

As My Wimsey Takes Me, Episode 15 transcript

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

SHARON Hello and welcome to this episode of As My Wimsey Takes Me. I'm Sharon Hsu—

CHARIS And I'm Charis Ellison—

ANGELA And I'm Angela Hines!

CHARIS Angela, for you listeners who probably remember from last time, but just as a reminder, Angela is a very dear friend of ours and she is joining us for our episodes on FIVE RED HERRINGS to represent the positive side, because Sharon and I agree that FIVE RED HERRINGS is our very least favorite out of all the Lord Peter Wimsey novels. And it just didn't seem fair for the two of us to discuss it ourselves. So we've invited Angela to join us because Angela loves FIVE RED HERRINGS.

ANGELA I do. I'm very fond of it.

CHARIS She is here to balance out the conversation

ANGELA And the pro FIVE RED HERRINGS side.

CHARIS You're the pro fish! So thank you for joining us. Angela we are getting ready to talk about the second half of FIVE RED HERRINGS I mean, admittedly, our episodes are not as organized around plot as they usually are because this book is so difficult to disseminate, but Sharon do you want to kind of introduce what we're going to be talking about in the second half?

SHARON Sure. Side note, I had thrown out a call to our Twitter followers to ask them to help us come up with topics to discuss, because I was at such a loss in thinking about prepping for this recording. And one follower brought up that it would be really neat to do a breakdown of all the alibis and kind of follow each suspect from beginning to end, because their stories come out so piecemeal in the book. And Charis and I agreed that that would be a fascinating project for *someone else* to take on. [all laugh] It'd be a fun Tumblr post, but not quite what we want to do in our episode here.

So yeah, last time we briefly touched on the idea of replication and mimicry and the fact that Sayers seems to be mimicking a kind of style of detective plot and detective narrative here that she really doesn't use elsewhere in her body of work. And the mystery in this novel, of course, really hinges on the ability of these other artists to paint in the style of the dead victim and thus set up this scene where it looks like he could have accidentally fallen into the river.

So yeah, we thought we'd pick up there and see what else we had to say about all of that.

CHARIS        Well, let's break down some of the mechanics of the murder. For one thing, the reason that Lord Peter is sure that it's a murder and not an accident is because a crucial item is missing from the scene. There's something that "the intelligent reader will be able to figure out what it is." Sayers very specifically doesn't tell us what it is, although she does describe everything that Lord Peter sees when he's ferreting around. And so based on that missing item, Lord Peter starts investigating it as a murder. And one of the things that comes out is this question of when did Campbell die? Because he was found much later in the morning and he had been...or *someone* wearing his distinctive hat and cloak was seen painting in midmorning, but there's a question about when he actually died and it comes out—

SHARON        The rigor mortis suggested—

CHARIS        By the rigor mortis and the contents of his stomach, he obviously hadn't had breakfast. So they're just like [speculatively] "Mmm, you think maybe he died much earlier?" And so that meant that someone was pretending to be him to give the impression that he was alive later. And so there's this wide window where someone needs an alibi for all this time. Someone is going to have a cast iron alibi for the time when everyone was *meant* to think that Campbell died, but do they have an alibi for earlier in the evening when he probably actually died? Like all these things are being juggled and it's, it's so many, so many balls in the air.

ANGELA        Can I tell you guys about the item that is missing? The missing item?

CHARIS        So shall we, shall we go ahead and—

SHARON        Yeah, let's do it.

ANGELA        So basically a couple pages back from where it says the intelligent reader will know, where it's listing the contents, Wimsey lays them out and then it lists each color specifically. There's vermilion, there was ultramarine number two. And then two paragraphs before that, it gives the description of the painting.

And the key thing that I... the thing I found to be key was that "there were splashes of red reflection upon the brown and white of the tumbling water beneath." And there is no white paint mentioned in the list of the paints, which is a thing that you kind of have to look at buried in this description of the painting. But if you go back and look and you go, "Wait a minute, he didn't find white." And then Wimsey dives confidently into the satchel. And then he turns it out and he, you know, goes and looks through all the pockets and everything. And so you can kind of figure it out that oh, he doesn't find one of the colors he's looking for. And then if you go back and look at all the colors that are mentioned, you see that there's white paint on this canvas and there's no white paint here. So that's it, that's the missing item. It was a tube of white paint.

SHARON      Right. And the meticulousness of pointing out that these artists all work with oils, because if it were a watercolor, you wouldn't...

CHARIS      Right.

