

A LORD PETER WIMSEY MYSTERY



Gaudy Night



DOROTHY L. SAYERS





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Contents

[Author's Note](#)

[Chapter I](#)

[Chapter II](#)

[Chapter III](#)

[Chapter IV](#)

[Chapter V](#)

[Chapter VI](#)

[Chapter VII](#)

[Chapter VIII](#)

[Chapter IX](#)

[Chapter X](#)

[Chapter XI](#)

[Chapter XII](#)

[Chapter XIII](#)

[Chapter XIV](#)

[Chapter XV](#)

[Chapter XVI](#)

[Chapter XVII](#)

[Chapter XVIII](#)

[Chapter XIX](#)

[Chapter XX](#)

[Chapter XXI](#)

[Chapter XXII](#)

[Chapter XXIII](#)

[Preview: *Busman's Honeymoon*](#)

[A Biography of Dorothy L. Sayers](#)

The University is a Paradise, Rivers of Knowledge are there, Arts and Sciences flow from thence
Counsell Tables are *Horti conclusi*, (as it is said in the Canticles) *Gardens that are walled in*, and the
are *Fontes signati*, *Wells that are sealed up*; bottomless depths of unsearchable Counsels there.

JOHN DONNE

AUTHOR'S NOTE

It would be idle to deny that the City and University of Oxford (*in aeternum floreat*) do actually exist and contain a number of colleges and other buildings, some of which are mentioned by name in the book. It is therefore the more necessary to affirm emphatically that none of the characters which I have placed upon this public stage has any counterpart in real life. In particular, Shrewsbury College with its dons, students and scouts, is entirely imaginary; nor are the distressing events described as taking place within its walls founded upon any events that have occurred anywhere. Detective-story writers are obliged by their disagreeable profession to invent startling and unpleasant incidents and people, and are (I presume) at liberty to imagine what might happen if such incidents and people were to intrude upon the life of an innocent and well-ordered community; but in so doing they must not be supposed to suggest that any such disturbance ever has occurred or is ever likely to occur in any community in real life.

Certain apologies are, however, due from me: first, to the University of Oxford, for having presented it with a Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor of my own manufacture and with a college of 15 women students, in excess of the limit ordained by statute. Next, and with deep humility, to Balliol College—not only for having saddled it with so wayward an alumnus as Peter Wimsey, but also for my monstrous impertinence in having erected Shrewsbury College upon its spacious and sacred cricket-ground. To New College, also to Christ Church, and especially to Queen's, I apologize for the follies of certain young gentlemen, to Brasenose for the facetiousness of a middle-aged one, and to Magdalen for the embarrassing situation in which I have placed an imaginary pro-Proctor. The Corporation Dump, on the other hand, is, or was, a fact, and no apology for it is due from me.

To the Principal and Fellows of my own college of Somerville, I tender my thanks for having been so generously given in questions of proctorial rules and general college discipline—though they are not to be held responsible for details of discipline in Shrewsbury College, many of which I have invented to suit my own purpose.

Persons curious in chronology may, if they like, work out from what they already know of the Wimsey family that the action of the book takes place in 1935; but if they do, they must not be querulously indignant because the King's Jubilee is not mentioned, or because I have arranged the weather and the moon's changes to suit my own fancy. For, however realistic the background, the novelist's only native country is Cloud-Cuckooland, where they do but jest, poison in jest: no offence in the world.

CHAPTER I

*Thou blind man's mark, thou fool's self-chosen snare,
Fond fancy's scum, and dregs of scattered thought,
Band of all evils; cradle of causeless care;
Thou web of will, whose end is never wrought:
Desire! Desire! I have too dearly bought
With price of mangled mind, thy worthless ware.*

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

Harriet Vane sat at her writing-table and stared out into Mecklenburg Square. The late tulips made a brave show in the Square garden, and a quartet of early tennis-players were energetically calling the score of a rather erratic and unpracticed game. But Harriet saw neither tulips nor tennis-players. A letter lay open on the blotting-pad before her, but its image had faded from her mind to make way for another picture. She saw a stone quadrangle, built by a modern architect in a style neither new nor old but stretching out reconciling hands to past and present. Folded within its walls lay a trim grass plot with flower-beds splashed at the angles, and surrounded by a wide stone plinth. Behind the level roof of Cotswold slate rose the brick chimneys of an older and less formal pile of buildings—a quadrangle also of a kind, but still keeping a domestic remembrance of the original Victorian dwelling-house that had sheltered the first shy students of Shrewsbury College. In front were the trees of Jowett Walk and beyond them, a jumble of ancient gables and the tower of New College, with its jackdaws wheeling against a windy sky.

Memory peopled the quad with moving figures. Students sauntering in pairs. Students dashing to lectures, their gowns hitched hurriedly over light summer frocks, the wind jerking their flat caps in the absurd likeness of so many jesters' cockscombs. Bicycles stacked in the porter's lodge, the carriers piled with books and gowns twisted about their handle-bars. A grizzled woman don crossing the turf with vague eyes, her thoughts riveted upon aspects of sixteenth-century philosophy, her sleeves floating, her shoulders cocked to the academic angle that automatically compensated the backward drag of the pleated poplin. Two male commoners in search of a coach, bareheaded, hands in their trousers-pockets, talking loudly about boats. The Warden—grey and stately—and the Dean—stocky, brisk, birdlike, a Lesser Redpoll—in animated conference under the archway leading to the Old Quadrangle. Tall spikes of delphinium against the grey, quiveringly blue like flames, if flames were ever so blue. The college cat, preoccupied and remote, stalking with tail erect in the direction of the buttery.

It was all so long ago; so closely encompassed and complete; so cut off as by swords from the bitter years that lay between. Could one face it now? What would those women say to her, to Harriet

Vane, who had taken her First in English and gone to London to write mystery fiction, to live with a man who was not married to her, and to be tried for his murder amid a roar of notoriety? That was not the kind of career that Shrewsbury expected of its old students.

She had never gone back; at first, because she had loved the place too well, and a clean break seemed better than a slow wrenching-away; and also because, when her parents had died and left her penniless, the struggle to earn a livelihood had absorbed all her time and thought. And afterwards, the stark shadow of the gallows had fallen between her and that sundrenched quadrangle of grey and green. But now—?

