

As My Wimsey Takes Me, Episode 8 transcript

[THEME MUSIC: jaunty Bach-esque piano notes played in counterpoint gradually fading in]

CHARIS: Hello, and welcome to this episode of "As My Wimsey Takes Me." I'm Charis Ellison--

SHARON: --and I'm Sharon Hsu. Today we'll be picking up our discussion on THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB, and we will be talking about the events that happen between, roughly, Chapter 8 through Chapter 16. Just a note to our listeners that we will be giving away some plot elements that happen during the course of those chapters, but not the whodunnit.

[Military-esque trumpet solo]

SHARON: So Charis, very exciting that we are doing our second of *three* episodes --

CHARIS: Yes!

SHARON: -- and I do hope we'll have enough material to talk about.

[both laugh]

CHARIS: I think that we will, especially considering how convoluted the plot of this book is.
[chuckles]

SHARON: [laughing] Yeah.

CHARIS: You know, in our last episode, I felt like it took forever just to explain the premise.
[laughs]

SHARON: It is one of the more "plotty" mysteries, I think.

So yeah, last time we left off with this visit that Wimsey pays to Sheila and George. And picking up in Chapter 8, Peter tries to go to see Ann Dorland, who was Lady Dormer's companion and the other party in this contested will. And she's conveniently not home - or at least not home to him. [both chuckle]

CHARIS: She kinda snubs him.

SHARON: Oh yeah!

CHARIS: I mean, not kind-of, like absolutely, definitely.

SHARON: Yes. [laughs] So Peter goes instead to try to see -- well, he succeeds in visiting her lawyer--

CHARIS: Who also snubs him.

SHARON: Yes. Just getting snubbed left and right.

CHARIS: It's probably good for him.

SHARON: Yeah, yeah. [CHARIS laughing in the background] So finally he goes to Robert Fentiman -- he's just like running down the list of all interested parties -- and General Fentiman's manservant had told Peter about this call that he received the night before the General's body was found at the Bellona Club, where this person on the other line said, "I'm an old friend of the General's. I just ran into him, he's going to be spending the night with me. Don't worry about him, etc." And Robert Fentiman mentioned that this is a friend of the General's named Oliver, but the manservant had kind-of found it a little bit suspicious because, as we've mentioned before, the General was very, very regular in his habits; did not really like to veer off his routine. (Which: relatable.) [both laugh]

And so, you know, that was kind-of already raising like a, "Hmmm" in Peter's mind. So he's been working with Robert to try to track down this Oliver fellow. And that's kind-of also how he gets Parker involved, because he needs--he, you know, asks for like a police tail to hang about the places that Robert Fentiman has said Oliver usually shows up.

CHARIS: I don't think he--he doesn't send police.

SHARON: Does he not?

CHARIS: No, he asks Parker to trace the phone call.

SHARON: Oh! That's what it is.

CHARIS: But then he gets private detectives to--

SHARON: To hang around. You're right.

CHARIS: --hang around, to loiter.

SHARON: This is what happens when like, a month goes by after I read something. [both laughing] Just, all the details fly out of my brain. Which, I don't know, maybe that makes me an ideal detective fiction reader. It's like half the time I'm like, "Oh yeah! I forgot about that."

CHARIS: So, this question of, like, "Where did the General spend the night?" and "Who is Oliver?" takes up a good chunk of the book for awhile.

SHARON: Mmhmm. [laughs] And spoiler--

CHARIS: [laughs] And spoiler, there is no Oliver.

SHARON: There is no Oliver.

CHARIS: It's an enormous red herring.

SHARON: Which - how early do you think Peter--like, do you think he ever really believes that there was an Oliver, or--?

CHARIS: I don't. I think that Peter--you know, he finds evidence that the General was at the Bellona Club that night. You know, he finds some notes on blotting paper that the General was making in the library of the Bellona Club.

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: And they kind-of are obviously him allocating amounts of money to Robert and George, cause like it's figures and their initials, and it's quite clearly the General's handwriting. Peter gets it all verified - like he checks the fingerprints on it, he goes to Parker and asks to have one of the police handwriting experts have a look at it and verify that it's the General's. And Peter noticed at the very beginning of the investigation that something was missing from the General's outfit.

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: So, I think that Peter really knew from the beginning that the General had gone back to the Bellona Club after his interview with his sister, and that he never left.

