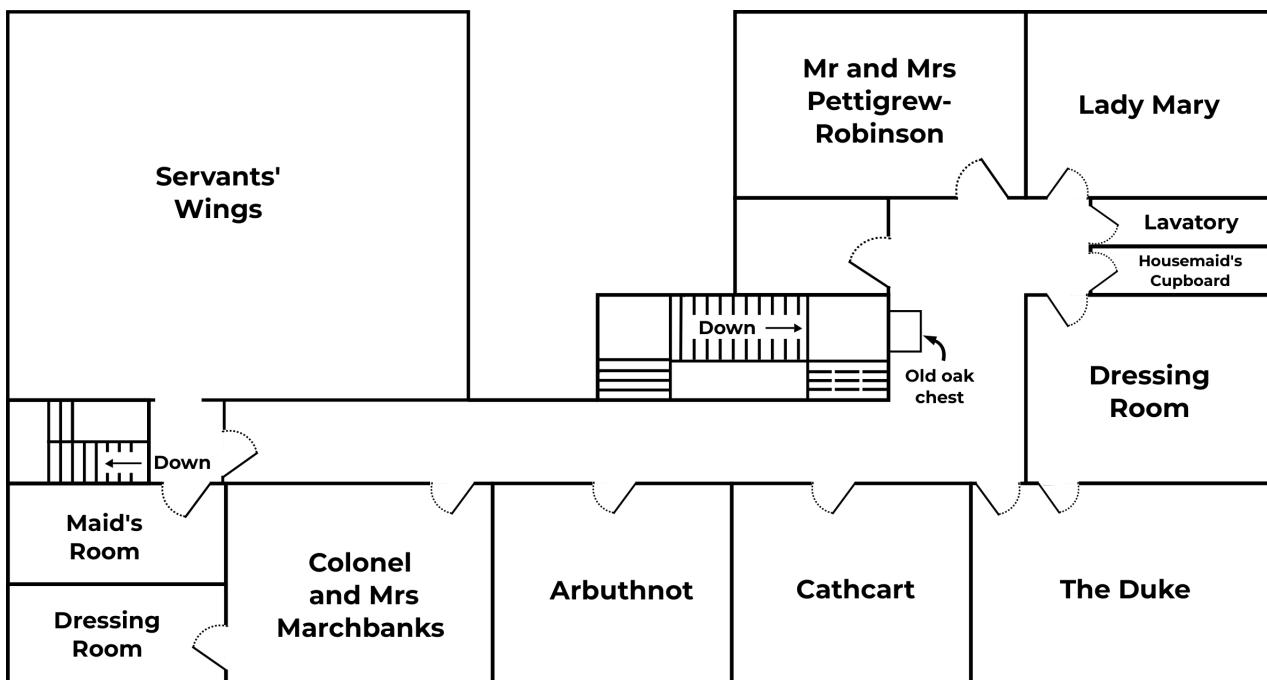
It was a glorious bath. He wondered, as he soaked in it, how he could have existed in Corsica. He wallowed happily and sang a few bars of a song. In a soporific interval he heard the valet de chambre bringing in coffee and rolls. Coffee and rolls! He heaved himself out with a splash, towelled himself luxuriously, enveloped his long-mortified body in a silken bath-robe, and wandered back. To his immense surprise he perceived Mr Bunter calmly replacing all the fittings in his dressing-case. Another astonished glance showed him the bags—scarcely opened the previous night—repacked, relabelled, and standing ready for a journey.

‘I say, Bunter, what’s up?’ said his lordship. ‘We’re stayin’ here a fortnight y’know.’

‘Excuse me, my lord,’ said Mr Bunter, deferentially, ‘but, having seen *The Times* (delivered here every morning by air, my lord; and very expeditious I’m sure, all things considered), I made no doubt your lordship would be wishing to go to Riddlesdale at once.’

‘Riddlesdale!’ exclaimed Peter. ‘What’s the matter? Anything wrong with my brother?’

For answer Mr Bunter handed him the paper, folded open at the heading:



RIDDLESDALE LODGE: SECOND FLOOR

Chapter I: Of His Malice Aforethought

DUKE OF DENVER ARRESTED
On MURDER CHARGE

Lord Peter stared as if hypnotized.