She picked up the letter again. It was an urgent entreaty that she should attend the Shrewsbury Gaudy—an entreaty of the kind that it is difficult to disregard. A friend whom she had not seen since they went down together; married now and remote from her, but fallen sick, and eager to see Harriet once again before going abroad for a delicate and dangerous operation.

Mary Stokes, so pretty and dainty as Miss Patty in the Second Year play; so charming and finished in manner; so much the social center of her year. It had seemed strange that she should take such a fancy to Harriet Vane, rough and gawky and anything but generally popular. Mary had led and Harriet had followed; when they punted up the Cher with strawberries and thermos flasks; when they climbed Magdalen tower together before sunrise on May-Day and felt it swing beneath them with the swing of the reeling bells; when they sat up late at night over the fire with coffee and parkin, it was always Mary who took the lead in all the long discussions about love and art, religion and citizenship. Mary, said all her friends, was marked for a First; only the dim, inscrutable dons had not been surprised when the lists came out with Harriet's name in the First Class and Mary's in the Second. And since then, Mary had married and scarcely been heard of; except that she haunted the College with a sick persistence, never missing an Old Students' Meeting or a Gaudy. But Harriet had broken all her old ties and half the commandments, dragged her reputation in the dust and made money, had the rich and amusing Lord Peter Wimsey at her feet, to marry him if she chose, and was full of energy and bitterness and the uncertain rewards of fame. Prometheus and Epimetheus had changed their parts; it seemed; but for one there was the box of troubles and for the other the bare rock and the vulture; and never, it seemed to Harriet, could they meet on any common ground again.

"But, by God!" said Harriet, "I won't be a coward. I'll go and be damned to it. Nothing can hurt me worse than I've been hurt already. And what does it matter after all?"

She filled up her invitation form, addressed it, stamped it with a sharp thump and ran quickly down to drop it in the pillar-box before she changed her mind.

She came back slowly across the Square garden, mounted the Adam stone stair to her flat and after a fruitless rummage in a cupboard, came out and climbed up slowly again to a landing at the top of the house. She dragged out an ancient trunk, unlocked it and flung back the lid. A close, cold odor of Books. Discarded garments. Old shoes. Old manuscripts. A faded tie that had belonged to her dead

lover—how horrible that that should still be hanging about! She burrowed to the bottom of the pile and dragged a thick, black bundle out into the dusty sunlight. The gown, worn only once at the taking of her M.A. degree, had suffered nothing from its long seclusion: the stiff folds shook loose with hardly a crease. The crimson silk of the hood gleamed bravely. Only the flat cap showed a little touch of the moth's tooth. As she beat the loose fluff from it, a tortoise-shell butterfly, disturbed from its hibernation beneath the flap of the trunk-lid, fluttered out into the brightness of the window, where it was caught and held by a cobweb.

Harriet was glad that in these days she could afford her own little car. Her entry into Oxford would bear no resemblance to those earlier arrivals by train. For a few hours longer she could ignore the whimpering ghost of her dead youth and tell herself that she was a stranger and a sojourner, a well-to-do woman with a position in the world. The hot road span away behind her; towns rose from the green landscape, crowded close about her with their inn-signs and petrol-pumps, their shops and police and perambulators, then reeled back and were forgotten. June was dying among the roses, the hedges were darkening to a duller green; the blatancy of red brick sprawled along the highway was a reminder that the present builds inexorably over the empty fields of the past. She lunched in High Wycombe, solidly, comfortably, ordering a half-bottle of white wine and tipping the waitress generously. She was eager to distinguish herself as sharply as possible from that former undergraduate who would have had to be content with a packet of sandwiches and a flask of coffee beneath the bougainvillea in a by-lane. As one grew older, as one established one's self, one gained a new delight in formality. Her dress for the Garden-party, chosen to combine suitably with full academics, lay, neatly folded inside her suitcase. It was long and severe, of plain black georgette, wholly and unimpeachably correct. Beneath it was an evening dress for the Gaudy Dinner, of a rich petunia color, excellently cut on restrained lines, with no unbecoming display of back or breast; it would not affront the portraits of dead Wardens, gazing down from the slowly mellowing oak of the Hall.

Headington. She was very near now, and in spite of herself a chill qualm cramped her stomach. Headington Hill, up which one had toiled so often, pushing a decrepit bicycle. It seemed less steep now, as one made decorous descent behind four rhythmically pulsating cylinders; but every leaf and stone hailed one with the intrusive familiarity of an old schoolfellow. Then the narrow street, with its cramped, untidy shops, like the main street of a village; one or two stretches had been widened and improved, but there was little real change to take refuge in.

Magdalen Bridge. Magdalen Tower. And here, no change at all—only the heartless and indifferent persistence of man's handiwork. Here one must begin to steel one's self in earnest. Long Wall Street. St. Cross Road. The iron hand of the past gripping at one's entrails. The college gate ahead and now one must go through with it.

There was a new porter at the St. Cross lodge, who heard Harriet's name unmoved and checked her off upon a list. She handed him her bag, took her car round to a garage in Mansfield Lane*, and the

with her gown over her arm, passed through the New Quad into the Old, and so, by way of an ugly brick doorway, into Burleigh Building.

She met nobody of her year in the corridors or on the staircase. Three contemporaries of a few senior generation were greeting one another with effusive and belated girlishness at the door of the Junior Common Room; but she knew none of them, and went by unspeaking and unspoken to, like a ghost. The room allotted to her she recognized, after a little calculation, as one that had been occupied in her day by a woman she particularly disliked, who had married a missionary and gone to China. The present owner's short gown hung behind the door; judging by the bookshelves, she was reading History; judging by her personal belongings, she was a Fresher with an urge for modernity and very little natural taste. The narrow bed, on which Harriet flung down her belongings, was covered with drapery of a crude green color and ill-considered Futuristic pattern; a bad picture in the neo-archaic manner hung above it; a chromium-plated lamp of angular and inconvenient design swore acidly at the table and wardrobe provided by the college, which were of a style usually associated with the Tottenham Court Road; while the disharmony was crowned and accentuated by the presence, on the chest of drawers, of a curious statuette or three-dimensional diagram carried out in aluminum, which resembled a gigantic and contorted corkscrew, and was labeled upon its base: ASPIRATION. It was with surprise and relief that Harriet discovered three practicable dress-hangers in the wardrobe. The looking glass, in conformity with established college use, was about a foot square, and hung in the darkest corner of the room.