SHARON      You know, a lot of times white is the negative space of the canvas, but in oil you have to have it.

CHARIS      Yeah. White is really essential. As any Bob Ross watcher would know, there's always white!

ANGELA      Exactly!

SHARON      So, Angela did you...I am trying to remember, but again, thinking back many, many years, I don't think I figured that out my first readthrough and felt like a very unintelligent reader. And then was just like, whatever, it'll come up eventually. But the first time you read this book, did you stop? And just sort of backtrack and look at all the things?

ANGELA      Yes, yes I did!

SHARON      Okay.

ANGELA      I did it the first time I read this book. And then I did it again this time, because I couldn't remember what it was. And so I was like, Oh man, it's been so many years. I don't remember. And I went back and I was like, aha. That's what it is.

SHARON      Yeah. How does it change, as you are reading, like how do you think that changes the reading experience? What did it clue you to look for through the rest of the book?

ANGELA      I honestly wasn't sure how that would be relevant. Like I did not put it together the way that Wimsey does. And so originally I had thought, well, maybe the artist didn't actually use the things from Campbell's satchel. They brought their own satchel and painted with their own stuff. And then just left Campbell's satchel. Like I was not entirely sure of how that would work out. I just knew that that was what they were looking for, and that someone else had painted it. I'm not quite as clever as Lord Peter, but...

SHARON      So few of us are. [chuckling]

CHARIS      Yeah. But, you know, Lord Peter goes running around and interviews a lot of different people and pokes his nose in different places. And so it kind of gets lost—

ANGELA      In the shuffle.

CHARIS        In all of his general running around, but he is making a point of visiting artists in their studio and watching them work—

ANGELA        While they're working—

CHARIS        And kind of makes a point of asking people like, could you imitate Campbell's style? Which apparently just about everyone could, because it was kind of distinctive and obvious.

ANGELA        I think someone talks about how Campbell used all these tricks and technique, and you just have to know what the trick is to be able to do it.

CHARIS        Right. That it looks very complex, but really it's, it's simple. And, in the future, Bob Ross is going to show everyone how to do it. Yeah. But it does talk about like, Campbell uses the knife a lot, you know, which is like a technique that can look very sophisticated, but isn't necessarily difficult? Which I think is the point that the other artists make, that it's showy, but not necessarily difficult.

SHARON        Right, which is very...I mean, Campbell to a tee, right? I think there's a way in which the book often links personality to technique? Which certainly makes sense from an artistic standpoint, like somebody who's cool-headed and really meticulous is also going to lay out all of their colors in a certain order on their palette and paint in a certain way. And then somebody like Campbell, who's maybe more slapdash as a person and violent...The use of a palette knife, right? Linking to kind of the violence that permeates his language and his personality.

CHARIS        Yeah. So shall we do a roundup of our fish? Because we have Waters, who's the young Englishman that Campbell was scrapping with at the very beginning of the book. He disappears for most of the book. He's just gone and no one knows where.

And then Farren, who is the Mr. Farren to Mrs. Farren, the lady that Campbell had a platonic, but romantic, attachment to.

ANGELA        Torch?

CHARIS        Yeah. Carried a torch for, which she encouraged because she felt an obligation to be sweet—

ANGELA        Charitable.

CHARIS        Charitable and loving to everyone. Yeah.

SHARON      You also get the sense that she enjoyed...like, she knew exactly how jealous her husband was and she kind of enjoyed getting under his skin in that way?

CHARIS      Yeah. Or like, it's just...the thing about Mrs. Farren is that there is a showiness to her sweetness and light, you know? Like it's very...it's a performance. Also a performance for her husband, you know, like that he objects to her letting Campbell come around. But she's like, "I'm gonna do it anyway, because look at me, I'm so good and charitable."

ANGELA      And I feel like, too, Campbell puts Mrs. Farren up on this pedestal where she wants to be.

CHARIS      Yeah, that's true.

ANGELA      And Mr. Farren doesn't necessarily like her being on that pedestal, and he doesn't put her up there, you know?

CHARIS      Yeah. That's very true. But we got sidetracked a little bit. But the point is that Mr. Farren has also vanished and no one knows where he is. Gowan, who is famous for having a long beard and who is also English, he has disappeared. Although he's supposedly left for England previously and has been in London this whole time, but no one can find him in London. And they're like, where, what exactly? Like what train exactly did he take? Because we can't find any corroboration. He's also in doubt.

And then Graham—

ANGELA      Wasn't he missing for two days?

