

As My Wimsey Takes Me, Episode 13 transcript

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

SHARON Hello and welcome to As My Wimsey Takes Me. I'm SHARON Hsu...

CHARIS And I'm Charis Ellison. Today we are going to be wrapping up our discussion of STRONG POISON. We are going to give away the whodunnit and the howdunnit. So if you aren't quite finished with the book and you don't want to be spoiled, listen for our warning for the point of no return so that you can turn the podcast off and come back when you're done.

SHARON Yes. So without further ado, one last time unto the breach!

CHARIS So Sharon, in our last episode, we alluded to the adventures of Miss Climpson, but we didn't have time to explain in depth. Do you want to give our listeners like a quick summary of where Miss Climpson is and what her mission is?

SHARON Yes, because of the very good detective work of Miss Murchison last time, Peter knows that a will has been made for Mrs. Wrayburn. He knows that the will is, as far as they can tell, not in Norman Urquhart's office. So he dispatches Miss Climpson off to the little village where Mrs. Wrayburn lives and says, you know, basically gives her the vaguest directions possible, which he knows are vague. He's like, there will be some person who's part of the household who is taking care of her, because we know that she has dementia and can't care for herself. And so he's like basically find that person, attach yourself to them, come up with some kind of way to get in the house to search for the will. And Miss Climpson being the enterprising spinster that she is, is like, Great! That's all I need.

And we get, you know, another one of her delightful letters when she first reaches the village. And in a book full of very good lines, I think this is my favorite one. You know, she's telling Lord Peter about how the carriage of the train that she takes to this village was, was very warm. And she would have liked the window down, but there were businessmen who would have probably had objected. She says, "Men are such hot house plants nowadays, are they not? Quite unlike my dear father, who would never permit a fire in the house before November the first or after March 31st, even though the thermometer was at freezing point. And "hot house plants" is in all caps. It's just, it just makes me so happy.

CHARIS These men, they're so fragile!

SHARON [laughing] They're so fragile. Yeah. So she arrives in the village. She sets herself up in a boarding house. She finds out that the attendant who takes care of Mrs. Wrayburn is one Miss Booth. And Miss Climpson sets herself up to run into Miss Booth after a whole comedy of errors of trying each tea house in the village after another. Cause she's like, well, surely this woman has to come out and take tea sometime.

CHARIS Right. Well, and I think that one of the other people at the boarding house mentions that, you know, Miss Booth is seen in the village visiting tea shops.

SHARON Yeah. So Miss Climpson goes on what the narrative calls "an orgy of tea" to try to locate Miss Booth. And she finally does. And--

CHARIS Manufactures a meeting.

SHARON Yes. Manufactures a meeting, gets this person to, you know, start confiding in her all about her profession and so forth. And Miss Climpson notices that Miss Booth is reading a book called CAN THE DEAD SPEAK? And the narrative says "in a single moment of illumination, Miss Climpson saw her plan complete and perfect in every detail," which for listeners who've been following along with us, this should probably very much remind you of the way that Peter solves the case in WHOSE BODY? where suddenly, in perfect detail, all the pieces fall together for him. And so she works up a way of just *casually* mentioning that, you know, *she* doesn't believe in Spiritualism, but some of her *friends* have said that she's remarkably sensitive to the occult forces and gets herself invited over to have a little seance.

CHARIS As one does! [chuckling]

SHARON Yes. As one does. So that's, that's kind of where... where we are!

CHARIS Yeah. And you know, we get a little background about Miss Climpson, which is, we know from previous books that she's been a single woman who kind of had to make her own way for a while. And she's been a paid companion. She's lived in boarding houses. So she has a lot of life experience and a lot of time that she's been able to spend observing people. And she also conveniently, at one point in her past, spent some time in the same hotel as someone who investigated Spiritualists and this person taught her all about the tricks that they use. So Miss Climpson knows how to fake a seance.

SHARON And the book goes into great detail about the different apparatus that she purchases. She wears a garter with a little box that she can clap--

CHARIS Right. Well, she doesn't, it's not exactly that she claps it, it's like a small metal tin and she squeezes it so that it pops.

SHARON Oh, right. Yeah.

CHARIS Here's the, here's the side note though. You are not the only person to get that wrong because I know that you have read TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG, and in TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG, there is a character who's just like, "I, having read STRONG POISON, know how to fake a seance," but the character in SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG is

described as clapping the two halves of the box together. Which is a detail that annoys me. Cause I'm just like [laughingly curmudgeonly] that's not right. That's not how it is.

SHARON Well, and I was always like, that must be remarkably difficult to do without giving yourself away! This makes much more sense.

CHARIS Yeah. No, it's kind of like, you know, the board game Trouble where you push something and it pops?

SHARON Okay. Much better.

CHARIS I just, I am relieved to finally air that grievance about TO SAY NOTHING OF THE DOG.

SHARON Which is, in all other ways, a perfect book. Yeah. But she, you know, she gets like little wires that she can put up her sleeves to kind of move the table as needed. She's very well prepared, which I love. And she's also, she has like a brief moment of Anglo Catholic conscience where she's like, is this the right thing to do? But then, like Mephistopheles, she imagines Lord Peter saying a hearty "Well done, Miss Climpson!" And she just goes along her merry way. [both laugh] Peter, the tempter.

CHARIS Yeah. And also we should mention that she's under a very tight schedule. She has one week, because t's almost the end of the month. They're almost out of time.

SHARON Right. Harriet is about to be retried. And I think there is like, as comical as this section is, there is an undercurrent of hurry and rush a bit. I feel like even the fact that the narrative follows Miss Climpson into all these different tea shops, it's a way of getting us as readers to kind of feel that time is passing. The pages are turning. Like what, how is this all going to be wrapped up? You know?