She unpacked her bag, took off her coat and skirt, slipped on a dressinggown and set out in search of a bathroom. She had allowed herself three-quarters of an hour for changing, and Shrewsbury's hot water system had always been one of its most admirable minor efficiencies. She had forgotten exactly where the bathrooms were on this floor, but surely they were round here to the left. A pantry, two pantries, with notices on the doors: NO WASHING-UP TO BE DONE AFTER 11 P.M.; three lavatories, with notices on the doors: KINDLY EXTINGUISH THE LIGHT WHEN LEAVING; yes, here she was—four bathrooms, with notices on the doors: NO BATHS TO BE TAKEN AFTER 11 P.M., and, underneath, an exasperated addendum to each: IF STUDENTS PERSIST IN TAKING BATHS AFTER 11 P.M. THE BATHROOMS WILL BE LOCKED AT 10:30 P.M. SOME CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS IS NECESSARY IN COMMUNITY LIFE. Signed: L. MARTIN, DEAN. Harriet selected the largest bathroom. It contained a notice: REGULATIONS IN CASE OF FIRE, and a card printed in large capitals: THE SUPPLY OF HOT WATER IS LIMITED. PLEASE AVOID UNDUE WASTE. With a familiar sensation of being under authority, Harriet pushed down the waste-plug and turned on the tap. The water was boiling, though the bath badly needed a new coat of enamel and the cork mat had seen better days.

Once bathed, Harriet felt better. She was lucky again in returning to her room to meet no one whom she knew. She was in no mood for reminiscent gossipings in dressinggowns. She saw the name

“Mrs. H. Attwood” on the door next but one to hers. The door was shut, and she was grateful. The next door bore no name, but as she went by, someone turned the handle from within, and it began to open slowly. Harriet leapt quickly past it and into shelter. She found her heart beating absurdly fast.

The black frock fitted her like a glove. It was made with a small square yoke and long, close sleeves, softened by a wristfrill falling nearly to the knuckles. It outlined her figure to the waist and fell full-skirted to the ground, with a suggestion of the medieval robe. Its dull surface effaced itself, not outshining the dull gleam of the academic poplin. She pulled the gown’s heavy folds forward upon her shoulders, so that the straight fronts fell stole-wise, serene. The hood cost her a small struggle before she remembered the right twist at the throat which turned the bright silk outwards. She pinned it invisibly on her breast, so that it sat poised and balanced—one black shoulder and one crimson. Standing and stooping before the inadequate looking-glass (the present student who owned the room was obviously a very short woman), she adjusted the soft cap to lie flat and straight, peak down in the center of the forehead. The glass showed her her own face, rather pale, with black brows fronting squarely either side of a strong nose, a little too broad for beauty. Her own eyes looked back at her—rather tired, rather defiant—eyes that had looked upon fear and were still wary. The mouth was the mouth of one who has been generous and repented of generosity; its wide corners were tucked back to give nothing away. With the thick, waving hair folded beneath the black cloth, the face seemed somehow stripped for action. She frowned at herself and moved her hands a little up and down upon the stuff of her gown; then, becoming impatient with the looking-glass, she turned to the window which looked out into the Inner or Old Quad. This, indeed, was less a quad than an oblong garden, with the college buildings grouped about it. At one end, tables and chairs were set out upon the grass beneath the shade of the trees. At the far side, the new Library wing, now almost complete, showed its bare rafters in a forest of scaffolding. A few groups of women crossed the lawn; Harriet observed with irritation that most of them wore their caps badly, and one had had the folly to put on a pale lemon frock with muslin frills, which looked incongruous beneath a gown.

“Though, after all,” she thought, “the bright colors are medieval enough. And at any rate, the women are no worse than the men. I once saw old Hammond walk in the Encaenia procession in his Mus. Doc. gown, a grey flannel suit, brown boots and a blue spotted tie, and nobody said anything about him.”

She laughed suddenly, and for the first time felt confident.

“They can’t take this away, at any rate. Whatever I may have done since, this remains. Scholar Master of Arts; Domina; Senior Member of this University (*statutum est quod Juniores Senioribus debitam et congruam reverentiam tum in privato tum in publico exhibeant*); a place achieved inalienable, worthy of reverence.

She walked firmly from the room and knocked upon the door next but one to her own.

The four women walked down to the garden together—slowly, because Mary was ill and could not move fast. And as they went, Harriet was thinking:

“It’s a mistake—it’s a great mistake—I shouldn’t have come. Mary is a dear, as she always was and she is pathetically pleased to see me, but we have nothing to say to one another. And I shall always remember her, *now*, as she is today, with that haggard face and look of defeat. And she will remember me as I am—hardened. She told me I looked successful. I know what that means.”

She was glad that Betty Armstrong and Dorothy Collins were doing all the talking. One of them was a hardworking dog-breeder; the other ran a bookshop in Manchester. They had evidently kept in touch with one another, for they were discussing things and not people, as those do who have lived their interests in common. Mary Stokes (now Mary Attwood) seemed cut off from them, by sickness, by marriage, by—it was no use to blink the truth—by a kind of mental stagnation that had nothing to do with either illness or marriage. “I suppose,” thought Harriet, “she had one of those small, summer brains, that flower early and run to seed. Here she is—my intimate friend—talking to me with a painful kind of admiring politeness about my books. And I am talking with a painful kind of admiring politeness about her children. We ought *not* to have met again. It’s awful.”

Dorothy Collins broke in upon her thoughts by asking her a question about publishers’ contracts and the reply to this tided them over till they emerged into the quad. A brisk figure came bustling along the path, and stopped with a cry of welcome.

“Why, it’s Miss Vane! How nice to see you after all this long time.”

Harriet thankfully allowed herself to be scooped up by the Dean, for whom she had always had a very great affection, and who had written kindly to her in the days when a cheerful kindness had been the most helpful thing on earth. The other three, mindful of reverence toward authority, passed on as they had paid their respects to the Dean earlier in the afternoon.