CHARIS      Yeah. He's missing for two days. And he eventually comes back, but then refuses to tell anyone where he was or who he was with.

SHARON      But he was not with Mrs. L-S! Who was the person who was trying to—

CHARIS      Yes. She tried to entrap him by providing an alibi, which was totally useless. And then Strachan, who is the person who runs the golf course who had cause to throw Campbell off of the golf course. And he has been walking around with a black eye. He is there, but his movements are all up in the air

ANGELA      He's being real shady.

CHARIS      He is being shady as heck.

SHARON      Yeah. Like saying that his black eye came because of a rogue golf ball.

ANGELA        Yeah. The other guy at the golf course was like he wasn't even here that day. What do you mean?

CHARIS        Yeah. And then Ferguson, who is Campbell's next door neighbor. He has an alibi, but the corroboration is not quite there. Like he says like, Oh, I went to this exhibition in a neighboring town and you know, like you, I saw you and you on the train and they're just like, Oh, we didn't see you. He was like, Oh, well I saw you. You were with so and so.

And you know, like he's able to describe the exhibition and all that, but no one else actually saw him at the crucial times.

SHARON       Well, Peter's neighbors run into him at the exhibition.

CHARIS       Right. And he says that he saw them on the train, but they didn't actually see him until later.

SHARON       Exactly.

CHARIS       So that is our basket of fish. And there's just...we aren't...beyond that, I don't think it makes sense for us to really....

SHARON       Nooooo.

CHARIS       [laughs]... you know, really try and summarize the plot, because there's so much. But eventually everyone gets tracked down despite all the shakiness and despite the lies, because everyone has been telling lies. The thing is, is that everyone seems able to account for themselves eventually, once they show up, once they stop keeping their secrets because of embarrassing circumstances. And after all that we're still kind of left with a pickle.

ANGELA       Yeah. Well, and then we come to a point where we have the Fiscal who calls the council of war, or whatever? Where he's like, alright, y'all, let's sit down and talk about who it was. And so he's like, all right, all the police and Lord Peter, let's figure out what happened. And then each of them has a different theory and a different suspect until finally they get to Lord Peter and he's like, Oh yeah, no, you're all wrong.

CHARIS       Which is so...that just...it's so murder mystery, like dinner theater murder mystery.

ANGELA       Yeah. It is!

SHARON       Like to the nth degree, right? That everybody has a reveal. Everybody. I get kind of frustrated with that part. Not just because half of the reveals are in dialect, but because as you're going through, you're like, well, okay, clearly it's not this one because this person went

first. Clearly it's not just...all the ones where it's not Lord Peter, you're like, clearly it's not! But I do think there's a good point to be made there about, we've talked before about how detective fiction sort of perfectly encapsulates reading practice and how, you know, anytime you perform a close reading, you're...in some ways you're acting as a detective of the text looking for what's missing, or what's said slantwise or what might be revealed if you dig a little deeper. And I'm certainly not the first person to make that point, but I think there's a way in which this book really, really plays on that linkage almost to an absurd degree.

I think maybe there's a little poking fun at literary critics here, of like, well, yeah. I mean like any argument could be made out of... like Angela, you were saying last time, you know, a lot of these theories seem perfectly plausible, but maybe they just leave out one or two key points. All of these theories could work. And the only reason they don't work is because, you know, none of the people putting them forward are Lord Peter, the *best* reader. I don't know. There's a way in which I feel gently made fun of as both a reader of this book when we get to that point, and also as a reader in general, because it's just like, well yeah, any argument could be made with any amount of evidence if you're a convincing enough storyteller in some ways.

ANGELA And Wimsey himself says at the very beginning of chapter 26: "At last, I really feel like Sherlock Holmes." And it is a very Holmesian "I will tell you what really happened" sort of thing, you know? It's almost...okay. I don't like Inspector Poirot. I find him really annoying. I am aware that that's a Me Problem. And that like everything I find irritating about Poirot is something I find endearing about Holmes. I'm like, they're the same person, just one of them is annoying and one of them is fine. [Sharon and Charis laugh in the background] But this is such a Poirot-like "aha, I'm more clever than y'all," you know?

SHARON I mean, it is a little fun in that usually in a detective novel, theories get discarded along the way. Or it's only the detective or, in rare cases, the culprit, who gets to do the big long, you know, like, [stuffily] "And *now*, Harry, I have something to tell you that I have neglected to tell you your entire time of Hogwarts," right? Like the long monologue reveal. So I think that, yeah, there is something pleasurable to see all of these theories get spun out in succession.