I think maybe one other thing to mention before we get into the actual seance is there's this part where Miss. Climpson... she's seen Miss. Booth, she's trying to manufacture the meeting, and not give away that she's following her [Miss Booth]. And the narrative says "The male detective, particularly when dressed as a workman, errand boy, or telegraph messenger is favorably placed for shadowing. He can loaf without attracting attention. The female detective must not loaf. On the other hand, she can stare into shop windows forever. Miss Climpson selected a hat shop." So it's, again, that pointing out of the difference of even like what spaces the different genders can access or at least like what spaces they're seen as belonging in and what behaviors belong and not.

CHARIS Right. Like it's fine for men to just stand around, but women need to always be purposeful or it stands out.

SHARON     Yeah. Or shopping.

CHARIS     Yeah. But I mean like shopping is a purpose. Like, but you can't just hang around for the sake of hanging around, because that looks weird. Like maybe not necessarily suspicious, but noteworthy. And so you'd need to have our reason to be where you are, whereas men can just be somewhere and be, you know, they're just there.

SHARON     They can just occupy space.

CHARIS     [unimpressed] Yeah, they don't need a reason.

SHARON     Except in this case, Lord Peter wouldn't have... I don't think he could have come up with a reason to know Miss Booth or to be invited in.

CHARIS     Yeah. Well, I mean like he would have had entirely different avenues though.

SHARON     That's true.

CHARIS     But this is all part of Miss Climpson's role to provide access to places where someone else, it would seem strange, but she's a nosy old lady. Of course, she wants to wander around and visit tea shops. So of course she wants to sit down and chat to anyone who will let her, you know?

SHARON     Right, what else do old ladies do? [both chuckle] Do you want to talk about the seance?

CHARIS     Sure. So we find out that Miss Booth, who is a retired nurse hired to be the caretaker for Mrs. Wrayburn, she is a student of Spiritualism and Miss Climpson realizes right away that she's a beginner. And also that she is not, um, not cautious, not sufficiently cautious in her learning. And that she's been associating with a Spiritualist who who's pretty clearly fraudulent.

SHARON     Yeah. Ms. Climpson recognizes that right away, If I'm remembering from my studies correctly... an interest in Spiritualism, I think we tend to associate with the late 19th and early 20th century. So like thinking in particular about W.B. Yeats and his circle, he was extremely interested in like spirit writing, occultism, and Spiritualism. But I think by the time Sayers is writing this book in the 1930s, Spiritualism is kind of on its way out. It's seen as something that more elderly people who are more susceptible--

CHARIS     Yes. And Miss Climpson gets a little bit more information from the other boarders at the house where she's taken up residence who tell her about how this Mrs. Craig... one of them got a letter from Mrs. Craig about how her deceased husband had arrived at a seance and

asked for special prayers, blah, blah, blah. And she's like, and you know, things that were like obviously meant to trick people into spending a lot of money on further seances.

SHARON Scammers gotta scam.

CHARIS Yeah. But so. So Miss Climpson knows that she's dealing with someone who is vulnerable to suggestion--

SHARON Overly credulous, say.

CHARIS Yes. And she also finds out that this Mrs. Craig is away, so conveniently she's out of the picture. And it gives an opening for Miss Climpson to kind of run the show. So she goes to the house, has dinner with Miss Booth, and then they begin this seance and Miss Climpson doesn't rush it too much, but she is on a timeline. And so once she has Miss Booth good and convinced that something supernatural is going on, she starts using the metal soap box on her garter to make popping noises, which was a common form of communication. I don't know if it began with the Fox sisters or if they just took advantage of something that already existed.

SHARON When were the Fox sisters?

CHARIS Let me see. The Fox sisters kind of started in the 1840s. The Fox sisters could pop their toe joints. And so that's why that was the noise that they used.

SHARON Like making the cracking noises?

CHARIS Yeah. So I'm not sure if the rapping originated with them, but it was rapping or, or like tapping was like "Ooh, this is how the spirit is communicating with us." And so Miss Climpson is using her soap box garter to make the rapping or popping noises. And they communicate that way, once for yes and twice for no. And then counting out the alphabet, which just sounds sooo exhausting. [both laugh] So we get Miss. Climpson using her powers of observation to, to feed into this the same way someone who was running the scam would. She looks around Miss. Booth's sitting room and takes note of the pictures that are there and turns photographs over to read names and things like that.

SHARON She does. She's very good at the deductive close reading.

CHARIS Yes. And so she puts on quite a convincing show. She realizes that that Miss Booth is interested in Spiritualism specifically because there's someone who's died that she has unfinished business with.

SHARON So Miss Climpson is also drawing on her, her understanding of human nature, right? That this old photograph that's kind of in pride of place, there's a flower next to it, it's a

first class frame and central position and on the mantelpiece. So Miss Climpson figures out from those clues that, Oh, this is someone who is remembered fondly, but probably not currently in the picture.

CHARIS        So the first session is mostly just Miss Climpson getting Miss Booth on the hook.

SHARON        I love the little bit where, so she figures out that the man's name was Harry, and then they're rapping out the letters and quote, unquote, Harry says, remember who came between us? And Miss Booth is writing, you know, and she says, yes. And so she's spelling out what the clacks are saying. And she says, F-A-T-H-E... And then she says, "No, no, Harry, it was moth-" So, you know, Miss Climpson was going towards father, and then she says, "No, it was moth-" and then "A-D, concluded the table triumphantly!" [both giggle] She's such a fast thinker.

CHARIS        The goal obviously is for Miss Climpson to gain Miss Booth's confidence and to come up with a reason to get to search the house and find this will, which is such, it's such an overwhelmingly daunting task. And Miss Climpson is just like [matter of factly] all right, here I go. And manages it, because she is just such a highly capable person.