“It was splendid that you were able to come.”

“Rather brave of me, don’t you think?” said Harriet.

“Oh, nonsense!” said the Dean. She put her head on one side and fixed Harriet with a bright and birdlike eye. “You mustn’t think about all that. Nobody bothers about it at all. We’re not nearly such dried-up mummies as you think. After all, it’s the work you are doing that really counts, isn’t it? Even in the way, the Warden is longing to see you. She simply loved *The Sands of Crime*. Let’s see if we can catch her before the Vice-Chancellor arrives ... How did you think Stokes was looking—Attwood, I mean? I never *can* remember all their married names.”

“Pretty rotten, I’m afraid,” said Harriet. “I came here to see her, really, you know—but I’m afraid it’s not going to be much of a success.”

“Ah!” said the Dean. “She’s stopped growing, I expect. She was a friend of yours—but I always thought she had a head like a day-old chick. Very precocious, but no staying power. However, I hope they’ll put her right ... Bother this wind—I can’t keep my cap down. You manage yours remarkably

well; how do you do it? And I notice that we are both decently sub-fusc. *Have you seen Trimmer that frightful frock like a canary lampshade?*”

“That was Trimmer, was it? What’s *she* doing?”

“Oh, lord! My dear, she’s gone in for mental healing. Brightness and love and all that ...Ah! I thought we should find the Warden here.”

Shrewsbury College had been fortunate in its wardens. In the early days, it had been dignified by a woman of position; in the difficult period when it fought for Women’s degrees it had been guided by a diplomat; and now that it was received into the University, its behavior was made acceptable by its personality: Dr. Margaret Baring wore her scarlet and French grey with an air. She was a magnificent figure-head on all public occasions, and she could soothe with tact the wounded breasts of crusty and affronted male dons. She greeted Harriet graciously, and asked what she thought of the new Library Wing, which would complete the North side of the Old Quad. Harriet duly admired what could be seen of its proportions, said it would be a great improvement, and asked when it would be finished.

“By Easter, we hope. Perhaps we shall see you at the Opening.”

Harriet said politely that she should look forward to it, and, seeing the Vice-Chancellor’s gown flutter into sight in the distance, drifted tactfully away to join the main throng of old students.

Gowns, gowns, gowns. It was difficult sometimes to recognize people after ten years or more. That in the blue-and-rabbit-skin hood must be Sylvia Drake—she had taken that B.Litt. at last, the Miss Drake’s B.Litt. had been the joke of the college; it had taken her so long; she was continually rewriting her thesis and despairing over it. She would hardly remember Harriet, who was so much her junior, but Harriet remembered her well—always popping in and out of the J.C.R. during her year of residence, and chattering away about medieval Courts of Love. Heavens! Here was that awful woman Muriel Campshott, coming up to claim acquaintance. Campshott had always simpered. She still simpered. And she was dressed in a shocking shade of green. She was going to say, “How *do you think* of all your plots?” She did say it. Curse the woman. And Vera Mollison. She was asking: “Are you writing anything now?”

“Yes, certainly,” said Harriet. “Are you still teaching?”

“Yes—still in the same place,” said Miss Mollison. “I’m afraid my doings are very small compared with yours.”

As there was no possible answer to this but a deprecating laugh, Harriet laughed deprecatingly. The movement took place. People were drifting into the New Quad, where a Presentation Clock was to be unveiled, and taking up their positions upon the stone plinth that ran round behind the flower-beds. An official voice was heard exhorting the guests to leave a path for the procession. Harriet used this as an excuse to disentangle herself from Vera Mollison and establish herself at the back of a group, all of whose faces were strange to her. On the opposite side of the Quad she could see Mary Attwood and her friends. They were waving. She waved back. She was not going to cross the grass and join them. She

would remain detached, a unit in an official crowd.

From behind a drapery of bunting the clock, anticipating its official appearance in public, chimed and struck three. Footsteps crunched along the gravel. The procession came into sight beneath the archway; a small crocodile-walk of elderly people, dressed with the incongruous brilliance of a more sumptuous era, and moving with the slovenly dignity characteristic of university functions in England. They crossed the quad; they mounted the plinth beneath the clock; the male dons removed their Tudor bonnets and mortar-boards in deference to the Vice-Chancellor; the female dons adopted a reverent attitude suggestive of a prayer-meeting. In a thin, delicate voice, the Vice-Chancellor began to speak. He spoke of the history of the college; he made a graceful allusion to achievements which could not be measured by the mere passing of time; he cracked a dry and nutty little jest about relativity and adorned it with a classical tag; he referred to the generosity of the donor and the beloved personality of the deceased Member of Council in whose memory the clock was presented; he expressed himself happy to unveil this handsome clock, which would add so greatly to the beauty of the quadrangle—the quadrangle, he would add, which, although a newcomer in point of time, was fully worthy to take its place among those ancient and noble buildings which were the glory of our University. In the name of the Chancellor and University of Oxford, he now unveiled the clock. His hand went out to the rope; an agitated expression came over the face of the Dean, resolving itself into a wide smile of triumph when the drapery fell away without any unseemly hitch or disaster; the clock was revealed, a few boisterous spirits started a round of applause; the Warden, in a short, neat speech, thanked the Vice-Chancellor for his kindness in coming and his friendly expressions; the golden hand of the clock moved on, and the quarter-chime rang out mellowly. The assembly heaved a sigh of satisfaction; the procession collected itself and made the return journey through the archway, and the ceremony was happily over.

Harriet, following with the throng, discovered to her horror that Vera Mollison had bobbed up again beside her, and was saying she supposed all mystery-writers must feel a strong personal interest in clocks, as so many alibis turned upon clocks and time-signals. There had been a curious incident one day at the school where she taught; it would, she thought, make a splendid plot for a detective story, for anybody who was clever enough to work such things out. She had been longing to see Harriet and tell her all about it. Planting herself firmly on the lawn of the Old Quad, at a considerable distance from the refreshment-tables, she began to retail the curious incident, which required a good deal of preliminary explanation. A scout advanced, carrying cups of tea. Harriet secured one, and instantly wished she hadn't; it prevented swift movement, and seemed to nail her to Miss Mollison side to all eternity. Then, with a heart-lifting surge of thankfulness, she saw Phoebe Tucker. Good old Phoebe, looking exactly the same as ever. She excused herself hurriedly to Miss Mollison, begging that she might hear the clock incident at a more leisured moment, made her way through a bunch of gowns and said, "Hullo!"

