

## As My Wimsey Takes Me episode 17 transcript

**Charis Ellison** 00:16

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

**Sharon Hsu** 00:21

And I'm Sharon Hsu. And dear listeners, as we're sure many of you have noticed, we have taken a brief, well, I guess not-so-brief hiatus from the podcast, and it was un-announced, and we do apologize for that.

**Charis Ellison** 00:38

It was unplanned.

**Sharon Hsu** 00:39

It was EXTREMELY unplanned. But that is the title of my 2020 memoir. 2020: It Was Extremely Unplanned. So thank you all for your patience with us. Thank you to everyone who reached out, we want to reassure you that we are both well, and you know, physically well. It was just a really hard summer, I think, nationally, politically. We're both in the States, so there's been a lot going on, you know. A lot was being asked of both of us in our workplaces. So yeah, we just neither of us really had a lot of extra mental and emotional bandwidth. And so in good professional fashion, we just kind of... stopped. But we are very determined to keep going and to you know, finish all the books, don't worry, this won't be a midseason cancellation. We did get together a few weeks ago and you know, kind of tried to soldier on with HAVE HIS CARCASE and we had a really difficult time talking about the book, and we actually recorded an episode that will just go into our personal archives, because it was completely about how much trouble we were having reading in general, and then reading critically, in particular, and reading these books critically, in particular particular. And I think you and I, we kind of came down on the realization that the Peter mysteries, and I think especially the ones with Harriet are such, they're such comfort reads for us both. And not that you can't, you know, approach comfort reading with a critical eye because that's, I mean, what else have we been doing this whole time?

**Charis Ellison** 02:18

That's the whole point of this podcast is to look at something that we love with a critical eye. And it's hard to do that when you just want to cozy in.

**Sharon Hsu** 02:27

Exactly. And it has been a few months of I think working really hard at work, and you and I, you know, individually doing our political actions and rallying our communities. But yeah, that that means by the time I sit down with the book, I'm like, I just need some comfort reading. I cannot do any more thinking right now.

**Charis Ellison** 02:52

Yeah, so that's about the sum of it, which is even reading Sayers ordinarily is still an intellectual exercise, right? Because they are books that ask you to meet them on an intellectual level. And that's

one of the things we love about them. And then when you are trying to bring critical thinking to the table, and really dig into what the books have to offer, and it's, I think you and I both agree, especially in the course of doing this podcast, like we find it incredibly rewarding, but it also just takes energy. And who has that?

**Sharon Hsu** 03:26

Who has extra energy these days?

**Charis Ellison** 03:29

Where does that come from?

**Sharon Hsu** 03:30

Also the title of my 2020 memoir. [both laugh] I've just I've been reading a lot of like cozy convalescent fiction in my off time. Lots of romance novels, lots.

**Charis Ellison** 03:45

I've also been reading lots of romance novels

**Sharon Hsu** 03:47

Guaranteed happily ever afters or what I'm after right now. But in an attempt to get back on track and not have our impromptu hiatus drag on too long, we thought we could do something a little bit different today, which is that we felt that we could bring a critical eye to a couple short stories of Sayers'. So today we will be talking about "The Piscatorial Farce of the Stolen Stomach," which is a Lord Peter story that was published in 1928 as part of the LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY collection.

**Charis Ellison** 03:48

Obviously we will be returning to HAVE HIS CARCASE at a later date, but by way of easing ourselves back into the saddle.

**Sharon Hsu** 04:23

Yes, that...yes, sorry. That was probably a thing to say. Don't worry, we have not suddenly pivoted the podcast completely to talking about short stories.

**Charis Ellison** 04:43

Maybe they will be something that we pepper in just as a palate cleanser, maybe?

**Sharon Hsu** 04:47

Yeah, we'll see. Again, who's making plans these days?

**Charis Ellison** 04:52

The future has no meaning.

**Sharon Hsu** 04:55

With all that said, Charis, do you want to give our listeners a brief sketch of, you know, sort of the, I guess, the inciting incident of this short story?

**Charis Ellison 05:04**

Yeah. So I think what drew us to doing this particular short story, we were just like, let's do a couple of short stories. We both agreed that we didn't necessarily want to tackle the short stories just in chronological order or anything like that, that we decided to pick something that sounded fun to talk about. And I think when I suggested this one, it came to mind because it takes us back to Scotland, where we have just been.

**Sharon Hsu 05:33**

It takes us back to Kirkcudbright in particular.