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: So Peter has been confident all along that there was foul play, and I think that he had a really good idea of who was responsible as well.

SHARON: Mhmm. It's interesting cause it picks up a bit on that theme from UNNATURAL DEATH, right, where Peter says, "Sometimes you have to wait for a suspect to try to start covering their own tracks and hope that they mess up." And I think that this is a--he's kind-of doing a similar thing here, where he knows something's fishy, he suspects Robert has *something* to do with it. But this time instead of, like, stirring up the ants' nest he just kind-of feeds out enough rope, I think?

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: So from a character development standpoint it's interesting to think that he is becoming a little more cautious, maybe, after being, like, indirectly responsible for some additional loss of life in his previous case.

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: I think it's also a case of him looking at Robert Fentiman and understanding the type of person that he is? We talked a little bit last time about how Robert doesn't have imagination. He has some creativity because he comes up with all these yarns, but he kind-of lacks the imagination to anticipate just where all of his fabulous stories end up?

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: And to make them cohesive, and like--they just--you know, it's that classic thing of you tell one lie and then there's more lies and then they just start falling all over the place.

SHARON: Yeah, it is, like, actually a little bit comical once Peter starts calling his bluff, right?

CHARIS: Right.

SHARON: Robert's like, "Oh yes! I just ran into Oliver at Gatti's, where I've seen him a bunch before." So then Peter's very cheerfully like, "Oh yes! Let's just go canvas the waiters and wait for him there." And then, "Oh, darn he's not here. Oh I, you know, I saw him get on a train and I

tried to rush after him but he eluded me." [both chuckling] So, I don't feel too bad for Robert that Peter, like, ends up leading him on a merry chase across Europe. [drops off into laughter]

CHARIS: Right, no, Robert really kind-of has it coming.

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: He's being ridiculous. And it's a little bit interesting that we don't see them, but we know that Peter is using, like, some private detectives since he doesn't exactly have Baker's Street Irregulars. He has, like, a detective who was helping Robert stake out the train station for Mr. Oliver, and then another sleuth who is watching Robert, in addition-- [laughs] --in addition to the other sleuth.

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: So it's just like a nesting--

SHARON: [laughing] A nesting doll.

CHARIS: Yeah, a nesting doll of detectives.

SHARON: Yeah, and it's like not really made clear to us as readers initially, right, that Peter never--has never believed in this yarn and that he's set like multiple detective matryoshkas into play. Which, like, how do you think that plays into what we've been saying about how Sayers always lays everything out for us? Cause I think like in the case itself - we'll talk about this out shortly, and we mentioned it last time - like all the clues that point Peter to the fact that the General, you know, never left the Bellona Club that night, are made available to us. But, I think there's a way in which the narrative kind-of occludes that Peter is suspicious of like the Oliver subplot?

CHARIS: Yeah. And I do... I think the way that Sayers kind-of conceals from us what Peter is doing... Because like we don't--she kind-of skips over it, it's just like, "And Peter gave the sleuths certain other instructions." You know? And so we aren't told right away that there is another sleuth watching Robert. There's the decoy sleuth that Robert knows about and then there's another sleuth, and we aren't told about that second sleuth right away. And then there's another bit where one of the hired sleuths goes off to France in pursuit of Oliver, who's like, "Oh, it turns out that he's real after all and I am chasing him, and I'm taking Robert with me." And you know, they go on this goose chase before coming back. And that--like again,

spoiler, but we find out that that was all manufactured by Peter. And we don't find that out until, you know, everyone else is finding it out in the book as well.

SHARON: Exactly.

CHARIS: But I do think that what makes those instances different from Sayers following the rules of showing us all the clues is that those are just Peter getting confirmation? He has all the evidence, he already knows. But he's kind-of doing these things to get proof.

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: So Sayers isn't concealing the clues we need from us. Like, even when Sayers describes the bay in the library where Peter found the piece of paper, she's just like, "Oh, this was where the General was." She mentions there that there is the complete works of Charles Dickens on the shelf right there. Which, obviously, is where the name Oliver came from.

SHARON: Right. It even later on, when Peter is reconstructing part of the scene to Murbles and Parker, the narrative then explicitly tells us the way that the lamp is situated it throws light onto the gilt lettering on the volume of OLIVER TWIST, so it's like, the name kind-of lodged itself, subconsciously.