"Hullo?" said Phoebe. "Oh, it's you. Thank God! I was beginning to think there wasn't a soul"

our year here, except Trimmer and that ghastly Mollison female. Come and get some sandwiches, they're quite good, strange to say. How are you these days; flourishing?"

"Not too bad."

"You're doing good stuff, anyhow."

"So are you. Let's find something to sit upon. I want to hear all about the digging."

Phoebe Tucker was a History student, who had married an archaeologist, and the combination seemed to work remarkably well. They dug up bones and stones and pottery in forgotten corners of the globe, and wrote pamphlets and lectured to learned societies. At odd moments they had produced a trio of cheerful youngsters, whom they dumped casually upon delighted grandparents before hastening back to the bones and stones.

"Well, we've only just got back from Ithaca. Bob is fearfully excited about a new set of burial places, and has evolved an entirely original and revolutionary theory about funerary rites. He's writing a paper that contradicts all old Lambard's conclusions, and I'm helping by toning down his adjectives and putting in deprecatory footnotes. I mean, Lambard may be a perverse old idiot, but it's more dignified not to say so in so many words. A bland and deadly courtesy is more devastating, don't you think?"

"Infinitely."

Here at any rate was somebody who had not altered by a hair's-breadth, in spite of added years and marriage. Harriet was in a mood to be glad of that. After an exhaustive inquiry into the matter of funerary rites, she asked after the family.

"Oh, they're getting to be rather fun. Richard—that's the eldest—is thrilled by the burial-places. His grandmother was horrified the other day to find him very patiently and correctly excavating the gardener's rubbish-heap and making a collection of bones. Her generation always get so agitated about germs and dirt. I suppose they're quite right, but the offspring doesn't seem any the worse. So his father gave him a cabinet to keep the bones in. Simply encouraging him, Mother said. I think we shall have to take Richard out with us next time, only Mother would be so worried, thinking about drainage and what he might pick up from the Greeks. All the children seem to be coming out quite intelligent, thank goodness. It would have been such a bore to be the mother of morons, and it's an absolute toss-up, isn't it? If one could only invent them, like characters in books, it would be much more satisfactory to a well-regulated mind."

From this the conversation naturally passed to biology, Mendelian factors and *Brave New World*. It was cut short by the emergence of Harriet's former tutor from a crowd of old students. Harriet and Phoebe made a concerted rush to greet her. Miss Lydgate's manner was exactly what it had always been. To the innocent and candid eyes of that great scholar, no moral problem seemed ever to present itself. Of a scrupulous personal integrity, she embraced the irregularities of other people in a wide, unquestioning charity. As any student of literature must, she knew all the sins of the world by name.

but it was doubtful whether she recognized them when she met them in real life. It was as though a misdemeanor committed by a person she knew was disarmed and disinfected by the contact. So many young people had passed through her hands, and she had found so much good in all of them; it was impossible to think that they could be deliberately wicked, like Richard III or Iago. Unhappy, yes; misguided, yes; exposed to difficult and complicated temptations which Miss Lydgate herself had been mercifully spared, yes. If she heard of a theft, a divorce, even worse things, she would knit her puzzled brows and think how utterly wretched the offenders must have been before they could do such a dreadful a thing. Only once had Harriet ever heard her speak with unqualified disapproval of anyone she knew, and that was of a former pupil of her own who had written a popular book about Carlyle. "No research at all," had been Miss Lydgate's verdict, "and no effort at critical judgment. She has reproduced all the old gossip without troubling to verify anything. Slipshod, showy, and catchpenny. I am really ashamed of her." And even then she had added: "But I believe, poor thing, she is very hard up."

Miss Lydgate showed no signs of being ashamed of Miss Vane. On the contrary, she greeted her warmly, begged her to come and see her on Sunday morning, spoke appreciatively of her work, and commended her for keeping up a scholarly standard of English, even in mystery fiction.

"You give a lot of pleasure in the S.C.R.," she added, "and I believe Miss de Vine is also a fervent admirer of yours."

"Miss de Vine?"

"Ah, of course, you don't know her. Our new Research Fellow. She's such a nice person, and I know she wants to talk to you about your books. You must come and make her acquaintance. We've got her for three years, you know. That is, she only comes into residence next term, but she's been living in Oxford for the last few weeks, working in Bodley. She's doing a great work on National Finance under the Tudors, and makes it perfectly fascinating, even for people like me, who are stupid about money. We are all so glad that the College decided to offer her the Jane Barraclough Fellowship, because she is a most distinguished scholar, and has had rather a hard time."

"I think I've heard of her. Wasn't she Head of one of the big provincial colleges?"

"Yes; she was Provost of Flamborough for three years; but it wasn't really her job; too much administration, though of course she was marvelous on the financial side. But she was doing too much, what with her own work, and examining for doctorates and so on, and coping with students—the University and the College between them wore her out. She's one of those people who always will give of her best; but I think she found all the personal contacts uncongenial. She got ill, and had to go abroad for a couple of years. In fact, she has only just got back to England. Of course, having to give up Flamborough made a good deal of difference from the financial point of view; so it's nice to think that for the next three years she'll be able to get on with her book and not worry about that side things."

“I remember about it now,” said Harriet; “I saw the election announced somewhere or other, last Christmas or thereabouts.”

“I expect you saw it in the Shrewsbury Year-Book. We are naturally very proud to have her here. She ought really to have a professorship, but I doubt if she could stand the tutorial side of it. The fewer distractions she has, the better, because she’s one of the *real* scholars. There she is, over there—and, oh, dear! I’m afraid she’s been caught by Miss Gubbins. You remember Miss Gubbins?”

“Vaguely,” said Phoebe. “She was Third Year when we were freshers. An excellent soul, but rather earnest, and an appalling bore at College Meetings.”