**Charis Ellison 05:36**

But yeah, we were so ready to leave Scotland by the time we were done with FIVE RED HERRINGS. But this is a much shorter story, without a single train in it. And it is set in Kirkcudbright and Lord Peter is there visiting a friend, Thomas MacPherson. And he happens to be there when MacPherson receives an unusual bequest from a great uncle, which is a medical specimen of the great uncle's stomach. It's not just the stomach, but the entire alimentary canal and intestinal tract, the whole kit and caboodle. And as you can probably guess, from the story's title, the stomach is going to be stolen. This isn't one that you read to be surprised by the mystery. You know, there's there's not a lot of sleight of hand, the course of events is not shocking, or surprising.

**Sharon Hsu 06:38**

It feels more like an adventure story in some ways.

**Charis Ellison 06:41**

Yeah, it is. There's a lot more action. But this interesting old gentleman, great uncle Joseph, he lived to be 95. And he was never ill, except that he had a stroke. And, you know, shortly afterwards, jumped out of a six storey window, leaving a note behind saying that, you know, he'd never been ill, he wasn't going to start being ill now and leaving a will that bequeathed his elementary organs to his great nephew.

**Sharon Hsu 07:11**

Who is studying to be a doctor.

**Charis Ellison 07:12**

Yes, he's studying to be a doctor. That is an important detail I should have included. But so by the happenstance of Lord Peter being present, when this bequest arrives, naturally, it attracts his curiosity. And he just, I think it's so... I think what I enjoy a lot about like these opening scenes, is how naturally nosy Peter is and how immediately he goes into detective mode.

**Sharon Hsu 07:41**

Yeah, he really never turns that off. I feel.

**Charis Ellison** 07:44

Yeah. And he just starts immediately peppering his friend with questions like, Where did your uncle live? What did he do in business? Did he leave any money. Who else was named in the will? But he you know, he, he does it all conversationally, but he's just full of interest.

**Sharon Hsu** 08:00

I mean, to be fair, if I was having breakfast with a friend and an entire digestive system showed up in a glass. I'd probably have a few questions. Maybe. Maybe not the same questions Peter has. But...

**Charis Ellison** 08:14

Yeah, it's it's natural to have a few questions. But what I think is interesting is that Peter immediately seems to have very specific suspicions. about why the stomach is significant. And he doesn't mention them to his friend, but he does start taking steps to follow up on on what he thinks might be the reason for such an interesting inheritance.

**Sharon Hsu** 08:39

Yeah, I mean, a lot of the action in this story could have been avoided if he just said like, okay, old boy, just lock that stomach up while I go have a peek at the you know, the wills and testaments archive. But maybe he didn't want to get Macpherson's hopes up.

**Charis Ellison** 08:56

You'd think if he just suggested you know, like "Why don't you dissect it now, since he says in the note that he wanted you to learn from it" or something to that effect?

**Sharon Hsu** 09:04

Yeah. But then there'd be no story.

**Charis Ellison** 09:06

Then there would be no story. Yeah, so Wimsey goes to town, and just starts for his own benefit, I suppose, following up on his suspicions, but like first [laughs] first they have this long interlude about the fishing.

**Sharon Hsu** 09:25

You can escape the trains, but not the fish.

**Charis Ellison** 09:28

Not the fish!

**Sharon Hsu** 09:31

I have to believe that Sayers was writing FIVE RED HERRINGS at this point, right? Like 1928. So it's published... the story collection is published after UNNATURAL DEATH, in the same year as THE BELLONA CLUB, a year before STRONG POISON, and I guess that makes it two years before FIVE

RED HERRINGS, but I feel like, I mean, at the very least we know she was very familiar with this part of Scotland, right?

**Charis Ellison** 09:57

I mean, I think it's very possible that she had the idea of FIVE RED HERRINGS percolating, even if she hadn't already started to work on it.

**Sharon Hsu** 10:04

Mm hmm. Well, and did you notice that our, our good friend Strachan as mentioned at the end of the story?

**Charis Ellison** 10:11

Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 10:12

So I feel like there's and there's a character named Jock, who I don't think is actually the Jock Graham of FIVE RED HERRINGS because he talks in a veeeeeeeery thick Scottish accent. But just a lot of echoes there. I feel like even... I don't know, that the MacPherson cousin, Robert, that is part of the story I circled and was like, Oh, you know, sort of echoes of Robert Fentiman from BELLONA CLUB, which is also kind of about a contested inheritance. So yeah.

**Charis Ellison** 10:41

It is a fact that I, like I've noticed there there's more than one example of Sayers recycling a name of a background character. And how much of that is intentional? And how much of that is just like, this is a common name?