CHARIS: Yeah. So, like the first time that she describes the library she doesn't say OLIVER TWIST, but she tells us that the Charles Dickens books are there.

SHARON: Yes. So as long as you're familiar with Mr. Dickens' massive canon [both start laughing] -- massive body of work.

CHARIS: But, yeah. So I think like the clues for us to figure out what was going on are there. And so, it feels a little bit like cheating for all of this to be going on with the sleuths and for us not to be told, but -- it doesn't break the rules.

SHARON: Yeah, I think I agree. And you and I were kind-of noting before we started recording that, in a way, this mystery--it's really sort-of broken up in two parts, right? And I think that there's a way in which, from a compositional point of view, it's really masterly that it's almost exactly halfway through that Sayers drops the first major revelation. Which is that General Fentiman was--we still don't quite get when he died, like a time of death, but that the body was moved and arranged in the armchair so that it would not be found until a little bit later. And, you know, we get the revelation that Robert was the one who did this because he found the General dead the night before and was concerned -- or not concerned, but you know, sort-of

once again lacking in imagination [laughs] reacted immediately to the situation of like, "Oh no. I know Lady Dormer's gonna be dead any second now, and why should this random girl get the money that I know my grandfather would have wanted us to have. Let me just try to hide this for as long as I can." Right?

So he stuffs the General's body into a telephone booth; he puts up a placard that says that the booth is out of order; and then the next morning during the two minute silence when everybody else in the club is observing Armistice Day, he moves the body into the General's regular and favorite chair.

CHARIS: Mmhmm.

SHARON: So that all comes out fairly early, I think, in the text, for such a major revelation. But it also sets us up for kind-of like the backend of the mystery, cause Peter's gone ahead with exhuming the body, you know, kind-of under the pretense of, "Oh, if we know what was in the General's stomach then maybe we would have a sense of how soon after he ate dinner he passed on," and so forth. But really, Peter's looking for foul play. And he finds it.

CHARIS: Mmhmm, he does. [Pause] It's easy to be reading the book and think that the whole mystery is who moved the body. Because there isn't a hint, really, in the beginning that there was foul play.

SHARON: Right.

CHARIS: It comes, I think, as a surprise probably to most readers. Like you go through all this [SHARON laughing in the background], you get--you're just like, "And it was Robert!" And then the exhumation results come back and it's like, "And, by the way, the General was poisoned." It's like, "Wait, what?"

SHARON: [laughs] Yeah. "Huh? What?" I even--I love how there's this bit when Parker goes to talk to Penberthy about the fact that they'd kind-of overlooked the foul play, and he was like, "Oh, I'm not gonna make a fuss about the certificate of death you issued, because I understand that a death resulting from an overdose of digitalin would like very much like a death from heart failure." [chuckling] And then there's this really funny bit where Penberthy says, "It would *be* a death from heart failure." And the narrative notes, "Doctors are wary of explaining that heart failure is not a specific disease like mumps or housemaid's knee." [both laughing]

CHARIS: Yeah. Well and there's also, a little bit before that, when Peter is explaining the "move the body" plot to Murbles: Robert is still being lead a merry chase, and Peter is revealing

everything to Murbles and Parker. And so Peter is talking about how the loose knee joint was suspicious, but no one kind-of made a fuss about it at the time. And he says, "It was obvious from the start that somebody had been tampering with the General. Penberthy knew that too, of course, only being a doctor he wasn't going to make an indiscreet uproar if he could avoid it. It doesn't pay, you know." [SHARON laughing in the background] Which, it seems like a pretty direct callback to UNNATURAL DEATH, and to Dr. Carr, and the fuss--

SHARON: Yeah, that was made. There's so many--I don't know if I ever really realized this before, which seems like maybe a lack of reading comprehension on my part [chuckles], but there's so many ways that these two books really rhyme, I think.

CHARIS: Yeah. It's almost like Sayers wrote this book as a response to herself?

SHARON: Yeah. Or like, I wonder if, you know, partially also a response to critics. Like Penberthy's sort-of exasperated, "Well it would BE heart failure!" [both laughing] Like if people were critiquing sort-of the, you know, the method in UNNATURAL DEATH.