“She is a very conscientious person,” said Miss Lydgate, “but she has rather an unfortunate knack of making any subject sound dull. It’s a great pity, because she is exceptionally sound and dependable. However, that doesn’t greatly matter in her present appointment; she holds a librarianship somewhere—Miss Hillyard would remember where—and I believe she’s researching on the Bacon family. She’s such a hard worker. But I’m afraid she’s putting poor Miss de Vine through a cross-examination which doesn’t seem quite fair on an occasion like this. Shall we go to the rescue?”

As Harriet followed Miss Lydgate across the lawn, she was visited by an enormous nostalgia. It was only one could come back to this quiet place, where only intellectual achievement counted; if one could work here steadily and obscurely at some close-knit piece of reasoning, undistracted and uncorrupted by agents, contracts, publishers, blurb-writers, interviewers, fan-mail, autograph-hunters, notoriety-hunters, and competitors; abolishing personal contacts, personal spites, personal jealousies, getting one’s teeth into something dull and durable; maturing into solidity like the Shrewsbury beeches—then, one might be able to forget the wreck and chaos of the past, or see it, at any rate, in truer proportion. Because, in a sense, it was not important. The fact that one had loved and sinned and suffered and escaped death was of far less ultimate moment than a single footnote in a dim academic journal establishing the priority of a manuscript or restoring a lost iota subscript. It was the hand-to-hand struggle with the insistent personalities of other people, all pushing for a place in the limelight that made the accidents of one’s own personal adventure bulk so large in the scheme of things.

But she doubted whether she were now capable of any such withdrawal. She had long ago taken the step that put the grey-walled paradise of Oxford behind her. No one can bathe in the same river twice, not even in the Isis. She would be impatient of that narrow serenity—or so she told herself.

Pulling her wandering thoughts together, she found herself being introduced to Miss de Vine. And, looking at her, she saw at once that here was a scholar of a kind very unlike Miss Lydgate, for example, and still more grotesquely unlike anything that Harriet Vane could ever become. Here was a fighter, indeed; but one to whom the quadrangle of Shrewsbury was a native and proper arena: a soldier knowing no personal loyalties, whose sole allegiance was to the fact. A Miss Lydgate, standing serenely untouched by the world, could enfold it in a genial warmth of charity; this woman, with infinitely more knowledge of the world, would rate it at a just value and set it out of her path if

incommoded her. The thin, eager face, with its large grey eyes deeply set and luminous behind thick glasses, was sensitive to impressions; but behind that sensitiveness was a mind as hard and immovable as granite. As the Head of a woman's college she must, thought Harriet, have had a distasteful taste for she looked as though the word "compromise" had been omitted from her vocabulary; and a statesmanship is compromise. She would not be likely to tolerate any waverings of purpose or woolliness of judgment. If anything came between her and the service of truth, she would walk over it without rancour and without pity—even if it were her own reputation. A formidable woman when pursuing the end in view—and the more so, for the deceptive moderation and modesty she would display in dealing with any subject of which she was not master. As they came up, she was saying to Miss Gubbins:

"I entirely agree that a historian ought to be precise in detail; but unless you take all the characters and circumstances concerned into account, you are reckoning without the facts. The proportions and relations of things are just as much facts as the things themselves; and if you get those wrong, you falsify the picture really seriously."

Here, just as Miss Gubbins, with a mulish look in her eye, was preparing to expostulate, Miss de Vine caught sight of the English tutor and excused herself. Miss Gubbins was obliged to withdraw. Harriet observed with regret that she had untidy hair, an ill-kept skin and a large white safety-pin securing her hood to her dress.

"Dear me!" said Miss de Vine, "who is that very uninspired young woman? She seems very much annoyed with my review of Mr. Winterlake's book on Essex. She seems to think I ought to have torn the poor man to pieces because of a trifling error of a few months made in dealing, quite incidentally with the early history of the Bacon family. She attaches no importance to the fact that the book is the most illuminating and scholarly handling to date of the interactions of two most enigmatic characters."

"Bacon family history is her subject," said Miss Lydgate, "so I've no doubt she feels strongly about it."

"It's a great mistake to see one's own subject out of proportion to its background. The error should be corrected, of course; I did correct it—in a private letter to the author, which is the proper medium for trifling corrections. But the man has, I feel sure, got hold of the master-key to the situation between those two men, and in so doing he has got hold of a fact of genuine importance."

"Well," said Miss Lydgate, showing her strong teeth in a genial grin, "you seem to have taken a strong line with Miss Gubbins. Now I've brought along somebody I know you're anxious to meet. This is Miss Harriet Vane—also an artist in the relating of details."

"Miss Vane?" The historian bent her brilliant, shortsighted eyes on Harriet, and her face lit up. "This is delightful. Do let me say how much I enjoyed your last book. I thought it quite the best thing you'd done—though of course I'm not competent to form an opinion from the scientific point of view."

I was discussing it with Professor Higgins, who is quite a devotee of yours, and he said it suggested the most interesting possibility, which had not before occurred to him. He wasn't quite sure whether it would work, but he would do his best to find out. Tell me, what did you have to go upon?"

"Well, I got a pretty good opinion," said Harriet, feeling a hideous qualm of uncertainty, and cursing Professor Higgins from the bottom of her heart. "But of course—"

At this point, Miss Lydgate espied another old pupil in the distance and ran away. Phoebe Tucker had already been lost on the way across the lawn. Harriet was left to her fate. After ten minutes, during which Miss de Vine ruthlessly turned her victim's brain inside out, shook the facts out of it like a vigorous housemaid shaking dust from a carpet, beat it, refreshed it, rubbed up the surface of it, relaunched it in a new position and tacked it into place with a firm hand, the Dean mercifully came up and buried himself into the conversation.