**Sharon Hsu** 10:55

Right. It's actually kind of absurd when you have a book with tons and tons of characters or series with tons and tons of characters and none of the names repeat, right? How many Ashley's did I go to, you know, K through 12 with?

**Charis Ellison** 11:11

So many

**Sharon Hsu** 11:12

Yeah.

**Charis Ellison** 11:12

So it's not easy to drag out the mystery really while discussing a short story.

**Sharon Hsu** 11:19

Yeah, readers, listeners, we're about to spoil it.

**Charis Ellison** 11:26

Yeah, we're going to give away the mystery. Because like Peter goes to Somerset House, he looks up the great uncle's will while putting on a really silly ass performance for the the clerk.

**Sharon Hsu** 11:42

Yes. And let's come back and talk about that.

**Charis Ellison** 11:46

And he discovers the clause where the great uncle describes in like very, very specific details about how his organs are to be removed. And he mentioned specifically that the alimentary organs be removed entire with their contents, and specifying that they'd be properly secured at both ends with a suitable ligature. And Peter comes to the very sensible conclusion that the mention of their contents, which is mentioned twice, is not accidental. Not insignificant.

**Sharon Hsu** 12:23

No. And earlier when he'd been asking MacPherson kind of about the family and great uncle Joseph, you know, he pries a little bit about like, oh, did he leave anything behind? You know, what kind of inheritance, like what a strange bequest, and MacPherson mentions the family had kind of thought that great uncle Joseph had had money. But they were all a little bit surprised when they found out that he only had 500 pounds in the bank and that MacPherson's cousin Robert, who was named the, you know, the trustee, I suppose, of the--

**Charis Ellison** 12:58

The residuary legatee

**Sharon Hsu** 13:01

The residuary legatee, of the odds and ends was very deeply disappointed that that was all that it amounted to. Mm hmm. So, I think that's also one of the things that that sends Peter into detective mode. He's like, Huh, where did all that money go?

**Charis Ellison** 13:17

It's kind of like, isn't that what he says in STRONG POISON when he's having the conversation with Miss Climpson about like, Why do people commit murder? And he's like money, but there doesn't seem to be any money and so then he goes looking for money.

**Sharon Hsu** 13:32

Yeah, so even though a murder hasn't occurred here, he's saying, all that money... like if great uncle Joseph did take his money out of the banks kind of right before a few crashes, what did he do with it? And Peter has a hunch as we'll find out very soon in the short story, because he's like, Okay, if people don't trust banks, they do one of a couple things with their liquid assets.

**Charis Ellison** 13:55

They invest in property, but property means rents and management, or they buy valuables.

**Sharon Hsu** 14:03

In this case...

**Charis Ellison** 14:05

In this case? Diamonds.

**Sharon Hsu** 14:07

Diamonds.

**Charis Ellison** 14:08

A detectives's best friend. But that does lead us to a little bit of an, an unf-- I have, what is, what is the phrase I'm trying to think of?

**Sharon Hsu** 14:18

Racist?

**Charis Ellison** 14:19

Yeah. An unfortunately familiar stereotype.

**Sharon Hsu** 14:24

[long sigh] Oh yeah.

**Charis Ellison** 14:26

That we have encountered before.

**Sharon Hsu** 14:28

Yes, there is a very long, as scenes go in short stories, a long scene where Peter goes to a jeweler because as he says, you know, if someone wants to put their money in something that they think is safer than a bank, jewels might be a thing that occurs to them. So he he goes to a friend of his, who is described thus: "This gentleman, rather curly in the nose and fleshy about the eyelids, nevertheless came under Mr. Chesterton's definition of a nice Jew for his name was neither Montague nor McDonald, but Nathan Abrahams, and he greeted Lord Peter with the hospitality amounting to enthusiasm."

**Charis Ellison** 15:07

Hmm.

**Sharon Hsu** 15:08

So let's unpack that. [long sigh]

**Charis Ellison** 15:11

And I feel like I should confess that up until like, the last few years, I probably wouldn't have raised any eyebrows at that. And especially like the scene that follows, like the conversation that they have, it's like it's real, cozy and pleasant.

**Sharon Hsu** 15:29

It's so delightful.