'I thought your lordship wouldn't wish to miss anything,' said

Mr Bunter, 'so I took the liberty—'

Lord Peter pulled himself together.

'When's the next train?' he asked.

'I beg your lordship's pardon—I thought your lordship would wish to take the quickest route. I took it on myself to book two seats in the airplane *Victoria*. She starts at 11:30.'

Lord Peter looked at his watch.

'Ten o'clock,' he said. 'Very well. You did quite right. Dear me! Poor old Gerald arrested for murder. Uncommonly worryin' for him, poor chap. Always hated my bein' mixed up with police-courts. Now he's there himself. Lord Peter Wimsey in the witness-box—very distressin' to feelin's of a brother. Duke of Denver in the dock—worse still. Dear me! Well, I suppose one must have breakfast.'

'Yes, my lord. Full account of the inquest in the paper, my lord.'
'Yes. Who's on the case, by the way?'

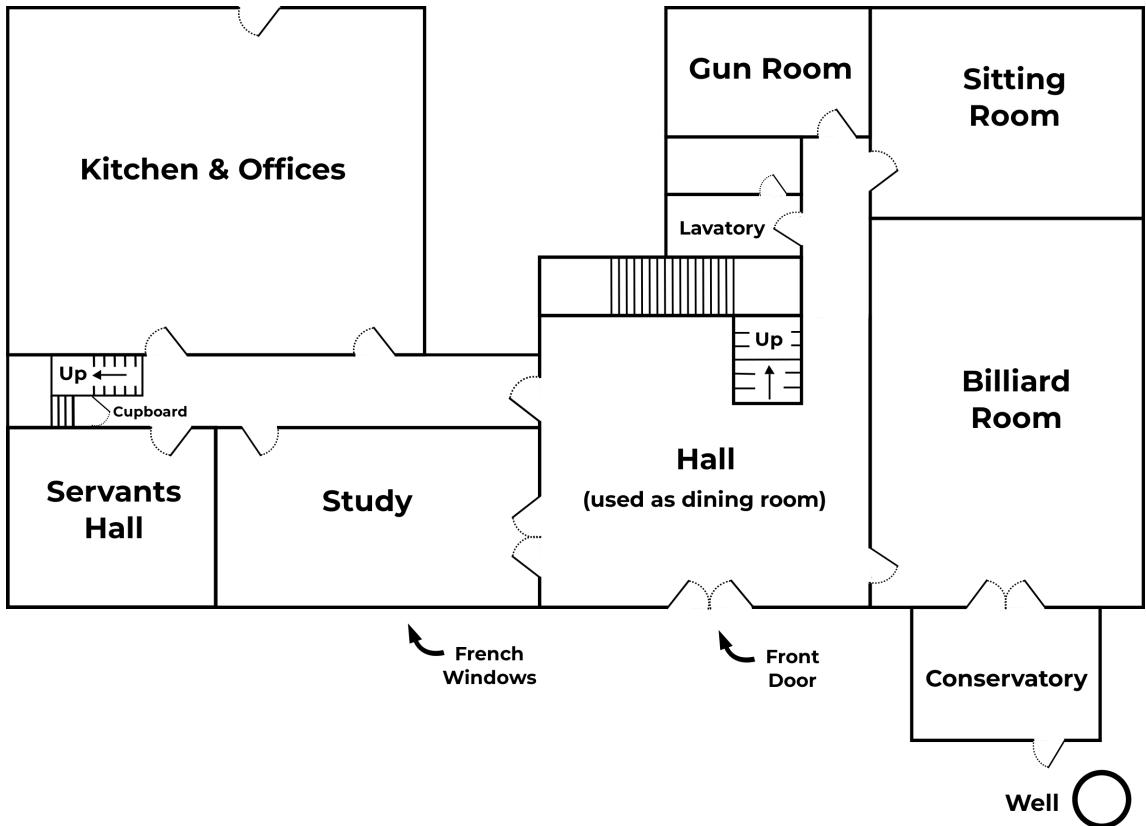
'Mr Parker, my lord.'

'Parker? That's good. Splendid old Parker! Wonder how he managed to get put on to it. How do things look, Bunter?'