"Thank *goodness*, the Vice-Chancellor's taking himself off. Now we can get rid of this filthy old bombazine and show off our party frocks. *Why* did we ever clamor for degrees and the fun of stewing in full academics on a hot day? There! He's gone! Give me those anything-but-glad-rags and I'll shove them into the S.C.R. with mine. Has yours got a name on it, Miss Vane? Oh, good girl! I've got three unknown gowns sitting in my office already. Found lying about at the end of term. No clue as to their owners, of course. The untidy little beasts seem to think it's our job to sort out their miserable belongings. They strew them everywhere, regardless, and then borrow each other's; and if anybody is fined for being out without a gown, it's always because somebody pinched it. And the wretched things are always as dirty as dishcloths. They use them for dusters and drawing the fire up. When I think how our devoted generation *sweated* to get the right to these garments—and these young things don't care a *thing* for them! They go about looking all bits and pieces, like illustrations to *Pendennis*—so out of date of them! But their idea of being modern is to imitate what male undergraduates were like half a century ago."

"Some of us old students aren't much to write home about," said Harriet. "Look at Gubbins, for instance."

"Oh, my dear! That crashing bore. And *all* held together with safety-pins. And I wish she'd washed her neck."

"I think," said Miss de Vine, with painstaking readiness to set the facts in a just light, "that the color is natural to her skin."

"Then she should eat carrots and clear her system," retorted the Dean, snatching Harriet's gown from her. "No, don't you bother. It won't take me a minute to chuck them through the S.C.R. window. And don't you dare to run away, or I shall *never* find you again."

"Is my hair tidy?" inquired Miss de Vine, becoming suddenly human and hesitating with the loss of her cap and gown.

"Well," said Harriet, surveying the thick, iron grey coils from which a quantity of overworked

hair-pins stood out like croquet-hoops, "it's coming down just a trifle."

"It always does," said Miss de Vine, making vague dabs at the pins. "I think I shall have to cut short. It must be much less trouble that way."

"I like it as it is. That big coil suits you. Let me have a go at it, shall I?"

"I wish you would," said the historian, thankfully submitting to having the pins thrust into place. "I am very stupid with my fingers. I do possess a hat somewhere," she added, with an irresolute glance round the quad, as though she expected to see the hat growing on a tree, "but the Dean said we'd better stay here. Oh, thank you. That feels much better—a marvelous sense of security. Ah! here's Miss Martin. Miss Vane has kindly been acting as hairdresser to the White Queen—but oughtn't I to put on a hat?"

"Not now," said Miss Martin emphatically. "I'm going to have some proper tea, and so are you. I'm *ravenous*. I've been tagging after old Professor Boniface who's ninety-seven and practically gagging and screaming in his deaf ear till I'm almost *dead*. What's the time? Well, I'm like Marjorie Fleming's turkey—I do not give a single damn for the Old Students' Meeting; I simply must eat and drink. Let's swoop down upon the table before Miss Shaw and Miss Stevens collar the last ices."

* For the purposes of this book, Mansfield Lane is deemed to run from Mansfield Road to St. Cross Road, behind Shrewsbury College and somewhere about the junction between the Balliol and Mortimer Cricket grounds as they stand at present.

CHAPTER II

'Tis proper to all melancholy men, saith Mercurialis, what conceit they have once entertained, to be most intent, violent and continually about it. In vitis occurrit, do what they may, they cannot be rid of it, against their wills they must think of it a thousand times over, perpetuo molestantur, nec oblivisci possunt, they are continually troubled with it, in company, out of company; at meat, at exercise, at all times and places, non desinunt ea, quae minime volunt, cogitare; if it be offensive especially, they cannot forget it.

ROBERT BURTON

So far, so good, thought Harriet, changing for dinner. There had been baddish moments, like trying to renew contact with Mary Stokes. There had also been a brief encounter with Miss Hillyard, the History tutor, who had never liked her, and who had said, with wry mouth and acidulated tongue, "Well, Miss Vane, you have had some very *varied* experiences since we saw you last." But there had been good moments too, carrying with them the promise of permanence in a Heraclitean universe. She felt it might be possible to survive the Gaudy Dinner, though Mary Stokes had dutifully bagged for her a place next herself, which was trying. Fortunately, she had contrived to get Phoebe Tucker on the other side. (In these surroundings, she thought of them still as Stokes and Tucker.)

The first thing to strike her, when the procession had slowly filed up to the High Table, and grace had been said, was the appalling noise in Hall. "Strike" was the right word. It fell upon one like the rush and weight of a shouting waterfall; it beat on the ear like the hammer-clang of some infernal smithy; it savaged the air like the metallic clatter of fifty thousand monotype machines casting type. Two hundred female tongues, released as though by a spring, burst into high, clamorous speech. She had forgotten what it was like, but it came back to her tonight how, at the beginning of every term, she had felt that if the noise were to go on like that for one minute more, she would go quite mad. Within a week, the effect of it had always worn off. Use had made her immune. But now it shattered her unaccustomed nerves with all and more than all its original violence. People screamed in her ear, and she found herself screaming back. She looked rather anxiously at Mary; could any invalid bear it? Mary seemed not to notice; she was more animated than she had been earlier in the day and was screaming quite cheerfully at Dorothy Collins. Harriet turned to Phoebe.

"Gosh! I'd forgotten what this row was like. If I scream I shall be as hoarse as a crow. I'm going to bellow at you in a fog-horn kind of voice. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit. I can hear you quite well. Why on earth did God give women such shrill voices? Though I don't mind frightfully. It reminds me of native workmen quarreling. They're doing us rather well, don't you think? Much better soup than we ever got."

"They've made a special effort for Gaudy. Besides, the new Bursar's rather good, I believe; she

was something to do with Domestic Economy. Dear old Straddles had a mind above food.”

“Yes; but I liked Straddles. She was awfully decent to me when I got ill just before Schools. Do you remember?”

“What happened to Straddles when she left?”

“Oh, she’s Treasurer at Bronte College. Finance was really her line, you know. She had a real genius for figures.”

“And what became of that woman—what’s her name?—Peabody? Freebody?—you know—the one who always said solemnly that her great ambition in life was to become Bursar of Shrewsbury?”

“Oh, my dear! She went absolutely potty on some new kind of religion and joined an extraordinary sect somewhere or other where they go about in loin-cloths and have agapemones nuts and grape-fruit. That is, if you mean Brodribb?”

“Brodribb—I knew it was something like Peabody. Fancy her of all people! So intensely practical and sub-fusc”.

“Reaction, I expect. Repressed emotional instincts and all that. She was frightfully sentimental inside, you know.”