**Charis Ellison** 15:31

Yeah. And it just, it seems like a really positive scene and the fact that it includes this racial physical stereotype, and then this reference to someone being a nice Jew, like, I just probably would have skipped right over that and been like, Oh, yeah, okay, whatever. But that's actually not good at all. I think, you know, like, I was kind of reading the story and you and I talked a lot, especially when we were talking about WHOSE BODY? about the Sayers and the fact that Sayers didn't consider herself to be anti-Semitic, in particular, you know, and we, like we heard from several listeners who don't consider her anti-Semitic and we both came down on the side of whether it was intentional or not, those feelings are obviously present in her work. And, like, I was kind of making a connection between this physical description, I mean, it's not on its face, like derogatory or insulting to, you know, say that he has this shape of nose and this shape, you know, like this characteristic of, of his eye shape. And it's the problem of being like, he looks like this, therefore, he's this. And that kind of flippant being like he belongs in this group, And, you know, like my brain making that connection between that and some of the things that, some of the like, wonderful quotable things that Sayers says in her essay ARE WOMEN HUMAN, you know, that what everyone hates most is to be reckoned as part of a group and not as an individual.

**Sharon Hsu** 17:04

Yeah, it's... it feels like that classic white feminism thing, right? Where, I mean, you had suffragists who were fighting for the rights of women to vote in the late 19th, early 20th century, who were using that language of rights and individuality, but they couldn't, not they couldn't, they refused to extend that to other racial groups, and certainly to racialized women. So I think it's, it is this conundrum for those of us who love Sayers' work and study her and maybe found a lot to connect to in her writings about female independence and female rights and the rights of women to be recognized as human beings.

17:50

But the fact that she has all of this sort of unexamined... all of these unexamined assumptions around race that makes it, you know, really easy for her to group certain people within a race together and have them stand for the entire group. And yeah, the fact that the Jews who show up in her novels are like always bankers or working with money--

**Charis Ellison** 18:16

Bankers or financiers or money lenders or jewelers.

**Sharon Hsu** 18:20

Yeah, it's it's really uncomfortable, like, you know, a one off, a two off, it's like, okay, maybe she just like, and it's not like she didn't know any Jews! But like for this to show up over and over and over. And I think especially the use of this Chesterton quote here is is really uncomfortable.

**Charis Ellison** 18:39

Yeah. Which you tracked down the source of the quote, would you tell us a little bit about it?



**Sharon Hsu 18:45**

I did, I will. And I say this as someone who you know, like G.K. Chesterton's writings have meant a lot to me. You know, I have not really gone down the rabbit hole of like his beliefs and his essays in this regard, but it is not great. So the quote appears to have come from "The Ball and Cross." And the quote was, "he nice Jew is called Moses Solomon and the nasty Jew is called Thornton Percy," and really what it's reflecting is, Chesterton had this attitude where he believed that Jews were unassimilable. So they were Others, they should not try to pass themselves off as part of the nations that they were, you know, a diaspora population of because of persecution. But that's, you know, we can set that aside. So in his opinion, you know, a Jewish person who tried to pass themselves off quote, unquote, as say, British, a Thornton Percy, or a McDonald or Montague was like underhanded and conniving and he thought it was far more honest for them to you know, keep Jewish names and to not try to assimilate. And part of this was because he held the belief, which was not uncommon during that time, and is not uncommon now, which is why we have to talk about these things, that, you know, a, [exasperated] that there was like a global conspiracy where Jewish people ran the banks and the media and controlled parts of the government and so forth. And again, this is a conspiracy theory that still exists now. And that is highly anti-Semitic, and that people use to justify anti-Semitic actions, right, and beliefs. So all of this, like, you know, I think you and I, we did, we did hear from some people early on, when we were talking about WHOSE BODY? where it was like, well, Sayers is just reflecting the attitudes of her time. And not necessarily like, can y'all give her a pass on that, but you know, like we shouldn't come down too harshly on that. And I'm like, No, because the attitudes of that time, that get reflected in the literature, if you don't consume the literature critically, you're just going to replicate those attitudes now, right, which people do. So yeah. And, and it's, I think I take a special... offense isn't the right word, but the this whole question of like, should a minority population assimilate? Can they assimilate? Like, if you're not looking at the power dynamics of Okay, first people are, you know, scattered from their homes because of colonialism and imperialism and persecution, and then they land in these other places. And immediately the pressure is exerted to, to like be patriotic, and to embrace your new nation. To then say, like, Oh, that is an underhanded activity to try to do?

**Charis Ellison 21:46**

Put in the situation of you can't win. You know, because you're going to be persecuted for not assimilating but you're being disingenuous if you assimilate and it's, like it really comes down to you're wrong to be here. Whatever you do, you're wrong.