SHARON        Incredible. If I got tasked with that, I would, I would just cry and, you know, run away so I never had to disappoint Lord Peter again.

CHARIS        I, it would never occur to me. Like this would never occur to me. The best I would do would be to go and meet the person and be like... tell them the truth? And see how far that got me. Probably not very far, honestly.

SHARON        Well, Peter does that a little bit later on. So, you know, you never know.

CHARIS        Yes, that's true. That's true. Peter does try it. I don't know how far that would have gone with me. It reminds me of a LEVERAGE episode, which, LEVERAGE is my favorite TV show. And, you know, there's a lot of this type of thing where they have to come up with a plan on the fly and it's always something outlandish. So, but yeah.

So in following, you know, they have another sitting the next night. And so the second night they use a Ouija board. Miss Climpson, just genius levels of creativity. She's introduced the idea of a control, which is like the spirit who gives you access to... basically like the doorman of the spirit world. So Miss Climpson has introduced to a character to be that. She's also introduced a bad influence who calls himself George Washington to disrupt things and add a layer of complexity because she can't be too direct.

And Miss Climpson has such a good understanding of that. You know, she, she knows that she can't lead too quickly into anything. And that she has to kind of populate these spirit encounters with these other characters.

SHARON She needs to do some world building first.

CHARIS Yeah. And she brings up common names that probably are names of people that Miss Booth went to school with. And through that, just like, "I wonder if that's so and so who went to India? I don't know what happened to her." And so like then later Miss Climpson comes back and is like, "Let me tell you all about my life and India." And like, as Miss Climpson points out at one point, she's like, it's not... it doesn't matter what you say, the other person is sure to help you out. It's all picking up on context clues and giving hints of things and letting the other person kind of finish the thought. And it's all very.. you know, we've talked a little bit about how terrifying it is that it's so easy to kill people. It's also just like terrifyingly easy to manipulate people. You know, like we all like to think that we are clever and savvy, but like when you get down to it, people who really know what they're doing?

SHARON Yeah, which we might say... detective writers, right? Like this whole scene, I mean, this whole interlude, it's just, I feel like it's such meta commentary on what detective fiction does with both clues and red herrings. So we have the good reader in Miss Climpson, the good detective who can kind of pick up these different pieces and understand the correct narrative behind them. But then she's also able to create a narrative and sort of direct Miss Booth's attention wherever she wants it to go and to get all sorts of information out of her. And I think that's, you know, later on when she gets her to start looking for the will, the clue is just the letter B. And Miss Climpson chose it very, very deliberately, because B can refer to almost anything. Books, bureaus, and like, barring that, then you have the color black or brown or--

CHARIS Or big--

SHARON Yeah, exactly. So it's just like, it's... I don't know. It almost feels like it's both celebrating the kind of detection that we as readers have to do. And then also making fun of how overdetermined the kind of reading that we have to do, where... that's always the problem with detective fiction, right? You don't know what's actually a clue until you finish reading the book.

CHARIS Right.

SHARON And so you have to kind of imagine that everything's a clue, but also *not*, because, you know, then you might get tricked by a bad spirit named George Washington!

CHARIS They switch from using the soap box to doing spirit writing. So Miss Climpson, as the medium, would be... she goes into a trance and is writing on a piece of paper in character as the, as the spirit, which speeds things up.

SHARON Yes, good job, Miss Climpson.

CHARIS        But Miss Climpson uses that to bring a message from the spirit realm, supposedly from Mrs. Wrayburn, which she could do because, you know, Mrs. Wrayburn is, she's not in a coma, but she is basically insensible. Like she doesn't really speak, which is a question that Miss Climpson asked earlier, and it sounded like she was just being politely curious about her new friends' patient, but she was also finding out whether or not she could use this method. And so she invents this little story about how Mrs. Wrayburn is, you know, stuck in an in between place. She's not dead, but she's not fully in her body. And there's something that she needs taken care of. And so she's struggling to reach them through the spirit world. And basically she says that they need to find the will because Norman wants it. And so at this point, Miss. Climpson has Miss Booth so thoroughly on the hook that she's just like, "Oh, well, we better find it. And we better send it. 'Cause it must be important."

SHARON        Yeah. And she does that over, well, not three *successive* evenings, right? Because on Sunday she has a bit of conscience.

CHARIS        Yes. "There was no seance due to the revolt of the medium's conscience." She goes to church instead.

SHARON        Yeah. But she is remarkably efficient. And then it also, you know, the search gives us a chance to see the inside of Mrs. Wrayburn's house. We actually even see Mrs. Rayburn. And again, it feels like, you know, this line of old wealthy ladies that starts with Agatha Dawson and goes through Lady Dormer and now ends in Mrs. Wrayburn. I don't know if Sayers just got exhausted of, you know, wealthy old women at this point, but there's something very... to me, when they start going through the house, there's almost this nightmarish quality where there's all these rooms just full of stuff, right? Like all kinds of stuff. The implication about Mrs. Wrayburn was that when she was an actress, she was also very free with her favors. And so people gave her money, jewels, you know, she often converted the jewels into investments and that's how she became so wealthy, but it's just like all this stuff jumbled around.