“I know. She wormed round rather. Had a sort of G.P. for Miss Shaw. Perhaps we were all rather inhibited in those days.”

“Well, the present generation doesn’t suffer from that, I’m told. No inhibitions of any kind.”

“Oh, come, Phoebe. We had a good bit of liberty. Not like before Women’s Degrees. We weren’t monastic.”

“No, but we were born long enough before the War to feel a few restrictions. We inherited some sense of responsibility. And Brodribb came from a fearfully rigid sort of household—Positivists, or Unitarians or Presbyterians or something. The present lot are the real War-time generation, you know.”

“So they are. Well, I don’t know that I’ve any right to throw stones at Brodribb.”

“Oh, my dear! That’s entirely different. One thing’s natural; the other’s—I don’t know, but it seems to me like complete degeneration of the grey matter. She even wrote a book.”

“About agapemones?”

“Yes. And the Higher Wisdom. And Beautiful Thought. That sort of thing. Full of bad syntax.”

“Oh, lord! Yes—that’s pretty awful, isn’t it? I can’t think why fancy religions should have such a ghastly effect on one’s grammar.”

“It’s a kind of intellectual rot that sets in, I’m afraid. But which of them causes the other, or whether they’re both symptoms of something else, I don’t know. What with Trimmer’s mental healing, and Henderson going nudist—”

“No!”

“Fact. There she is, at the next table. That’s why she’s so brown.”

“And her frock so badly cut. If you can’t be naked, be as ill-dressed as possible, I suppose.”

“I sometimes wonder whether a little normal, hearty wickedness wouldn’t be good for a great many of us.”

At this moment, Miss Mollison, from three places away on the same side of the table, leaned across her neighbors and screamed something.

“What?” screamed Phoebe.

Miss Mollison leaned still further, compressing Dorothy Collins, Betty Armstrong and Marjorie Stokes almost to suffocation.

“I hope Miss Vane isn’t telling you anything *too* bloodcurdling!”

“No,” said Harriet, loudly. “Mrs. Bancroft is curdling *my* blood.”

“How?”

“Telling me the life-histories of our year.”

“Oh!” screamed Miss Mollison, disconcerted. The service of a dish of lamb and green peas intervened and broke up the formation, and her neighbors breathed again. But to Harriet’s intense horror, the question and reply seemed to have opened up an avenue for a dark, determined woman with large spectacles and rigidly groomed hair, who sat opposite to her, and who now bent over and said, in piercingly American accents:

“I don’t suppose you remember me, Miss Vane? I was only in college for one term, but I would know you anywhere. I’m always recommending your books to my friends in America who are keen to study the British detective story, because I think they are just terribly good.”

“Very kind of you,” said Harriet, feebly.

“And we have a very dear mutual acquaintance,” went on the spectacled lady.

Heavens! thought Harriet. What social nuisance is going to be dragged out of obscurity now? And who is this frightful female?

“Really?” she said, aloud, trying to gain time while she ransacked her memory. “Who’s that Miss—”

“Schuster-Slatt,” prompted Phoebe’s voice in her ear.

“Schuster-Slatt.” (Of course. Arrived in Harriet’s first summer term. Supposed to read. Law. Left after one term because the conditions at Shrewsbury were too restrictive of liberty. Joined the Home Students, and passed mercifully out of one’s life.)

“How clever of you to know my name. Yes, well, you’ll be surprised when I tell you, but in my work I see so many of your British aristocracy.”

Hell! thought Harriet. Miss Schuster-Slatt’s strident tones dominated even the surrounding uproar.

“Your marvelous Lord Peter. He was so kind to me, and terribly interested when I told him I was at college with you. I think he’s just a lovely man.”

“He has very nice manners,” said Harriet. But the implication was too subtle. Miss Schuster-Slatt proceeded:

“He was just wonderful to me when I told him all about my work.” (I wonder what it is, thought Harriet.) “And of course I wanted to hear all about his thrilling detective cases, but he was much too modest to say anything. Do tell me, Miss Vane, does he wear that cute little eyeglass because of his eyesight, or is it part of an old English tradition?”

“I have never had the impertinence to ask him,” said Harriet.

“Now isn’t that just like your British reticence!” exclaimed Miss Schuster-Slatt; when Mary Stokes struck in with:

“Oh, Harriet, do tell us about Lord Peter! He must be perfectly charming, if he’s at all like his photographs. Of course you know him very well, don’t you?”

“I worked with him over one case.”

“It must have been frightfully exciting. Do tell us what he’s like.”

“Seeing,” said Harriet, in angry and desperate tones, “seeing that he got me out of prison and probably saved me from being hanged, I am naturally bound to find him delightful.”

“Oh!” said Mary Stokes, flushing scarlet, and shrinking from Harriet’s furious eyes as if she had received a blow. “I’m sorry—I didn’t think—”

“Well, there,” said Miss Schuster-Slatt, “I’m afraid I’ve been very, very tactless. My mother always said to me, ‘Sadie, you’re the most tactless girl I ever had the bad luck to meet.’ But I am enthusiastic. I get carried away. I don’t stop to think. I’m just the same with my work. I don’t consider my own feelings; I don’t consider other people’s feelings. I just wade right in and ask for what I want, and I mostly get it.”

After which, Miss Schuster-Slatt, with more sensitive feeling than one might have credited her with, carried the conversation triumphantly away to the subject of her own work, which turned out to have something to do with the sterilization of the unfit, and the encouragement of matrimony among the intelligentsia.

Harriet, meanwhile, sat miserably wondering what devil possessed her to display even a disagreeable trait in her character at the mere mention of Wimsey’s name. He had done her no harm; he had only saved her from a shameful death and offered her an unswerving personal devotion; and for neither benefit had he ever claimed or expected her gratitude. It was not pretty that her only return should be a snarl of resentment. The fact is, thought Harriet, I have got a bad inferiority complex; unfortunately, the fact that I know it doesn’t help me to get rid of it. I could have liked him so much if I could have met him on an equal footing ...

The Warden rapped upon the table. A welcome silence fell upon the Hall. A speaker was rising to propose the toast of the university.

She spoke gravely, unrolling the great scroll of history, pleading for the Humanities, proclaiming

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