CHARIS: Yeah, there's another line from this bit where Peter is leading Murbles and Parker all over the Bellona Club. They're talking about, like, how quickly the body could have been moved from the telephone cabinet to the chair. And it says that, "Finally placing the light, spare form of the unwilling Mr. Murbles in the telephone cabinet, Parker demonstrated that a fairly tall and strong man could have extricated the body from the box, carried it into the smoking room, and arranged it in the armchair by the fire all in something under four minutes."

[both laughing hysterically] I just love the idea of Mr. Murbles letting this happen and hating it. Just being carried around by Parker.

SHARON: [gleefully] Yeah. Speaking of Sayers' efficiency of language, right? "The light, spare form of the unwilling Mr. Murbles." Like, talk about understatement. [more hysterical laughter] And I think once again we sort-of get that generational difference, right, where Murbles is so horrified that Robert, you know, took advantage of Armistice Day. Like, "Mr. Murbles was horror struck. 'God bless my soul. How abominable! How blasphemous! I cannot find the words - this is the most disgraceful thing I ever heard of, to be engaged in perpetrating a fraud and irreverent crime.'" And Parker just sort-of very dryly is like, "Well, you know, half a million is a good bit of money." [both laughing] And Murbles is going on and on about, you know, the desecration.

CHARIS: Yeah. Which, speaking of Armistice Day, I don't think we've directly mentioned yet that the thing that was missing from the General's outfit that gave Peter the clue -- he was just like,

"This is how I knew the General was not anywhere on the street or in public the morning of Armistice Day" -- because the General did not have a poppy. A man like the General would never have gone anywhere on Armistice Day without wearing his poppy.

SHARON: Which, for our non-British or Commonwealth listeners, is a very--it's like the remembrance token that people wear on, and I think around, Armistice Day as well, right? And I think it gives us a slight indication kind-of into Robert's character as well, that he would forget such a crucial detail.

We were talking last time about how he came through the war relatively unscathed in comparison to his brother or to Peter. So it, you know, it's a nice little character note that he would--you know, he's the most likely suspect to forget the remembrance day accessory.

CHARIS: Yeah. And there's-- you know, it's interesting when like they do confront Robert about all of it, and Murbles is kind-of like, "How dare you!" [both laughing] Robert's just like, "What? It doesn't make a difference to my friends who died. Like, they aren't in a position to benefit from me doing"--like this isn't terminology that he would use, but he's just like, "They're not going to benefit from me doing performative grief."

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: And I do think it's worth noting that the reason Robert kind-of came through the war without psychological damage is just all about his personal mental make-up, right? Cause there's a -- I thought I put a sticky note in it, but of course now I can't find it -- oh yeah, here it is, where George is talking about Robert and talking about how he was in "a ghastly hole at Clarency," and "the ground is rotten with corpses, and there were big rats" - so it's just like, it's not that Robert was not in horrible places or seeing terrible things, it's just that it did not affect him the same way.

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: You know, like, his mind is just built differently.

SHARON: Mmhmm. And that's also part of why he can, you know -- he almost like, once he's found out he's sort-of like, "Oh, fiddlesticks," you know. [laughs]

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: Like doesn't really even, I think, demonstrate that he understands why Murbles is so horrified? He's just like, "Oh, it was a good lark until I couldn't get away with it anymore."

CHARIS: Yeah, it's just like, you've been caught out committing *fraud*, [both laughing] involving the corpse of your *grandfather*.

SHARON: [dryly] Yeah.

CHARIS: I mean, and, just, wow. Okay. And it's interesting though, because Robert isn't shown as someone who is like, totally without sensibility, right?

SHARON: Mmhmm, yeah.

CHARIS: It's just that his sensibilities are different. Like, he has this whole thing with Peter where he's talking about George and Sheila, and he's just like, "Women deserve to be treated politely no matter how long you've been married." It's like, he has sensibilities, he kind-of has standards, but they're very different from Murbles, and they're very different from, say, George or even Parker.

SHARON: Yeah. And to be fair to Robert as well, when it comes out-- you know, when Peter reveals that Dr. Lubbock had ruled that the General was given a dose of poison and that's what caused the death -- like Robert is horrified and I think very regretful? Like, he says, "I wouldn't have touched the body for twenty millions if I had known. I hadn't the faintest idea."