And I think it was really, really smart of Sayer is to then have Peter kind of reconstruct, like *physically* reconstruct, the crime, because you've been sitting through chapter after chapter of just people talking. So the end of the book really needs a jolt of energy in that way, in my opinion.

ANGELA Well, and I love that that's how it's proved. Here's how it works with all of these timetables and all of these distances that have been so important this whole time, you know? Here's how it happens.

SHARON Yeah. Which...I never even tried to keep track of the trains when I'm reading this book!

CHARIS [with great weariness] I can't be bothered.

SHARON Peter will explain it to me.

ANGELA What is *that* like?

CHARIS [giggles] It saves on notebook paper for you.

ANGELA [overlapping] How does *that* change the reading experience?

SHARON Well, it helps *me* to finish reading. [all laugh]

But before we get into the solution of the plot, did we want to pick up other bits that come up in the latter half? I know, Charis, you wanted to talk more about the Farren marriage, right? After we meet Mr. Farren?

CHARIS Yeah. This is something that, you know, we've talked about marriages in general and Sayers does kind of explore the theme of different marriages repeatedly. The marriage between Mr and Mrs. Farren is...I know, I already know that I'm going to want to revisit this once we get to GAUDY NIGHT. And so I have to save some of the things I want to say, because we can't talk about GAUDY NIGHT right now. I feel like every book I'm just like "And GAUDY NIGHT! "but we can't talk about it.

But the tension between Farren and Mrs. Farren and kind of their conflicting desires of what they want from marriage? Or how they want to be seen. Like Mrs. Farren has a very specific idea of how she wants to be perceived, and she's built her life around a performance to embody that perception. And it doesn't...there isn't room in her ongoing performance for ordinary human emotions. You know what I mean? Like, there's not room for her husband to just feel human things, because she expects him to be part of her ongoing performance art of the womanly woman. He can't be...he can't express frustration with her, because that would be so ungentlemanly, you know. Like you can't, you can't just have a flaming row with Mrs. Farren. You can't get your emotions out. There's not room for that. And we talked about inequality in relationships, and I think that this is a really interesting example because the inequality in this relationship is Mrs. Farren having a tight fist on the emotions that are permitted. I don't want to use terms incorrectly, but it's almost like, I would say like borderline that Mrs. Farren is emotionally abusive of her husband. And that may be that terminology isn't correct, but she is emotionally manipulative and emotionally controlling. And if he gets frustrated with it, then she just digs deeper into being angelic. And she's always in the right and that whatever negative emotions he's feeling are his fault.

SHARON I like that you called it performance art, Charis, because when we first encounter the Farrens in the book, you know, we don't meet Mr. Farren until much later on, because he has gone missing. And the consensus in this little village that they live in, is that Mrs. Farren is



this wonderful woman and Mr. Farren is a jealous brute. And that's, that is the image of them that she has constructed for everybody else.

CHARIS        That's the role *she* gave him.

SHARON        Exactly. And by maintaining that "Oh, I just don't like to think of unpleasant things. I'm an angel" [attitude] she absolutely always holds the emotional upper hand in the marriage/ And whether that's abusive or not, it's certainly very unfair, and it's unfair to trap him into being perceived in some ways...I mean, the public perception is that *he's* the abusive one, right? That he throws people out of the house, that he doesn't want anyone talking to his wife.

CHARIS        And he's controlling

SHARON        Right, which then even more shores up her whole angelic damsel in distress act. And it's, it is, I think, the part of the book that always...that I forget about a lot and then surprises me, is when Peter does run down Mr. Farren and you're like, "Oh, wait, this relationship is kind of nothing like what we were led to believe. He's, he's not really what we were led to believe.

ANGELA        Well, and I love when we first see him and he's talking with the children that are watching him paint, it's just like this long dialogue, but him just talking to them: "And put the cap on, and that's a palette knife, nice and wiggly," He's very patient with these kids.

SHARON        Angela, would you like to tell our listeners about the circumstances under which we encounter him?

ANGELA        Okay, sure. So Wimsey goes to Mrs. Farren and lies that he knows that she got a letter. And so she lets it slip. She tells him where Farren was, and [Wimsey] tracks him down and he is at an inn in...somewhere, I don't remember...

SHARON        [flippantly] He's at an inn in Scotland!

ANGELA        He's in a small town and he's painting a new sign for this inn.

SHARON        Yeah. And it comes out that Farren had sort of, you know, in his mind, he's running away from home, right? He's decided to just ditch the marriage.