'If I may say so, my lord, I fancy the investigations will prove very interesting. There are several extremely suggestive points in the evidence, my lord.'

'From a criminological point of view I daresay it is interesting,' replied his lordship, sitting down cheerfully to his *café au lait*, 'but it's deuced awkward for my brother, all the same, havin' no turn for criminology, what?'

'Ah, well!' said Mr Bunter, 'they say, my lord, there's nothing like having a personal interest.'



RIDDLESDALE LODGE: GROUND FLOOR

The inquest was held today at Riddlesdale, in the North Riding of Yorkshire, on the body of Captain Denis Cathcart, which was found at three o'clock

on Thursday morning lying just outside the conservatory door of the Duke of Denver's shooting-box, Riddlesdale Lodge. Evidence was given to show that deceased had quarrelled with the Duke of Denver on the preceding evening, and was subsequently shot in a small thicket adjoining the house. A pistol belonging to the Duke was found near the scene of the crime. A verdict of murder was returned against the Duke of Denver. Lady Mary Wimsey, sister of the Duke, who was engaged to be married to the deceased, collapsed after giving evidence, and is now lying seriously ill at the Lodge. The Duchess of Denver hastened from town yesterday and was present at the inquest. Full report on p. 12.

'Poor old Gerald!' thought Lord Peter, as he turned to page 12; 'and poor old Mary! I wonder if she really was fond of the fellow. Mother always said not, but Mary never would let on about herself.'

The full report began by describing the little village of Riddlesdale, where the Duke of Denver had recently taken a small shooting-box for the season. When the tragedy occurred the Duke had been staying there with a party of guests. In the Duchess's absence Lady Mary Wimsey had acted as hostess. The other guests were Colonel and Mrs Marchbanks, the Hon. Frederick Arbuthnot, Mr and Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson, and the dead man, Denis Cathcart.

The first witness was the Duke of Denver, who claimed to have discovered the body. He gave evidence that he was coming into the house by the conservatory door at three o'clock in the morning of Thursday, October 14th, when his foot struck against something.

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THE SOLUTION OF
THE RIDDLERDALE MYSTERY

WITH

A REPORT

OF THE TRIAL OF

THE DUKE OF DENVER

BEFORE THE HOUSE OF LORDS

FOR

MURDER

He had switched on his electric torch and seen the body of Denis Catcart at his feet. He had at once turned it over, and seen that Catcart had been shot in the chest. He was quite dead. As Denver was bending over the body, he heard a cry in the conservatory, and, looking up, saw Lady Mary Wimsey gazing out horror-struck. She came out by the conservatory door, and exclaimed at once, 'O God, Gerald, you've killed him!' (Sensation).¹

THE CORONER: Were you surprised by that remark?

DUKE OF D.: Well, I was so shocked and surprised at the whole thing. I think I said to her, 'Don't look,' and she said, 'Oh, it's Denis! Whatever can have happened? Has there been an accident?' I stayed with the body, and sent her up to rouse the house.

THE CORONER: Did you expect to see Lady Mary Wimsey in the conservatory?

DUKE OF D.: Really, as I say, I was so astonished all round, don't you know, I didn't think about it.

THE CORONER: Do you remember how she was dressed?

DUKE OF D.: I don't think she was in her pyjamas. [Laughter.]

I think she had a coat on.

THE CORONER: I understand that Lady Mary Wimsey was engaged to be married to the deceased?

DUKE OF D.: Yes.

THE CORONER: He was well known to you?

DUKE OF D.: He was the son of an old friend of my father's; his parents are dead. I believe he lived chiefly abroad. I ran across him during the war, and in 1919 he came to stay at Denver. He became engaged to my sister at the beginning of this year.

THE CORONER: With your consent, and with that of the family?

DUKE OF D.: Oh, yes, certainly.

THE CORONER: What kind of man was Captain Cathcart?

DUKE OF D.: Well—he was a Sahib and all that. I don't know what he did before he joined in 1914. I think he lived on his income; his father was well off. Crack shot, good at games, and so on. I never heard anything against him—till that evening.

THE CORONER: What was that?