And Miss Climpson sees everything. And the narrative says "it was the room of a woman without taste or moderation, who refused nothing and surrendered nothing, to whom the fact of possession had become the one steadfast reality in a world of loss and change." And then later on, a few paragraphs down, Miss Climpson is in the room with Mrs. Wrayburn and she's, she kind of can't help herself. She creeps over to the bed and she looks down and sees "an old, old face, so tiny in the vast expanse of sheet and pillow that it might've been a doll, stared up at her with unblinking unseeing eyes. It was covered with fine surface wrinkles, like a hand sodden with soapy water, but all the great lines carved by experience had been smoothed out and crumpled. It reminded Miss Climpson of a child's pink balloon from which nearly all the air has leaked away. The escaping breath puffed through the black slips and little blowing snorting sounds and added to the resemblance. From under the frilled nightcap straggled a few limp wisps of whitened hair."



And it's like, I don't know, I haven't fully put together my thoughts here, but there's something about all three of those old women and their wills where like, they have so much power. Like they have so much *narrative* power, right? It's their impending or actual deaths that kick off the events of all these books. But then when we finally see one of them, she's completely helpless and frail and fragile. And there's something about that juxtaposition that's... I don't know. I mean, you know, Miss Climpson feels overcome by a sense of sacrilege. I don't know that I'd go that far, but like, there's something about that juxtaposition that's really interesting to me. I think, especially when, like we've had book after book of people, you know, even Peter sometimes musing out loud of like, what's the harm in pushing off a little old lady who was going to die anyway? And then now we finally see one of them as a human.

CHARIS        Right.

SHARON        And it's like, no, no, there is *massive* harm in that because you would be killing a human being. And that's not okay. No matter how, no matter how convenient it would be for someone else... the childishness, I think, of Mrs. Wrayburn, her helplessness just really drives that home. I think.

CHARIS        Yeah. I think that there's a contrast between the three women, right? Like Agatha Dawson, because she had just a massive amount of willpower and like, she was so determined not to die. And she had a very decided opinion on the matter--

SHARON        She did.

CHARIS        And then Lady Dormer, her health disintegrated quickly, but we get the impression of her as just like a lovely, kind person who liked people. And the reason she became ill was because she decided to go out and see fireworks. And then you have Roseanna Wrayburn who lived a full and... what's a good word? She had, like, she lived a very full life and a life that was full of experiences that taught her to hold on to everything that she could get, you know, and not letting anything be taken away from her. And I feel like in particular that parallels with Agatha Dawson, you know? Like Agatha Dawson had everything taken away from her, specifically her life. The one thing that she desperately wanted to keep.

I think in the other books, these elderly women and their wills, they're plot conveniences. It is different to have Mrs. Wrayburn here on the page and to be confronted with her as a still living person.

SHARON        'Cause for so much for this book, *she's* a plot convenience.

CHARIS        Right! And she's a figure in the abstract. I didn't have a clear follow up. I didn't have a final thought there, but it's just like, there, it's like on the one hand, yes, three old women with wills in a row, but also they're all very different. And I think, I don't know, I think you could make an interesting argument that the power that they have in death being greater than the

power they have in life and whether that's a deliberate commentary on how, to so many people in these narratives, these women are a lot more valuable dead than they are alive. I feel like there's an element of commentary there with the idea of like surplus women, you know?

SHARON      Certainly, yeah. I also wonder if it's something... Sayers is sort of staunchly in middle age now, when she's writing this part. And she herself died at an age that I think we would think of as quite young now. And so I wonder if, as she was growing older... we know her mother had died while she was writing *STRONG POISON*. If she's just kind of thinking about mortality more. And I wonder if this moment where we see Mrs. Wrayburn... like, Sayers can never put a character on the page without humanizing them in some way. And I, I wonder if, you know, there's sort of this aspect where she'd been treating the characters as sort of just plot devices, but then when confronted with one that she couldn't just shuffle off that way... I don't know. I feel like there might be a reason she doesn't return to this well ever again, after this point in the books and, and, you know, we've talked before about how the books kind of take a turn anyway, but it does kind of feel to me at least that once you're confronted with the old, old woman tiny in the bed who looks like a child's pink balloon, like you... you kinda can't go back from that, right? You can't go back to "old lady dying somewhere with a will conveniently" like as a... as a non-person.

CHARIS      Yeah.

SHARON      Sorry. Before we went on that long rabbit hole...I do think it is funny that after all this searching after hours and hours, Miss Booth just happens to say, you know, "Ah, well it's, if it weren't for the fact that the spirit medium told us to look for something beginning with B, I would have thought that the will would be in the safe" and I just imagine Miss Climpson inwardly collapsing with despair, you know!

CHARIS      Because of course there would be a safe!

SHARON      Yeah. She does save it, because of course they find the safe combination in a *black book*. But yeah. They find the will. Miss Climpson very enterprisingly steams it open when she's boiling the water for hot water bottles, because it's now so late she has to stay the night. And she finds that to the contrary of what Norman Urquhart claimed, the actual will leaves both Mrs. Wrayburn's real estate and 50,000 pounds to Philip Boyes, with the remainder left to Norman Urquhart, who is also at the sole executor. So, so yeah.

CHARIS      And suddenly the thing that Peter has been looking for all along is right there, which is a motive for someone to kill Philip Boyes.

SHARON      Yes. So is this the point of no return for our listeners?

CHARIS I think probably, because it's time to talk about what Wimsey does in response to the information that Miss Climpson sends him. And it's also a time to talk about Miss Murchison having her own little extra adventure.

SHARON Yes. All right. So listeners, if you have not finished the book and do not want to be spoiled, this is your warning to... go away.

CHARIS [burst out laughing] But come back, come back!

SHARON Yes. Do come back. I never know how to politely say it, but this is the point at which you would want to stop listening to us, shall we say. So, Charis--

CHARIS So, Sharon?

SHARON Who killed Philip Boyes?

CHARIS Philip Boyes was murdered with arsenic by his cousin, Norman Urquhart.

SHARON Yes.