CHARIS        Well, not permanently, but he had gotten drunk. He had kind of wandered off. He woke up in a ditch basically, and just--

SHARON        Kept walking?

CHARIS        Yeah! He just kept walking. He had enough money in his pocket to buy a little set of paints. And he's just been kind of getting by, by going around to local businesses and pubs

and inns and offering to repaint their signs. In exchange for a room for the night or a meal. And he seems really peaceful and happy.

SHARON      He's so sad when Peter shows up! He's so sad because Peter is going to take him back.

CHARIS      It's like a weight drops on him when he realizes that he's been found and he has to go back.

ANGELA      I think it's kind of funny that...nope. Nevermind. My brain just completely stopped working. I don't know.

CHARIS      It happens. It happens. You would not believe how often we do that.

SHARON      Oh, it happens so often when you hit *record*.

ANGELA      [chuckling] "I think it's kind of funny!" And then just nothing, nothing there. I have no idea.

SHARON      Nothing's funny.

CHARIS      Nothing has ever been funny. It'll come back later.

ANGLEA      I'm sure. I'm sure.

SHARON      Can I use this as a weird segue into reputation and small villages?

CHARIS      Yeah! Go for it! Slide right in there. [all chuckle]

SHARON      Well, I think, speaking of the public perception of the Farrens versus kind of the actual dynamics of their relationship, I think something this book does a lot actually is point out that... you know, it seems to at first just engage in that kind of worn out theme that, "Oh, if you live in a small country village, then everybody knows who you are, and everybody knows your history and everybody knows your business." But I think both with the Farrens and with Mr. Gowan, the book really turns that on its head.

So Gowan is the Englishman who also goes missing, supposedly the night of the murder. And he's the one with the really funny butler with the "Mr. H'Alcock, Mr. Allcock" et cetera. And the maid who has the sort of Gothic encounter in the house. But the subplot with Gowan is that he had gotten into a fight with Campbell. So he was the person who almost ran into Campbell in the road and they get into a big fight and Campbell pulls out fistfuls of Mr. Gowan's beard. Gowan is not the person who murders Campbell, but he goes home and he's all bruised, so he has to be taken care of. But he also has to shave his beard off. And that's actually why he flees

the village, because later on it comes out that this man who'd been so intimidating to everybody and was known for his beard and sort of serious demeanor actually has an extremely weak chin and like a slight jaw. And, you know, I think they say his face is rabbit at a certain point.

ANGELA "It's like the face of a sulky rabbit." It's a brilliant phrase.

SHARON It is a brilliant phrase. And, you know, we can get it all into the nuances of toxic masculinity and equating a beard with being strong, and who cares if he has a kind of weak chin? But once again, it's sort of like there's a reputation that he has established for himself, or that other people see him as, and then later on you realize that it's kind of all smoke and mirrors, right? And that nobody in this village has ever seen him without his beard for that reason. And it's kind of sad actually, they really make fun of him, once they decide that he looks like a weak man and you know, I'm not thrilled about that. But I think once again, this is just interesting to see come up in a book that's engaging so much with art and with surface versus depth, representation versus reality, and so forth.

I remembered one of our Twitter followers asked us if we had any theories about why Peter gets along so well with artists, and I thought that might be an interesting thing--

CHARIS Yeah. You know, we've described Peter in the past as having an artistic temperament, you know, and he's a sensitive and empathetic person. And I think probably one of the reasons that he gets along well with artists is that he understands artistic temperament. Like what does that even mean? But when I think of it, I tend to think of people who get focused on their work, you know, you get a little bit lost in what you're doing and Peter understands that.

SHARON He's also very nonjudgmental, I think, in terms of...I mean, he has very exacting tastes, right? When it comes to art and wine and women, but in the sense of, it's very fascinating to me because where detectives are often supposed to be the authoritative moral voice of a mystery—and we've talked about Peter as having a strong, ethical sense and a strong sense of justice that isn't necessarily the same thing as a strong sense of legality—at the same time, he is remarkably unbothered by things that other people... You know, he's unbothered by Harriet having had sex outside of wedlock. He's unbothered by Sylvia and Eiluned being lesbians. He's unbothered by just a lot of things that I think society would judge people for. And I think that's part of his sympathetic nature or the part of him that the more Bohemian artists that we see him interact with appreciate.

I have nowhere to go after that. [all laugh] I guess we did a pretty good job of, um, talking about Peter's character and personality in a book where he exhibits very little of either!

ANGELA Right.