CHARIS: Yeah, like obviously he wouldn't have done anything to hasten his grandfather's death. And if he had suspected that someone else had, he would never have interfered with the investigation.

SHARON: Exactly.

CHARIS: You know like, as far as he was concerned it was just like, "Why not move a dead body around so that the people who I think deserve this money get it. Like, it's not hurting anyone that much."

SHARON: Right, right. Like, "Miss Dorland will still be provided for, I will be provided for, George and Sheila will be provided for. Like, what's the harm in kind-of telling" -- I mean, the equivalent to him of telling a little white lie. Right?

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: And it's so funny, cause Parker -- when Peter does this big reveal: Mr. Murbles sat petrified, Fentiman's like, "Oh my God!" [both laughing] "Good lord!" And then Parker, "who had hitherto preserved the detached expression of a friendly spectator, now beamed. 'Damn good old man,' he cried and smote Peter on the back. Professional enthusiasm overcame him. 'It's a real case!'" [both hysterically laughing] And then, "'Thank you, Charles,' said Wimsey dryly. 'I'm glad somebody appreciates me.'" [both overcome by laughter] It's just so funny!

CHARIS: Ah, I love it!

SHARON: Yeah!

CHARIS: Parker doesn't have a huge role, you know, in this investigation up to this point.

SHARON: He does not.

CHARIS: But it is delightful to have him kind-of show up and be in the background. And it's also kind-of nice to just kind-of like get to see Parker at work, you know? Like, in the beginning Peter asks him to trace the phone call. He stops by and asks him to be like, "Hey, could your handwriting person have a look at this." Parker is busy because he's got some big case underway. You're just like, oh, it's nice to see you doing something other than like run around after Peter--

SHARON: --doing all the hard work *for* Peter. [laughs]

CHARIS: Right. It's just like, Parker does have, like, a developed life and job and career outside of-- he's not *just* Peter's sidekick, and I appreciate that. [chuckling]

SHARON: Mmhmm. Yeah. He really starts to fade out a bit too as the series goes on. I mean, as the sidekick. He's still part of it in a very important other role, which we will get to eventually.

CHARIS: Yes.

SHARON: But it is interesting that you know, you kind-of--I don't even know if it's that Sayers got tired of that sidekick formula or once Harriet's introduced, you know, there's sort-of these alternatives. But I think it's interesting that she's like already kind-of playing with that form, of, "Okay, let's try having my detective be on his own for a bit."

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: Or working with other people, you know? Like working with Murbles here, or we're gonna meet Marjorie Phelps, I think, in this part as well. So, just like, putting Peter with other people.

CHARIS: Yeah, I wonder if some of that is, you know, Sayers acknowledging the fact that if you have a sidekick character it doesn't ever serve them well? You know, at some point--so like, say you're treating your sidekick character as like a fully realized person, being a sidekick at some point is going to be holding them back.

SHARON: Right.

CHARIS: Or, you know, they're going to outgrow it. And given the fact that she wrote Peter and Parker from the beginning as a mutual friendship, it's not like a Poirot-Hastings situation, you know. Or a Holmes-Watson situation.

SHARON: Yeah. I mean, the narrative here even at one point says that, "Parker was possibly Lord Peter's most intimate -- in some ways his *only* intimate friend. And though they couldn't have been more different, Parker was the one person who was never irritated by Wimsey's mannerism." [both laughing] Which, good for you, Charles Parker! "And Wimsey repaid him with a genuine affection foreign to his usually detached nature." Yeah, that's really something.

[contemplative pause]

Okay, so, we find out who moved the body. We find out the General was given a large dose of poison.

CHARIS: Which, we're saying poison because that's how it functions, but it's actually an overdose of a heart medication.

SHARON: Right, yes. My apologies to Dr. Penberthy. [both laugh] So then we're off to the races! Of course sort-of immediately Peter's working out, "Okay, who would have had access, who would have benefitted," and he's very suspicious of Miss Dorland and why she sort-of sequestered herself away and what she might know.

CHARIS: Yeah. Well, and there's also the fact that Peter, once it's known to her side of the--like, her lawyer is informed and her lawyer is present at the exhumation. So she knows the exhumation is happening, and it's when the exhumation is planned and Peter has informed people, that's when, for the first time, she offers to compromise and like do a settlement.