CHARIS And the motive was that Norman Urquhart had been given a power of attorney by Roseanna Wrayburn, which gave him access to all of her money. And he had used her money for his private speculations and lost the bulk of it in the Megatherium trust crash.

SHARON Yes. Which, if you're going to try to bilk somebody, or if you're going to use someone else's money for speculation, you should at least attempt to be good at the speculation.

CHARIS Right.

SHARON Because otherwise you lose all the money that someone else is supposed to inherit, then you have to kill them.

CHARIS Yup. So as to the how...

SHARON That's what Peter has to figure it out.

CHARIS Yeah. And let's go back to Miss Murchison because Miss Climpson and Miss Booth have sent the will to Norman Urquhart's office. Miss Murchison sees it arrive and shortly after it arrives, Miss Murchison comes up with a reason to go into Mr. Urquhart's office.

SHARON Partly because Peter had said, make sure there are witnesses around who see that well, so he can't destroy it.

CHARIS Right. So she goes into his office without knocking and she catches him kind of standing at the mantelpiece. And so like the office is in an old building, old enough that all the rooms of course would have fireplaces. And Miss Murchison has the thought that he looks as though he were protecting or defying somebody. And he's also staring her in the eye, which reminds her of "a little set of rules, which Lord Peter Wimsey half in jest, half in earnest, had once prepared for the guidance of the Cattery. Of rule seven in particular, which ran" always distrust the man who looks you straight in the eyes; he wants to prevent you from seeing something. Look for it."

SHARON Side, note, someone, please write us the fan fiction of Lord Peter's rules for the Cattery. Cause I'm like what?What are rules one through six?

CHARIS Uh, I think that you're just hungry for some fan fiction.

SHARON I really am!

CHARIS So someone, please write some fanfiction for Sharon.

SHARON Yes. So each rule and then like the circumstance under which a Cattery member had to use the rule, please.

CHARIS But yeah. So she looks away from Mr. Urquhart's face and notices a line at the edge of the paneling behind his head. She's just like, Hmm, that's curious. And so she waits for an opportunity to be alone in the office. So what she does is she leaves work that evening and then she kind of goes and waits down the streets until the other clerk leaves and Mr. Urquhart leaves. And this is where they have their fun little encounter where Miss Murchison has glued herself to a butcher shop window because she can't loiter, as Miss Climpson mentioned earlier, but she can't stare at shop windows forever. And Mr. Urquhart pauses and says, "Good evening, choosing your supper chop?" Miss Murchison says something about how she wishes that Providence had seen fit to provide more joints suitable for single people. And Mr. Urquhart says, "Well, you should cease to be single, Miss Murchison." And Miss Murchison giggles, "But this is so sudden, Mr. Urquhart!" and he like blushes and leaves really quickly. And Miss Murchison goes "Thought that would settle him. That's a great mistake to be familiar with their subordinates."

SHARON [chuckling and emphatic] "That'll show him."

CHARIS So gets the charwoman to let her back into the office. And she goes in to have a hunt round and, conveniently, she failed to return the lockpicks that she was given to use on the deed box before. So there are one or two conveniences in this book, you know, like it's a convenience that Miss Climpson noticed the combination for the safe, when they were

searching. It's a convenience that Miss Murchison still has the lock picks. But I don't think that those are so out of the way that I would call them unreasonable.

SHARON       No, I don't think so either.

CHARIS        They're well within the rules. Are they convenient? Yes. Are they totally plausible and understandable? Yes. We give them a pass. But yeah. So Miss. Murchison goes in and finds a secret cubby hole basically in Norman Urquhart's office. And what does she find inside?

SHARON       Well, in addition to the will, she finds a small packet full of white powder. Dun dun dun dun!

CHARIS        [gasps dramatically] What could it be?

SHARON       Yeah. She asks herself that. So she hurries over to Peter's place where, I love this. "There was the honorable Freddie Arbuthnot looking amiable, Chief Inspector Parker, looking worried, Lord Peter looking somnolent, and Bunter, who having introduced her, retired to position on the front of the assembly and hovered there, looking correct." Dear Bunter.

Yeah. So, you know, they basically lay out all of the motive here. Which is that yes, Mr. Urquhart has been speculating with the money. He lost it, so he needed to get rid of Philip Boyes, you know, that's the motive. And then Bunter, of course being Bunter, has a whole little chemical apparatus set up so that they can test the powder. And, you know, Peter's saying all along it's been really suspicious how meticulous Norman Urquhart has been in making sure he was never left alone with Philip Boyes. Like making scrupulously sure that they always ate things and met each other in front of the servants. [Peter says] there's something fishy about someone who sets up their own alibi even before the thing happens.

CHARIS        Right. Like Wimsey says, did you ever hear of a meal hedged round with such precautions?

SHARON       Exactly. Yeah. And even the fact that it comes out that the water jug in Philip Boyes' room had been empty. So it was just like, you know, he'd made sure that there was no way anybody could be like, "Oh, did you slip him something at some point?" Like everything was eaten by somebody else or drunk by someone else.

I also love the part where Parker says, "What would one naturally do if one found one's water bottle empty?" "Ring the bell," said Wimsey promptly. "Or shout for help," added Parker. "Or," said Miss Murchison, "if one wasn't accustomed to being waited on, one might use the water from the bedroom jug." [laughing] She's like, you know, it's never occurred to Peter to fetch some water!

But yeah, Bunter tests the white powder, and it is of course arsenic. And then Peter sits up late at night trying to figure out how he did it.

CHARIS        It's a little bit of an echo of what he does in WHOSE BODY?, isn't it?