CHARIS Yeah. That, to me, that's what this book lacks, is Peter. You know, you're reading this book where Peter is supposedly the main character and where is he? There are just a

handful of parts where I feel like I'm kind of getting the Lord Peter that I showed up for. Like when he's he's loitering and Ferguson studio and chattering away and bursts the tube of paint. And that reminds me of what I love about Sayers, which is when she conveys stuff through dialogue, because you don't really know what he's doing until he's talking about like, Oh, it's got everywhere. There is a bit where he realizes that someone is leaving from Gowan's house in a car late at night. And he is running to see if he can get a look at them and falls down, and then goes home and is just like "Bunter such and such happened." And Bunter's just like "Oh yes. I know I was watching. I did the thing that you were trying to do and totally failed to do." [all laugh]

SHARON "And I did it spectacularly. My lord."

CHARIS And Peter says something like, "Why do I bother to detect things? You're always ahead of me."

SHRON Does it feel like... I mean, I'm sure it feels like a regression after the huge amounts of character interiority we get in STRONG POISON, but do you think it's actually supposed to represent... I mean, I don't know how to ask this question without like, "Read, you know, Dorothy Sayers' mind!" which is the stupidest and most boring kind of literary analysis, but in the sense of...

Okay, I guess approaching it from like a reader response angle, do you think that's partially why you and I find this book disappointing, Charis, because it feels like such a step back?

CHARIS Yeah, definitely. Definitely. Like we've read STRONG POISON, where it's just like, [long gasp] so many emotions, so many feelings and we've gotten so deep into Peter's perspective and it feels so rich and it's just like you've had something so complex and interesting. And then you get FIVE RED HERRINGS and it's... Saltines. And Saltines are *fine*, but...

ANGELA So I think this was actually the second, it was the second or third Peter book that I read. I know that I read MURDER MUST ADVERTISE first.

SHARON Ooooooh, that's such a good one.

ANGELA And I don't remember if this one was second or third. So I think coming at it from the point of view of you've just read STRONG POISON is a different context.

CHARIS So different. Yeah.

ANGELA The first time I read it, I didn't really know Peter that well, anyway.

CHARIS Well, and like MURDER MUST ADVERTISE is another one which... we can't go into too much detail, but you don't... you get *more* of Peter in that one, but not as much as you

do in like STRONG POISON. And it also kind of doesn't dig into the things that STRONG POISON dug into, even though it takes place afterwards.

SHARON But it's so much less *boring*. [all laugh] It's so good!

ANGELA [sarcastically] How can you be *bored*? There's so much going on in this book.

CHARIS There's so many trains!

SHARON Okay, Angela, the time has come for you to mount your rousing defense of how fun this book is for the type of reader who really, really cares about mapping out all the trains and the schedules and so forth.

ANGELA I mean, I don't know what else I have to say other than it's fantastic! There's all of these clues. There's all of these people who are going all these places at all these times. And there's, you know, this maid saw someone in this house at this time and this person saw someone on this train at this time, there's so many details and there's so many clues. There's almost like too many clues, but you have to make them all work.

CHARIS There's *definitely* too many clues.

ANGELA There are so many clues in this book, but yeah, I don't know what else to say. Like, it's great. I love it.

CHARIS [chuckling] Angela is like, "the more clues the better."

ANGELA Yeah! Like how is that not a universal?

[all laugh]

CHARIS I mean, I like clues, but I want them wrapped up in fraught emotions. And this book has very little in the way of fraught emotion. That's why we've spent so much time talking about the Farrens when comparatively they're a small aspect of the book. It's because that's the one intense, emotional aspect. So I'm just like, this is the thing that I think is interesting.

ANGELA I love so much where Peter is like, let's walk through how it actually happened.

SHARON I *do* really like that part.

CHARIS You know what it reminds me of? What it reminds me of is the end of the movie CLUE where Tim Curry is running back and forth and being like, and then this happened, and then this happened, [increasingly quick and frantic] this happened, this happened.

SHARON      Yeah, that's quite literally what Peter is doing.

CHARIS      Uh, so who would like to outline the ending? Pfffffft.

SHARON      I think we should make Angela do it—

CHARIS      We *should* make Angela do it!

SHARON      —because she's clearest. Yes. So listeners, we are about to give away the whodunit and then somehow, *impossibly*, Angela is going to outline the howdunit. So this is your warning. If you have not yet read or finished FIVE RED HERRINGS and you desperately want to try to figure it out yourself, this is the time to turn off the podcast and return once you've read the book.