**Sharon Hsu 22:01**

Yeah, exactly. You know, as an Asian American woman... like Asian Americans are considered the perpetual foreigner in America, right? It's like, it doesn't matter how long your family's been here. It doesn't matter if your family came here and helped to build the railroads, because you are phenotypically marked as different. That question of like, "but where are you really from?" always comes up. And I feel like, you know, it's not a one to one comparison, but I just, yeah, it just really gets my goat that Chesterton said those things and thought those things, and that apparently this was like a well known enough, you know, either quote of his or idea or idea that people in general held that Sayers can just kind of offhandedly toss it into a short story. That's just all... that's all really uncomfortable.

**Charis Ellison** 22:50

Yeah. Did I lose you?

**Sharon Hsu** 22:52

No, I just... got quiet.

**Charis Ellison** 22:53

Yeah, okay. Yeah, it's like, I don't know what to say. Also kind of hit that point where I'm just like I don't know if we're just like both having a pause of "And where do we go from there?"

**Sharon Hsu** 23:05

We sit with the discomfort.

**Charis Ellison** 23:07

Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 23:07

I mean, you know, I think one way of being an ally is saying this is here, and it is bad, right? And not glossing over, like, not doing the thing that we're all prone to, in especially literature we love where we're like, oh, well, she didn't mean it. Or if she did mean it, it's not that bad, or. I mean, and I...like, I went through a journey too, like, you know. I mean, I was a Modernist for heaven's sake, right. Like, I had to, in some ways, I'm like, Yeah, I had to write like, all of T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, my God, like, just awash in racial stereotype! And, like, once again, it's not... It's like you can read and appreciate and like, actually be deeply formed by writing written by people who held these attitudes and who, you know, were very, very flawed and dare I say, like, racist by the standards of both our time and theirs? And, and like, I don't think...I think the problem would be like never being willing to revisit, you know, that work with a critical eye, right? The problem would be saying, like, No, no, no, I am going to bury my head in the sand and like, not think about it, because I love this book, or this character so much. And I'm going to refuse to like recognize the reality of the other things that this author said. I mean, it doesn't mean, you know, like, I'm never gonna read Sayers again. And people can actually make that decision too! Like, if readers who are encountering all of this in her work go like, "you know what, I'm actually out" like, that's for them to decide. That's not for anybody, that's not for me to decide what someone can take or not. But I think... I just think it's important.

24:58

And I think literary theory gives us a lot of equipment to be able to pull back and go like, oh, wow, that makes me really uncomfortable. Why is that? Or like, Oh, hey, that phrasing or that attitude, or that stereotype is still recognizable to us now, and, you know, this kind of writing, where it's not out and out, like... you know, Sayers isn't doing like a phrenology or a eugenics here, but like, where it is tapping into these ideas and sort of like pulling them into mass culture and into media that, you know, a large number of people are consuming it just it merits another look, you know, it merits a critical eye of saying, like, hey, if we don't want to just unthinkingly replicate the problem, then, you know, then we just got to put on our big girl pants and deal with it!

**Charis Ellison** 25:53

Yeah, well, it's, you know, like, I feel like, part of the problem is that Sayers, this is an area where Sayers has never stopped and self examined. You know? And, like, if, like, there's a certain amount of responsibility in a reader that, you know, if, like, if a writer has failed to self examine their own work, do it for them? Because you're, you're like, you're taking that work into yourself, you know, like, the written word, the way we absorb it is, like, unique and specific. And, you know, you, you... like words are something that you will absorb. Like, not to get all weird about books. But, you know, they, they they enter your mind, and they enter your heart in a way that's very kind of unique from other forms of media. And, like, why wouldn't you want to, like, think a little bit about what it is that you're digging in?

**Sharon Hsu** 26:55

Yeah, I guess where I come down is if, like, you as a reader, if a text is harming you? Then certainly, like, you don't need to engage with it.

**Charis Ellison** 27:05

Yeah.

**Sharon Hsu** 27:06

Right? Like--

**Charis Ellison** 27:07

There's no obligation to be hurt

**Sharon Hsu** 27:10

Yeah. And there's no obligation... And I also want to say like, because I think you and I have touted the merits of there is something responsible, and you know, maybe I daresay, even pleasurable about approaching a text that you love, but that has problematic elements and bringing a kind of theoretical or critical gaze to it, and that's something that you, you and I want to do, and that we enjoy doing. But I think, you know, to some extent that like that is also a privileged position, right? That is a privileged position that we have as, like people who've been given that equipment due to our education due to being English majors, due to often not being the oppressed, or marginalized, populations that would be most harmed. And so, you know, and! And this whole, like, oh, be less emotional, like, what I'm NOT saying is readers should be less emotional and not have reactions, or like that you owe it to an author or a text to examine, because that feels dangerously close to like the whole, you know, to now REALLY broadly sweep, like, you know, when men are like, if women were just less emotional, like, if you could just, if you could just present your arguments more logically, we would listen to you. And I'm like, No, you wouldn't!