SHARON        Yes, definitely. Brings down all these books and once again, I mean, Peter doesn't have a breakdown this time, but once again, we kind of see it from Bunter's point of view, where after Peter has sat up nearly all night, he rings the bell, calls for a bath, and says, I know how he did it. And dear Bunter, you know, he's putting the books away and he looks at the collection of books and he goes, "Why, of course, why what a wooden-headed set of chumps we've all been!" Bunter, the detective as well, gets it.

CHARIS        I think I want to talk for just a second, 'cause I think it's an interesting contrast between this scene and the scene in WHOSE BODY?, because, in WHOSE BODY?, he sits up and like, the thing becomes clear in his mind and it causes him to panic because he feels this weight of responsibility. Whereas, you know, like this scene is... it's so peaceful. Like he's sitting up, he has all these books out. He's thought about it. You don't get the same peek into his mind the way we did in WHOSE BODY?, but you know, he calls Bunter and he says, I know how it was done and he's totally calm.

SHARON        And then he just falls asleep.

CHARIS        Yeah! Bunter goes away to like draw his bath and make some coffee. And he comes back and Peter is peacefully asleep.

SHARON        And [the book] had mentioned that Bunter was silently and anxiously sitting in his own kitchen, waiting to be called. So Bunter is kind of expecting another breakdown, I feel like.

CHARIS        He's definitely anticipating it as a possibility. And I think Bunter... like you get the impression that he's a little relieved. Because I think if Peter... this is really the last possible day before they run out of time. And if Peter didn't figure it out, the result would be bad. In this case, Peter has undertaken finding the truth to save someone else. And I think that that makes a big difference in his response. With Freke, even knowing that Freke was guilty, even knowing that Freke was a cold blooded murderer, the responsibility of sending someone to the gallows weighed really heavily on Peter. But now Peter is in the situation where there is someone that he cares about who is going to lose their life when they're innocent. With that in the balance, I think, I think Peter really feels like it's a fair trade, especially since, you know, Norman Urquhart is prepared to let Harriet Vane go to the gallows with no remorse.

SHARON        I think that's one of the linchpins, right. It's similar to how he viewed Pemberthy. It's like the criminal who is willing to let someone else suffer in their place, that's when things become very clear to Peter, of like, not only did you commit this murder in cold blood for your

own benefit, but you're not even willing to step up when someone else is endangered. And whether or not he has romantic feelings for the person in question, that's intolerable to him.

CHARIS       Right. It is not acceptable to let someone else pay for what he did. You know, there's a little bit of that playing fields of Eton complex.

SHARON       Mmhmm. And he does kind of punish Norman Urquhart for it in the most, you know, in a... I mean, I wouldn't even say spiteful way, but I think this is where we see Peter at his most savage in some sense.

CHARIS       Oh yeah.

SHARON       So if I may, what happens is he calls Norman Urquhart over, you know. Oh, [first] there's a little aside with a manicurist where Peter's like, I'm going to tell you something and you're going to help me track down some evidence. Um, and this becomes clear very soon after what it is that he needs. And it's where he's like, I'm going to just tell you. But he calls Norman Urquhart over and gives him some coffee, gives him some Turkish delight, and starts spinning a long, long tale all about the case, and this and that comes up, and he's like, "Well, you know, I figured out your motive. I also figured out how you did it." So remember Sylvia's intuition that his hair was too sleek? And the omelette juggler who broke some eggs?

CHARIS       Mmhmm.

SHARON       So Peter's saying, what you did was you either found a cracked egg, or you cracked one yourself and you introduced a few grains of arsenic into it. And when Philip Boyes made that omelet that night, that did the trick. And Norman Urquhart goes like that, that's preposterous. I ate the omelet too. Are you saying that, you know, somehow all the arsenic just gathered into one part of the omelet? And Peter's like, no, you've been Dread Pirate Roberts-ing it. You've been dosing yourself for probably about two years so that you could eat all that arsenic and not feel any effects. And by the way, your manicurist has saved some of your nails and some of your hair. And they're just bungful of arsenic and that's that. And, you know, Norman Urquhart tries to weasel out of it.

And Peter very coolly is like, well then can you explain to me why when you came in and I served you coffee and Turkish delight, they were just, just covered with gobs and gobs of arsenic. Would you like to try to be sick now? And Norman Urquhart runs off into the bathroom and Parker apprehends and takes him out in handcuffs.

And of course it comes out that Peter's bluffing. But you kind of, you *kind of* get the sense that he would've just done it. You know? Like, I feel like he, he would have done it and somebody talked him out of it. Like maybe, you know, maybe Charles being like, well, you don't want to confuse the toxicologist report when it does come back. But Peter is very cold.

CHARIS        Very, very cold. There are two things about that scene that strike me as funny that I want to mention real quick. One is that I wonder was the howdunnit just a huge revelation to readers at the time, because I feel like modern readers are not going to be that surprised by the idea of Norman Urquhart building up an immunity to arsenic.

SHARON        Right, because we've all seen THE PRINCESS BRIDE.

CHARIS        [laughing] We've all seen THE PRINCESS BRIDE! It's not that new of an idea to us. And then the other thing is that I think it's really funny because I think I'm correct that you also read THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA when you were pretty young. Did you also long to try Turkish delight and then were really grossed out when you found out what it's actually like?

SHARON        Yes. I was like, what is this magical confection that would make me betray my whole family? And then when I tried it for the first time, I was like, This really? Edmund, you like [bleeped]

[CHARIS breaks into laughter in the background]

I mean, there was a war going on. He probably hadn't had a sweet in like three years. So I suppose--I actually have a very tender place in my heart for him, but yeah.

CHARIS        Yeah, the older I get the more I'm like, oh Edmund, you were having a hard time, no one ever listened to you. But also Edmund, seriously, that was the best that you could think of? And so like.. I don't know that at this point in her life Sayers knew C.S. Lewis socially. But I do think the contrast between that and the description of Turkish delight here as like a disgusting sweet meat. Like Peter obviously thinks that it's just absolutely gross.