All right. Angela, without further ado, who killed Campbell?

ANGELA      It was Ferguson!

SHARON      Yes. And how did he do it?

ANGELA      Um...

CHARIS      [laughing] By accident?

ANGELA      Oh yeah! By accident, basically. Campbell came to his house and was being all Campbell-y and they had a fight and he hit his head and he died. And so Ferguson was like, uh, [bleeped], uh, I could tell somebody, but who's going to believe that I didn't do this on purpose? And so basically he comes up with the idea to stage the whole thing and provide himself with an alibi. He's actually the only one with an alibi that looks airtight.

SHARON      And that's kind of what Peter latches on to, right? He's like, who would go through this elaborate rigmarole.

ANGELA      Exactly.

SHARON      Staging the body, staging a painting, except someone who had the opportunity to have a very good alibi on Monday morning, but had no alibi for Sunday night.

ANGELA      Tuesday morning.

SHARON      Tuesday morning. And Monday night.

ANGELA        Sorry. It happens on a Tuesday, Sharon, that's very important. [laughing] That's an important detail in this book full of details.

SHARON        Thank you. Because if you hadn't corrected me, we would have gotten emails about it.

ANGELA        Yeah. So he's the one with the airtight, you know, it looks like an airtight alibi, and everyone else either was missing for like four days or whatever. Like they don't have good alibis for the time in question. "Oh, well, he could have easily snuck off from his friends, had gone and killed him, then come back," you know?

And so Ferguson is the one that takes the pains to construct this alibi for himself involving the trains. He buys the ticket for an early train and then he goes and does the staging of the painting. And then he goes and takes a different train, gets to Glasgow. And he, as he's walking by the station hotel, he notices Wimsey's neighbors eating lunch with some friends. And so he's able to say later when he meets them, like, "Oh yeah, I saw you on the train. And I saw that you were meeting these people," you know? So he does that.

And the thing is like, the thing it hinges on, is making sure that his ticket from the early train is accounted for. And so each station, they punch the tickets with these certain letters. And so he goes to a bookbinding shop and says that he wants these letters and numbers, so that he can punch his own ticket to make it look as though he actually rode all the way to Glasgow on the first train and not on a later train.

Oh. And the other thing was the reason that he suddenly had to go to Glasgow, like he couldn't take his car and stuff, was because he said that his car...there's a part in the engine that needed to be fixed. So he had to take it to this motor shop. He goes there and he establishes, like, he tells the clerk, "I've been waiting for ten minutes." And so the kid's like, "Oh man, this guy is here and he's been waiting ten minutes. He needs to see you right away." And really, he had just slipped in the door and didn't, you know, the kid didn't notice him. So like, there's all these things where he makes his alibi look tighter than it actually was.

SHARON        Right. And Peter ends up, when he does his reconstruction, he actually goes through every single step. Including buying the typeset letters and making up a story of like, "Oh, sorry, you know, I...at the final destination, they didn't take my ticket." Which I do wonder, I mean...the ticket thing, the fact that Ferguson forges his ticket, I, I don't remember there being a clue for that earlier on?

CHARIS        I think the thing with the train ticket is more that it's just kind of less that there is a clue going into it, but more that, like anyone who's spent some time thinking about it would realize how easy it is to forge.

ANGELA      And when this book came out, you would be aware that that's how train tickets are punched and you'd be like, "Oh yeah, they put the letters and the numbers." Whereas me being an American in 2020—

SHARON      Who doesn't take trains!

ANGELA      I've been on a couple trains.

SHARON      I do wonder if the train people were, you know, got worried about excessive forgery after this book, because she really walks you through exactly how to do it.

ANGELA      Right?!

CHARIS      But it's also like, why would you need to forge, you know, like—

SHARON      As an alibi for murder, Charis!

CHARIS      Oh, right. Of course. Of course.

SHARON      Which we have established is terrifyingly easy to do!

CHARIS      [bursts out laughing] Listeners, let us remind you again: please, don't murder people, no matter how easy it is.

SHARON      Yes. We would appreciate that. So Peter...it's really a feat of both his intelligence as a detective. And then, you know, also we've talked about before his physicality, to just like reconstruct all this through over the course of most of the night and part of a day. And that reconstruction takes up a huge part of the end of the book.

And then it's interesting, right, because they have Ferguson with them for most of the time. 'Cause they're like, "Oh yeah, you know, we need to borrow your house to do some things, to do some detective things." And he's getting more and more nervous as he's watching all this. And then at the end, he...it's, it's such a, I don't know, it's like kind of an anticlimax when they, you know, basically they kind of get him to confess.