SHARON: Right. And Peter's like, "No, it's too late."

CHARIS: Yeah, and at that point Peter tells Murbles, he's just like, "If you agree to handle a settlement then you're going to be party to fraud."

SHARON: Mmhmm. So then he's like, "Okay, what does she know that makes her not want me to find whatever information this body's gonna give me." And then there's a whole bit where they're trying to figure out if she could have possibly slipped something to the General, because they know he had a little bit of like a fit while he was at Lady Dormer's house - probably from the shock of seeing her - and that they know that the General was given brandy at Lady Dormer's. So they're trying to like work out, like, if Ann Dorland could have slipped the digitalin in at any point.

CHARIS: Yeah, that does seem like the obvious thing. But, I don't know, I kind-of get this sense that Peter, even before meeting Ann Dorland - because he doesn't meet her for like a very long time into the book--

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: He doesn't meet her face-to-face at all, but, I definitely get the impression that he thinks that there's something else going on?

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: We haven't talked about Marjorie. Let's talk about Marjorie a bit--

SHARON: Yes!

CHARIS: --before we get into kind-of our first interaction with Ann Dorland's social circle.

SHARON: Yes, let's do. Tell our listeners about Marjorie, Charis.

CHARIS: Marjorie Phelps is--she makes pottery figures, she's an artist, and Peter goes to call on her and it's obvious that they're good friends. He shows up at her studio and they have this lovely scene together, where it's just like, "Oh, this is just nice and comfortable."

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: And he goes to her to ask her what she knows about Ann Dorland, because Ann Dorland has been kind-of trying to paint, trying to be involved in kind-of the studio scene, trying to be a part of the art world and not really succeeding. And so we haven't met Ann Dorland, and really most of what we know about her comes from Marjorie.

She gives a very good description where she's like--a very honest kind-of physical description, where she's just like--

SHARON: It's an artist's description.

CHARIS: Yeah, it's like, "She has like these features--she has good features, but the overall effect is not particularly attractive."

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: Peter says, "She's a painter, isn't she?" And Marjorie goes, "Mmm, well, she paints."

SHARON: [bursts out laughing] What was that meme that went around a few years ago--or maybe it was like a, you know, like an article on Jezebel or something, where it was like, "What do you -- Dear Miss Manners, what do I do if my friend is engaged to someone I don't like?" And it's like, "Just respond in facts." [CHARIS bursts out laughing] [SHARON, with fake enthusiasm] "You're engaged! You're getting married!" And so this feels very much like, "Mm, she paints."

CHARIS: [laughing] Yeah. Like, Marjorie kind-of gives us this picture of someone who is trying to fit in to a lifestyle that doesn't suit her?

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: It reminds me a little bit of, in CLOUDS OF WITNESS, when we talked about Mary Wimsey, Peter's sister, and how she tried on different personas. Like, Ann Dorland is--she's an orphan who was in extreme poverty before Lady Dormer took her on, so she kind-of went from one extreme to another. And you kind-of get this picture of someone who's just been like, "I don't know what to do with myself. I'm gonna try this. This isn't working, I'm gonna try this."

SHARON: Right. And Marjorie, I think, also -- she puts her finger on, I think, aspects of Ann's personality that are quite revealing for Peter? She says, "I think Ann has a sort-of fixed idea that she could never possibly attract anyone, so she's either sentimental and tiresome or rude and

snubbing. And our crowd does hate sentimentality and simply can't bear to be snubbed. Ann's rather pathetic, really."

You know, like, Marjorie sort-of implies that she'd started on the painting and the art because she'd fallen for someone who was part of the art scene, and so it's sort-of this like--you know, and then she's like, "I think she's gone off art a bit. Now she seems to be going for social service or sick nursing or something of the kind." It's like, you know, Marjorie sort-of twigged onto the fact that Ann attaches herself to these various populations, or these various ways of being that have much more to do with the crowd that she wants to be a part of than her own, like, native interests.

CHARIS: Right. Well, and I think--you know, it's that classic thing of, "Oh yes, I'm definitely interested in this." You know, when you're really just interested in a person? You're just like, "Oh yeah, I'm *sooo* interested in this thing. Very interested." [SHARON laughing in the background]

SHARON: So interested.

CHARIS: "I have never been more fascinated by anything."