SHARON        Yeah. "It gluts the palette and glues the teeth. Nauseating mess."

CHARIS        Yeah. Like I know so many people who... finding out what Turkish delight is just feels like a betrayal because they're just like, Really? This? So it just, it just strikes me as really funny.

SHARON        Don't eat Turkish delight, dear listeners, if you haven't tried it yet. I feel like mochi is the thing that you *think* Turkish delight is going to be, right? They're much better. It's like in ANNE OF GREEN GABLES when she was like, the first time I saw a diamond, I was so disappointed because I thought it would look like an amethyst.

CHARIS        Yeah. So don't bother with Turkish delight, also betray your family.

SHARON        Don't betray your family. Don't murder anyone.

CHARIS        Don't murder anyone.



SHARON Glad we cleared things up.

CHARIS Just note that down, everyone. Some life advice for your friends of the podcast. But yes. So Peter tricks Norman Urquhart into confessing by claiming to have poisoned him, even though he hadn't.

SHARON Though he probably wanted to.

CHARIS He probably wanted to. You talked about how we see Peter being really savage and it's described like when Wimsey is telling him that he's supposedly been poisoned, he says "there's something menacing in his rigidly controlled voice." Well, you know, Wimsey has been sitting there kind of putting on his silly ass persona for a couple of hours or so, you know, to give the supposed arsenic time to work. And he suddenly just... the silly ass switches off, and yeah, it is, it is a change.

SHARON It's a delight. I love the part where it says, "'Couldn't you try to get up a few symptoms?' said Wimsey sarcastically. 'Should I bring you a basin or fetch the doctor? Does your throat burn? Is your inside convulsed with agony? It is rather late in the day, but with a little goodwill you could surely produce *some* display of feeling even now.'" Oh, I just, I love Peter when he's petty. He's being so petty here.

CHARIS And Norman Urquhart deserves every second of it. Every last bit of it.

SHARON Yeah. Cause also what a horrible way to off your cousin. My goodness.

CHARIS Yeah. Like you've been, you've been giving him little doses for a while and then you decided to, to wipe him out and you know, the process of dying from arsenical poisoning is described in a good bit of detail in the first couple of chapters during the judge's summing up. And it does not sound nice.

SHARON It is not pleasant--

CHARIS *At all.* No, it sounds awful. So it's just like... ugh!

SHARON And even though, you know, we have spoken at length about what a terrible person Philip Boyes is and how little he deserved Harriet.... nobody, nobody deserves to go like that. That's just terrible.

CHARIS I mean, people don't deserve to be murdered just in general?

SHARON Yes. To be clear. Yes. I agree with that statement. [chuckles]

CHARIS As we just said, please don't murder anyone, especially not like this. Yeah.

SHARON Yeah. Do you, do you think there's something to be said... given Sayers' belief in the idea that everyone should have work that they are suited to and work should be dignified and vocation is important....Do you think there's something to the fact that in these first five novels you see the culprits are always people betraying their own professions?

CHARIS Huh, I hadn't thought about that. But...

SHARON Yeah, like we have two doctors, one caretaker, and one lawyer behaving very badly and often either taking advantage of, or murdering the very person or people that they should be taking care of.

CHARIS Yeah. Yeah. You're right. I like, I think that you could make a very interesting argument for that.

SHARON And again, I think it's something she moves away from a bit later books, but it's just such a... I don't know, reading these all in order and in quick succession and doing deep dives, it's like, Oh, there's just a lot of themes.

CHARIS Yeah. Yeah. No, I think that that's really interesting. Add that to the list of things that would make for a really interesting paper!

SHARON [chuckling] If anyone wants to write a fan fiction... or papers, you know, our inbox is open.

CHARIS We would be delighted to see your thesis project.

SHARON Mmhmm. Very much, so very much.

CHARIS Which reminds me that hopefully soon we will have a listener as a guest on the podcast to talk about glands and the medical trends of the 1920s and 30s.

SHARON Yes. A listener reached out to us. They had the knowledge of the history of neuroscience in a way that we certainly do not. So stay tuned for a special little episode on that.

CHARIS Yes. I am excited to learn a little bit more about this thing that I'm just like, I can see that this is a theme, but I don't know the context, so I don't know what I'm looking at. So I am excited to learn more.

SHARON Yeah. I mean, many a thesis project has been started that way. I don't know enough about that. Let me go to school for more!

CHARIS I don't go to school. I just ask our listeners.

SHARON Smart. That makes you very smart.

CHARIS So much more affordable.

SHARON Right?

I think we should talk about the fact that when Harriet is acquitted, a free woman, she finds Eiluned Price and Sylvia Marriott waiting for her.

CHARIS I want to circle back really quickly to the description of the beginning of the last chapter.

SHARON Okay. Yes. The chrysanthemums.

CHARIS Yes. Because you know, the book opened with the crimson roses on the bench, which looked like splashes of blood. And we talked a little bit about whose perspective is that from, and here we have, "there were burning chrysanthemums on the judge's bench. They looked like burning banners." And it says that "the prisoner too had a look in her eyes that was a challenge to the crowded court."

And then we have just the formalities of stating that Harriet Vane is free and Sir Impey Biggs rises up "large and majestic" just to be like, we need to state it very clearly that she had nothing to do with it, and that someone else was being charged with this crime, and she is absolutely innocent. And I wanted to ask you Sharon, whether you think that we're seeing that possibly from Peter's perspective or if it is meant to be Harriet or if it is meant to be either like an omniscient...

SHARON Like the court at large?