At one point they'd left him behind, I think when they started doing all the trains, and then he tried to run away and was arrested and cautioned by the police. But then Ferguson says like, "'You know, you got, you got all of it right except that I accidentally killed him. I didn't mean to kill Campbell. And I still say, and say again, it was not murder.' Wimsey got up. 'Look here, Ferguson,' he said, 'I'm damn sorry and I always thought that it couldn't really be murder. Will you forgive me?' 'I'm glad,' said Ferguson, 'I felt like hell ever since, really rather stand my trial,'" et cetera, et cetera. And then the book wraps up in a two sentence paragraph that begins: The jury, after hearing Mr. Gowan's experiences"—i.e. the fight with Campbell—"took a view midway



between murder and self-defense. They brought it in manslaughter with a strong recommendation to mercy on the ground that Campbell was undoubtedly looking for trouble." And like that's... and then "The End," right? There's no, there's no long drawn out court trial. There's just, it just ends!

ANGELA        It's just like, that's it. Well, and I think it's interesting, too, because Ferguson is so sympathetic, like it's almost like he's the victim here.

SHARON        Which is maybe why we get that long, drawn out bit in Campbell's head at the beginning. He's really someone that nobody's sorry to see go.

ANGELA        Yeah. And when Wimsey says, "I always thought it couldn't really be murder," that's such an interesting sentence.

SHARON        Right. Given that there really should have been *many* signposts that like a lot of people could have murdered Campbell.

ANGELA        Yup. So that's it. We did it. The end. Yay!

CHARIS        Yeah. I think this is one of the things that differentiates this from any other mystery, because like, it was a murder, it was accidental manslaughter, but he just made everything worse by trying to cover it up with this elaborate plot. Just like, why didn't you just call someone and be like, look, this happened. It was an accident. Like everyone would have believed you.

SHARON        Yeah. He out-clevered himself.

CHARIS        Yeah. That's, that's it! That's the book.

ANGELA        You did it guys. You got through it.

SHARON        We did it! Thank you for helping us, Angela.

ANGELA        You're welcome.

CHARIS        Yes. Thank you so much, Angela, for joining us. It was so much fun to have you on.

ANGELA        I had a lot of fun, too. This was really fun.

SHARON        Oh, I'm glad. I know it can be very unpleasant to be the person defending a thing that other people are like "Bleeeegh, I don't get it!" So I appreciate it.

ANGELA I'm just like, I just love it. I don't know. I don't know how to explain it. It's just good.

CHARIS [laughing, says as Angela] "I don't know what's wrong with you people!"

SHARON Angela, I have a question.

ANGELA Okay.

SHARON In terms of like the pure mystery, is it your favorite of the Wimsey books or is there another book's mystery that you like better?

ANGELA Umm...I think this might be my favorite. Yeah. [SHARON very quietly in the background: Wow] In terms of just the mystery, but that's because it gives me a lot of things to dig into, you know, even rereading it. There's so many things that I'm like, "Oh yeah. Oh yeah. This!" So I might be the one who might reconstruct all the other alibis and stuff, I don't know. That sounds like a fun project that I might do. And then it could be like, here it is.

SHARON Well, if you do, we will link it in the shownotes.

CHARIS I'm just imagining Angela like, "This is my quarantine project!" And it's like a wall with strings.

ANGELA [laughing] Like a murder wall.

SHARON Like it's the graphic of, um, what's his face?

ANGELA Oh yeah, the Charlie—

SHARON Charlie Day! Yeah.

[all laughing]

CHARIS What did *you* spend *your* time on in quarantine? Doing this!

SHARON An amazing masterpiece!

ANGELA "Do you think a depressed person could make *this*?!" [all laughing]

CHARIS All right. Well, thank you, listeners, so much for joining us and Angela, as we talked about FIVE RED HERRINGS. We hope that you enjoyed these episodes and that you enjoyed the book more than Sharon and I did. Although not as much as Angela did, because that's impossible! But coming up next in two weeks, we're going to start talking about HAVE HIS

CARCASE, which is one of my very favorite of the Wimsey books. So I'm very excited and we hope that you will join us again.

SHARON      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).

CHARIS      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 be really grateful if you would give us a rating and leave us a review on iTunes or on your podcatcher of choice. We also hope that you will tell all of your friends who love Dorothy Sayers as much as we do.

SHARON      See you next time for more talking piffle!

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