**Charis Ellison** 28:28

Yeah, no, absolutely not. Which, like I should, like, every reaction I have to media is on some level emotional, which is exactly why I didn't pursue academia beyond the bachelor's degree. I was just like, I have looked at academia, and I think it's not for me.

**Sharon Hsu 28:46**

It's a lot of people arguing all the time and pretending they don't have emotion.

**Charis Ellison 28:50**

Yeah. Can't handle it. I'm emotional. I have a lot of feelings. You know, and when I say that people should read things critically, I'm not saying like, every time you sit down to read something, it should be with your critical thinking hat on.

**Sharon Hsu 29:02**

No, certainly not.

**Charis Ellison 29:03**

Because we definitely don't do that. Most of the time when I read HAVE HIS CARCASE, I am not doing that. Like, I mean, like we have, we have been stuck kind of on this for a little bit and lost sight of the actual story, I guess.

**Sharon Hsu 29:17**

Yeah. But I think it's a good, I think it's good to unpack like, what is it that we are trying to do here and what is it that we are or we are not saying, you know, other people can or should do as readers? So yeah. And it's... also I mean, like you said, they go on to have a really delightful conversation where Mr. Abrahams is like kind of joshing Peter about Oh, are you finally here to pick out a ring for Mrs. Peter? And you know, Peter says, No, I haven't found the lady yet. And Mr. Abrahams says, "you know, once you do everything will be done in a hurry. 'Quick, Mr. Abrahams, I fallen in love yesterday, and I'm being married tomorrow,' but it may take months years to find matched perfect stones." And it's wonderful because like that is kind of how impetuously Peter is going to fall in love with Harry.

**Charis Ellison 30:06**

Yeah, it really is. And when we were talking about STRONG POISON we kind of talked about, like how immediately Peter falls in love with Harriet. Like, he sees her in the dock. And, and like that's it for him. And it does give me this like lovely mental image of him showing up to visit Mr. Abrahams and being like, "You are right, it happened."

**Sharon Hsu 30:30**

"Quick! I need a ring! But also it's more complicated than that," yeah.

**Charis Ellison 30:35**

And I do appreciate the reference to like, specifically, there's a reference to rubies, like Mr. Abrahams shows him some rubies, and is just like, "They would make a good engagement ring!"

**Sharon Hsu 30:48**

Something very pretty!

**Charis Ellison 30:50**

Yeah, that is something that we will revisit later.

**Sharon Hsu** 30:55

Much later, as it were.

**Charis Ellison** 30:56

Much later, it will take a while.

**Sharon Hsu** 30:58

Unfortunately for Peter, Harriet does not agree to marry him three days after meeting him during which she's still standing trial for murder. So you know, all around a bit of a delay.

**Charis Ellison** 31:10

Yes.

**Sharon Hsu** 31:11

But you want to talk about the auction?

**Charis Ellison** 31:13

I do want to talk about the auction.

**Sharon Hsu** 31:15

Because I find it deeply delightful.

**Charis Ellison** 31:17

It is so wonderful. Oh, I guess we should say in summary that, you know, Peter visits Mr. Abrahams and learns that great uncle Joseph was in the business of acquiring diamonds. And over the course of many years, and purchased in cash. So 20 years ago, there was like a bank, couple of banks crashed, and there was like a scare and great uncle Joseph went and like, took out all his money. And then no one knew what had happened to it.

**Sharon Hsu** 31:50

Yeah, I mean, I think we alluded to it, but that is a good, actual factual summary.

**Charis Ellison** 31:57

Quick reminder that he had taken pretty much all of his money out of the bank, and no one knew where he had stashed it or what he had done with it. And we learn from Mr. Abrahams, that what he did with it was acquire diamonds of particular brilliance, and that were perfectly matched. And that Mr. Abrahams and several other jewelers were acquiring these gems for him over the course of I think 20 years, but you know, like, over the course of quite a long time, and that he always paid in cash. And that at the end, he had 12 perfectly matched diamonds.

**Sharon Hsu** 32:39

And Abrahams said, you know, like, on average, like the last one I sold him was 7000 pounds. But he also mentioned that the set together, because they are perfectly matched, would be valued far above what each individual stone was valued at.

**Charis Ellison** 32:56

Yeah, so it's a very long term investment.