So, that being the portrait that Peter has of Ann Dorland, Marjorie invites him to go with her to a party at the Rushworths, and the Rushworths are kind-of part of the artistic circle. And that party is... it's interesting.

SHARON: It's in Chapter 16? Right? The last chapter we're talking about. Yeah.

CHARIS: Yeah. And the party is to hear a talk on a glands clinic that is meant to be starting.

SHARON: Mmhmm. Well we find out quite a bit of information at this party. Right? Peter shows up and finds out that it's actually Dr. Penberthy speaking. And there's kind-of this whole bit where, you know, earlier on Marjorie had mentioned that the Rushworth daughter, Naomi, had just gotten engaged to this doctor who's giving this talk. And then you find out, "Oh, it's Penberthy," and that the engagement was like, a little bit sudden - or unexpected, unanticipated.

CHARIS: And this party is like a crowd of artistic people crossed over with a crowd of wealthy people kind-of to drum up support for this glands clinic. Which is Penberthy's pet project, which is to make people good with glands? [both laugh] Like, [blithely] "If you fix people's glands, then all of their personality problems will go away."

SHARON: Mmhmm. [pause] It really reminds me of that early conversation with Julian Freke, right? Kind-of from the other angle. Like, I mean at one point Penberthy is sort-of antagonizing a clergyman of like, "I hope the church isn't too against what I'm doing." And the father says, "If you can cure sin with an injection I shall be only too pleased. Only be sure you don't pump in something worse in the process." And it just--it just really reminded me of that, of Julian Freke's proposal that the knowledge of good and evil could be removed from the--that's it just this, like, physical phenomenon.

CHARIS: Yeah. I'd love to know, like, if any of our listeners know about this attitude towards the chemical aspect of personality. If that phrase makes any sense at all. But like, how your brain chemistry influences things. And I kind-of feel like this was early days of people realizing that your hormones affect your mood, and like your health kind-of changes your mental attitudes.

SHARON: Mmhmm.

CHARIS: And if anyone has particular knowledge about what the general thought about that was in the 20s I would be interested to know, because it does seem to be something that's popping up in the background of Sayers a good bit. And so--

SHARON: Right, yeah, was this considered, like, quack medicine or was it--

CHARIS: Yeah, or was this the up-and-coming mainstream thing. Or was this like the equivalent of, I don't know, like Gwennyth Paltrow's "goop" stuff. [both chuckle]

SHARON: Yes, steaming your bits. [both burst out laughing]

CHARIS: Please -- which, listeners, please *do not*.

SHARON: We do not endorse--

CHARIS: Not at all.

SHARON: No.

CHARIS: That's a good way to make terrible things happen. [laughing] We might edit this out, this bit. [SHARON laughing in the background]

SHARON: It would be interesting to know kind-of whether this was considered like fringe science or becoming more mainstream or cutting-edge or so forth. I think it would give us more of a sense of, like, how we're meant to view these characters, maybe?

CHARIS: Yeah, and like I--my awareness of it only comes from seeing it here in Sayers. And I'm not sure where to look to find out a little bit more about, like, the social context?

SHARON: Yeah.

CHARIS: So, if anyone has information I would be very interested.

SHARON: Yeah. I mean, certainly psychoanalysis was a huge thing, but that seems to be a very separate conversation. Or like a separate strand of the medical world. Yeah, I don't know either.

A couple interesting things about this party that I wanted to flag: first of all, Miss Dorland does not show up, even though everyone thought she was very keen on glands and things. And it's sort-of implied that maybe she wasn't feeling up to being in public. Because the other thing that happens is we find out that the newspapers have kind-of gotten a hold of the story, and good old Sal Hardy - or, sometimes referred to as Sally Hardy - but Salcombe Hardy, who is like a gossip rag newspaper man, also turns up.

And he'd, like, briefly shown up in UNNATURAL DEATH, I think, reporting on the story of the Vera Findlater disappearance? But I find it interesting that you're really--I feel like in the middle set of books you really get a sense of like, the press, or the newspapers, or reporters, as like, being potential hindrances to investigation? It feels like they're always kind-of endangering Peter's investigation by, they want to release clues, or you know Sal Hardy is always coming to him being like, "Well what do you think happened?" [both laugh] And Peter's like, "I can't tell you."