DUKE OF D.: Well—the fact is—it was deuced queer. He—if anybody but Tommy Freeborn had said it I should never have believed it. [Sensation.]

THE CORONER: I'm afraid I must ask your grace of what exactly you had to accuse the deceased.

DUKE OF D.: Well, I didn't—I don't—exactly accuse him. An old friend of mine made a suggestion. Of course I thought it must be all a mistake, so I went to Cathcart, and, to my amazement, he practically admitted it! Then we both got angry, and he told me to go to the devil, and rushed out of the house. [Renewed *sensation*.]

THE CORONER: When did this quarrel occur?

DUKE OF D.: On Wednesday night. That was the last I saw of him. [Unparalleled *sensation*.]

THE CORONER: Please, please, we cannot have this disturbance. Now, will your grace kindly give me, as far as you can remember it, the exact history of this quarrel?

DUKE OF D.: Well, it was like this. We'd had a long day on the moors and had dinner early, and about half-past nine we began to feel like turning in. My sister and Mrs Pettigrew-Robinson toddled on up, and

CLOUDS OF TIMELESSNESS



we were havin' a last peg in the billiard-room when Fleming—that's my man—came in with the letters. They come rather any old time in the evening, you know, we being two and a half miles from the village. No—I wasn't in the billiard-room at the time—I was lockin' up the gun-room. The letter was from an old friend of mine I hadn't seen for years—Tom Freeborn—used to know him at the House—

THE CORONER: Whose house?

DUKE OF D.: Oh, Christ Church, Oxford. He wrote to say he'd seen the announcement of my sister's en-

gagement in Egypt.

THE CORONER: In Egypt?

DUKE OF D.: I mean, *he* was in Egypt—Tom Freeborn, you see—that's why he hadn't written before. He engineers. He went out there after the war was over, you see, and, bein' somewhere up near the sources of the Nile, he doesn't get the papers regularly. He said, would I 'scuse him for interferin' in a very delicate matter, and all that, but did I know who Cathcart was? Said he'd met him in Paris during the war, and he lived by cheatin' at cards—said he could swear to it, with details of a row there'd been in some French place or other. Said he knew I'd want to chaw his head off—Freeborn's, I mean—for buttin' in, but he'd seen the man's photo in the paper, an' he thought I ought to know.

THE CORONER: Did this letter surprise you?

DUKE OF D.: Couldn't believe it at first. If it hadn't been old Tom Freeborn I'd have put the thing in the fire straight off, and, even as it was, I didn't quite know what to think. I mean, it wasn't as if it had happened in England, you know. I mean to say, Frenchmen get

so excited about nothing. Only there was Freeborn, and he isn't the kind of man that makes mistakes.

THE CORONER: What did you do?

DUKE OF D.: Well, the more I looked at it the less I liked it, you know. Still, I couldn't quite leave it like that, so I thought the best way was to go straight to Cathcart. They'd all gone up while I was sittin' thinkin' about it, so I went up and knocked at Cathcart's door. He said, 'What's that?' or 'Who the devil's that?' or somethin' of the sort, and I went in, 'Look here,' I said, 'can I just have a word with you?' 'Well, cut it short, then,' he said. I was surprised—he wasn't usually rude. 'Well,' I said, 'fact is, I've had a letter I don't much like the look of, and I thought the best thing to do was to bring it straight away to you an' have the whole thing cleared up. It's from a man—a very decent sort—old college friend, who says he's met you in Paris.' 'Paris!' he said, in a most uncom- monly unpleasant way. 'Paris! What the hell do you want to come talkin' to me about Paris for?' 'Well,' I said, 'don't talk like that, because it's misleadin' under the circumstances.' 'What are you drivin' at?' says Cathcart. 'Spit it out and go to bed, for God's sake.' I said, 'Right oh! I will. It's a man called Freeborn, who says he knew you in Paris and that you made money cheatin' at cards.' I thought he'd break out at that, but all he said was, 'What about it?' 'What about it?' I said. 'Well, of course, it's not the sort of thing I'm goin' to believe like that, right bang-slap off, without any proofs.' Then he said a funny thing. He said, 'Beliefs don't matter—it's what one *knows* about people.' 'Do you mean to say you don't deny it?' I said. 'It's no good my deny-