CHARIS Yeah.

SHARON Yeah, huh. Why not all three? [laughs] That's a cheat. I, I like the idea of Peter. Like I don't think Peter wouldn't be there, you know--

CHARIS Well, we know that he was there because he ducks out.

SHAORN Yeah. Right.

CHARIS Eiluned says "I saw him drive off the moment the verdict was given." So he was there, but he, he leaves immediately.

SHARON        Yeah. There's also a bit earlier in the book that implies to me that it's Peter's perspective because when Miss Murchison goes to see him at home for the first time, she says... "she expressed admiration of the big bronze chrysanthemums heaped here and there about the room." Peter says, "Oh, I'm glad you liked them. My friends say they give a feminine touch to the place, but Bunter sees to it as a matter of fact." So there's a way in which the chrysanthemums are already sort of tied to Peter. Um, so I feel like it's, at the very least, it's a good call back.

I think it could be Harriet as well. I feel like burning banners is a thing that she would think, but I feel like the description that she had a look in her eyes that was a challenge to the crowded court is, is very external to her. So I do think, I don't know, I--

CHARIS        That we're distantly from Peter's perspective? Yeah. And I love that the chrysanthemums look like burning banners. Like that's like that victorious imagery. And I like the idea that, you know, these burning banners kind of wipe out the splashes of blood that the red roses were at the beginning.

SHARON        Exactly.

CHARIS        I love it.

SHARON        Yeah.

CHARIS        So Harriet Vane is free without a stain upon her character, as the judge puts it. "And so ended sensational to the last one of the most sensational murder trials of the century." But as we already said, Peter has departed and is not there when Harriet Vane comes out.

SHARON        Yeah. And Harriet actually, you know, she says, "Where's Lord Peter Wimsey, I must thank him." And Eiluned says he's gone. "Oh," said Miss Vane. "He'll come and see you," said Sylvia. "No, he won't," said Eiluned. "Why not?" said Sylvia. "Too decent," said Eiluned.

CHARIS        Which is high praise for Eiluned

SHARON        *Right?* She says, "I like that young man, you needn't grin. I do like him. He's not going to do the King Cophetua stunt. And I take my hat off to him." Which is the king going and finding the beggar maid and making her the queen and like that, that whole power imbalance thing. And she says, "If you want him, you'll have to send for him." "I won't do that," said Harriet. "Oh yes you will," said Sylvia. "I was right about who did the murder and I'm going to be right about this." And it remains to be seen.

CHARIS        Yeah. It will be a book or two before we return to that. But that's not actually the closing of the book. We get this short little scene of Lord Peter. Wimsey going down to Duke's

Denver that same evening and finding the family "in a state of perturbation, all except the Dowager who sat placidly making a rug in the midst of the uproar."

SHARON      The uproar is over, uh... so Mary Wimsey finally told her family she's marrying Parker.

CHARIS      Yes. And Gerald and Helen are reacting as expected.

SHARON      But Peter takes Mary's side. Of course.

CHARIS      Of course.

SHARON      And he says, "Just you watch, Charles is going to be a big man one day. And if you want to have a row with somebody, have it with me." "My God," said the Duke, "You're not going to marry a police woman!" "Not quite," said Wimsey, "I intend to marry the prisoner." "What?" said the Duke, "Good Lord. What what?" "If she'll have me," said Lord Peter Wimsey. The end.

CHARIS      Yeah. Yes. So he stepped back, but he has not given up,

SHARON      Mmmmm. Not in the slightest. And thank goodness Sayers continued this series

CHARIS      Oh, thank goodness.

SHARON      That would have been quite the massive cliffhanger.

CHARIS      Yes. We will encounter Harriet Vane again, but not in the next book, which is going to be FIVE RED HERRINGS.

SHARON      So we don't have that long to wait.

CHARIS      Right. But we do have to get through the trains.

SHARON      [unenthusiastically] Yeah.

CHARIS      We must get through the trains,

SHARON      Which speaking of getting through the trains--

CHARIS      We must have gear up.

SHARON      Yes. We have to gird our loins. And also, because life is quite busy right now, I've started a new job and Charis is--

CHARIS Yay!

SHARON Yes, I love the new job, but it takes up a lot of time and brain space and poor Charis is single-handedly editing all of these episodes and could also use a break. We are going to take a very short break.

CHARIS Yes. We're just going to basically skip one episode. We plan to have our special episode, hopefully next time in two weeks. And then after that, there will be a gap. So--

SHARON Yes, essentially we are taking a month mini break during which we will be doing a bunch of recording. And trying to work ahead again. But yes, our dulcet voices shall return soon-ish, just not as soon as you're used to, and we do hope our listeners understand. So thank you.

CHARIS All right. But join us next time in two weeks for our special episode. And then we will see you again, four weeks after that, when we return to talk about trains (and Scotland)

SHARON Yaaay, she said weakly. [both laugh] Maybe, you know, maybe we'll find things to enjoy... this time.

CHARIS We will. There are things to enjoy. There's just also trains.

SHARON Yeah.

CHARIS Train schedules.

SHARON Yup.

CHARIS Yeah. And I think there's some charts.

SHARON Oh, and some Scottish accents.

CHARIS Oh no. I'd forgotten about the Scottish accents. [THEME MUSIC: jaunty Bach-esque piano notes played in counterpoint begins] In the meantime, you can find us on Twitter and Instagram as @wimseypod, that's Wimsey spelled w i m s e y. Our website, where you can find transcripts for each episode, as well as links to any resources we mentioned on today's podcast, is [asmywimseytakesme.com](http://asmywimseytakesme.com).

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CHARIS Join us next time for more talking piffle!

[THEME MUSIC gradually fades out]