**Sharon Hsu** 33:00

Yes. And it's interesting, right? Because like you have this long interlude where you're talking about value and valuation and how in some sense like the, the worth of an object is what what people can kind of collectively agree on, right? Like that the stones themselves, okay, there's this kind of exchange price but that because it would be difficult or rare to have a whole set together, then that you know, the price goes up because again, everybody has sort of artificially agreed that diamonds are precious, and that a set of 12 perfectly matched diamonds are even more precious. And there is a rarity. And then Peter goes and bids on some ancient manuscripts.

**Charis Ellison** 33:47

Yes, and he has such a good time!

**Sharon Hsu** 33:50

He has such a good time, and he also like artificially drives the value up into. Like, you know, it says that he has this sort of like nemesis, Skrymes, who is always like bidding against him and they, you know, it kind of goes through all of Peter's tactics where he jumps in at the last minute on this Catullus and Skrymes sort of senses the blood in the water, so he overbids him and then they go back and forth. And then you know, Peter finally wins and then because he had such a good time, he, like to poke at Skrymes, he then just like starts entering for this random other thing where then all these other antiques dealers are like Oh, it's Lord Peter, is it you know, maybe, maybe this thing is more valuable than we thought it was? But Peter's just playing and yeah, I don't know, there's--

**Charis Ellison** 34:38

Yeah, it says that he drives the price up and then he leaves them holding the baby.

**Sharon Hsu** 34:41

Exactly, yes. And, and there's this like very delightful interlude where a "timid little outsider suddenly flinging himself into the arena became the owner of refined 14th century missal at bargain price. Crimson with excitement and surprise, he paid for his purchase and ran out of the room like a rabbit, hugging the missal as though he expected to have it snatched from him." It's just it's... it, it. Sayers does that thing that she does so well here, right, where she, she sketches out... like there's so much backstory, there's so much almost like world building, you can totally picture the scene. And in my copy, it's like... a page? Right? She does so much so efficiently. And I feel like it's only fair to, to heap laurels on her for that after we've, you know, I have just spent however many minutes talking about the things that I don't appreciate about her writing.

**Charis Ellison** 35:37

There's nuance to everything.

**Sharon Hsu** 35:39

There is nuance in everything. Yes. And I think, I think that question of like, what is valuable, what is valuable because it is rare and unreproducible versus what is valuable because people have, you know, sort of like, everybody has sort of just held hands and agreed that it is, like, that's something I feel like I'm still, you know, even after a dissertation chapter and many, many years, trying to tease out that thread in Sayers. And it's once again I'll say like, when we get to GAUDY NIGHT, I will have so much to say about this! But even when we get back to HAVE HIS CARCASE I will have so much to say about this because I think these ideas, like she's just tugging at this thread constantly and in HAVE HIS CARCASE the whole thing with the razors really, really gets into this but I will, I will put a pin in that so that you and I both have something to look forward to

**Charis Ellison** 36:36

Hurray! Something that we all need.

**Sharon Hsu** 36:40

Yes, um. Yeah, but so Peter dashes off a telegram to MacPherson and says you know, open up great uncle, basically, posthaste, and MacPherson telegrams back and says, you know, basically, what the devil does this mean, bottle was stolen yesterday. Bottle found broken in the river, dropped by burglar, contents done, what next? And this is, this is my favorite line in the story. So you know, Peter, Peter sends a telegram back that's like, you know, dredge the river, I'm coming. And then the line says "The night express decanted Lord Peter Wimsey at Dumfries early the following morning--"

**Charis Ellison** 37:21

Oh I lied, there IS a train!

**Sharon Hsu** 37:23

Yes, there is a train "--and a hired car deposited him at the Stone Cottage in time for breakfast" but I just... "the night express decanted Lord Peter Wimsey," that is as good as "the door waltzed open."

**Charis Ellison** 37:35

Yes, I also highlighted that Yeah. I love that idea.

**Sharon Hsu** 37:41

It is exactly how I feel after I've been on like a red eye flight, right? Like just yeah, pour me out of here. I picture this scene and the Miyazaki HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE, where Howl is just like turning into slime. And he's sort of like slimes his way over to the table and like flumps down and is like, "I don't have the will to live."

**Charis Ellison** 38:05

[laughing] "What's the point of living if I can't be beautiful?"

**Sharon Hsu** 38:09

"I can't be beautiful." Yeah, I feel like Howl has a lot of Lord Peter Wimsey in his DNA.

**Charis Ellison 38:15**

I think so, and you know, that's true of like both the film version and the book version, which there are two distinct entities. For anyone who's unfamiliar with HOWL'S MOVING CASTLE, the film and the book are to be treated as separate and distinct narratives, but both very worthwhile. But yeah, both have definite echoes of Lord Peter, for me.