But I think it's interesting to sort-of see like, a wider awareness of the press or of like the changes in journalism. You know the sort-of rise of more gossip tabloids start to show up in these books. [pause] I wasn't really going anywhere with that, just wanted to flag it, especially before we get to STRONG POISON.

CHARIS: Yeah, definitely. And then, you know, Majorie comes back to Peter after circulating the party, and she's been gathering information for him as well. And she brings the information that the artist side of things is like, "Oh, well, Ann didn't come because she's upset about a failed romance." And it kind-of seems that Ann Dorland was--Marjorie uses the phrase

"gathered up" by someone named Ledbury who's an artist. And that seems to be when she tried really hard to be good at painting but just wasn't. And then, you know, he like, moved on because that's what he does, and then she kind-of stopped painting. And then Marjorie's passing on this information about like, "Oh, Naomi was saying things about how Ann Dorland tried to get together with so-and-so and couldn't make it come off." And then it kind-of comes out that people are not feeling very loving towards Ann Dorland because everyone's saying that she did it.

And Peter--interestingly, Peter asks Marjorie to be a friend to Miss Dorland. Marjorie, because she's a lovely person, she's like, "I'm *not* going to spy on her." You know.

SHARON: [laughing] Not if she poisons 50-year old generals.

CHARIS: Yeah. [laughs] She's just like, "If someone comes to me as a friend I'm not going to spy on them for you." He's like, "I don't want you to. But I want you to keep an open mind and tell me what you think. Because I don't want to make a mistake." Which, I think, is another place where this book reminds me of UNNATURAL DEATH. "I've made mistakes by rushing into things and I don't want to make a mistake." He says, "And I'm prejudiced. I want Miss Dorland to be guilty, so I'm very likely to persuade myself she is when she isn't." And so basically he's just said--he's just asking Marjorie to do her best to be an impartial third party. And, you know, he's looking for an opinion to balance him.

SHARON: Yeah. Which is so interesting, because a few lines later--I mean, you know, Marjorie responds, "I'm not going to try to worm anything out of her." And then Peter says, "My dear girl, you're not keeping an open mind, you think she did it." So it's interesting how he's saying, "I need you to be an objective third party because I want her to have done it. But I also recognize that you already think she did it, and that in trying to be a good friend, you're telling me you're not going to dig for more information, but that's because you think you're gonna find something."

CHARIS: Mmhmm.

SHARON: And then it's great, cause Marjorie says, "Peter Wimsey, you sit there looking a perfectly well-bred imbecile." [laughing] "And in the most underhand way you twist people to doing things they ought to blush for." So she really has Peter's number there. [laughs]

CHARIS: Yeaah.

SHARON: Yeah, it's interesting to me that the books don't try to make more of a romantic match between Peter and Marjorie.

CHARIS: Yeah, there's definitely a sense that they've had something. And my impression is that they've had a nice, friendly something-something. But that it didn't develop into anything serious. And after this we're going to read STRONG POISON, and Peter's life will take a tremendous turn.

SHARON: [laughing] Yeah. We'll definitely, I think, when we get to that book and its developments, talk about sort-of earlier candidates, earlier female characters that show up in Peter's life. And kind-of, you know, maybe what that book borrows or rhymes with or takes off from.

CHARIS: Yeah.

SHARON: So we will be talking about STRONG POISON *soon*, but before that we will have one more episode wrapping up THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE BELLONA CLUB in two weeks. We will talk about the whodunnit, we will *finally* meet Miss Dorland, and we will find out more about why Mr. Murbles delights me so very much. So, we'll see you then dear listeners!

CHARIS: In the meantime, you can find us on Twitter and Instagram as @wimseypod - that's Wimsey, W-I-M-S-E-Y -, and you can find transcripts and show notes of our episodes on our website at asmywimseytakesme.com.

SHARON: Our logo is by Gabi Vicioso and our theme music was composed and recorded by Sarah Meholick. If you've enjoyed this episode of As My Wimsey Takes Me, we'd love for you to give us a rating and a review on Apple podcast or on your podcatcher of choice. And we also hope that you'll tell all your friends who love Dorothy L. Sayers as much as we do.

CHARIS: Join us next time for more talking piffle.

[THEME MUSIC: jaunty Bach-esque piano notes played in counterpoint begins and gradually fades out.]