38:39

Yes, so Wimsey arrives back in Scotland after taking the train. The one, the one solitary train, and we don't even talk about it's schedule.

**Charis Ellison 38:49**

It's just "he arrives." He arrives in the middle of chaos, which I suppose we should mention that his, because the fishing was good, his telegram was not received by MacPherson right away. Which is why... oh, I should go back to this other line that I like, where like he sends off the telegram. And after the book sale, like he sent the telegraph to MacPherson telling him to open, open up the stomach. And after the book sale he's, it says "he felt vaguely hurt at receiving no ecstatic telegram from MacPherson. He refused to imagine that his deductions had been wrong and supposed rather that the rapture of MacPherson was too great to be confined to telegraphic expression and would come next day by post." So I just I just love the idea of him like feeling a little sulky that he hasn't yet gotten confirmation of his, of, you know, like, what he suspected, but also that he's sure that he's not wrong.

**Sharon Hsu 38:49**

Thank God. Right but he's been like insufficiently thanked.

**Charis Ellison 39:58**

Yeah. Which, I mean, I feel that feeling. I just the other day, I specifically told people that I was sulky because I, I felt like I should have gotten a bigger laugh at something.

**Sharon Hsu 40:13**

I mean, you are legit one of the funniest people I know. So I support you in, in your quest to have your family sufficiently recognize that.

**Charis Ellison 40:24**

Thank you. I appreciate that deeply. But yes, it turns out that MacPherson was away fishing, didn't get the first telegram until after the bottle has already been stolen by a burglar who comes in in the night. But who doesn't get away with the bottle. It's such a kind of a slapstick, you know, scene to imagine.

**Sharon Hsu 40:48**

Mm hmm. Yeah. Yeah. I love that Maggie, the housekeeper, when she's describing that whole slapstick scene in her very, very thick Scottish accent, at the very end, she's like, you know, I'm not going to try to reproduce the accent but, but she, you know, she notes the detail that the burglar trampled down the young kale and the strawberry beds, "the blackguard." And I circled that and you know, as someone



who is also like an amateur home gardener, and I've been fighting with some critters that keep eating my little cherry tomato sprouts before they can blossom--

**Charis Ellison** 41:24

Noooo

**Sharon Hsu** 41:24

--and like, yeah, so I have this enormous cherry tomato plant, Charis, and I have eaten three cherry tomatoes total this summer, because I don't know if it's a raccoon or a squirrel or something that comes like a thief in the night. So I really feel for Maggie the housekeeper.

**Charis Ellison** 41:43

She does say that if the cattle had gotten in, they couldn't have done more devastation.

**Sharon Hsu** 41:48

It is, it is truly a crime.

**Charis Ellison** 41:51

Not a gentleman burglar at all.

**Sharon Hsu** 41:53

No.

**Charis Ellison** 41:56

Which you mentioned the Robert, the cousin of MacPherson, who was the residuary legatee of the will. And we failed to mention that Peter actually meets him at Somerset House because he was there to have a squint at the same will, at great uncle Joseph will.

**Sharon Hsu** 42:18

Yes. And I love how the clerk is like I've never had this happen to me. Two people wanted to see the same will at the same time.

**Charis Ellison** 42:26

This poor innocent clerk is just like, What a crazy random happenstance. And I think you know, like that's what leads to Peter going ahead and sending the telegram as opposed to just like going back to visit his friend and being like, I think you should open up the stomach. Because he knows, he like he kind of sees that cousin Robert recognizes his name. And he's like oh, he's been given food for thought.

**Sharon Hsu** 42:52

There's shenanigans afoot with the stomach.

**Charis Ellison** 42:57

So Lord Peter arrives in Scotland to find the stomach missing, the bottle it was in broken, so it's it's no longer in its container. And cousin Robert with a broken kneecap being like stuck in bed--

**Sharon Hsu 43:16**

Nursed in the upstairs room, yeah.

**Charis Ellison 43:20**

Because he was out fishing. You can't see me doing air quotes, but he was "out fishing" when his cousin bumped into him and he slipped and broke his knee. Do you want to give us a little summary of how things wrap up?

**Sharon Hsu 43:32**

Yeah, I can do that. I love that first Peter sort of trolls cousin Robert when he's like oh fishing, eh? Do, do you use the pink sisket, or? And give me your opinion of it. You know, Mr. Ferguson says "not so bad, I've sometimes caught trout with it." "'You surprise me,' said Wimsey, not unnaturally since he had invented the pink sisket on the spur of the moment." So this is Peter being Peter. I love how Peter he is in this story. But yeah, so he goes out and you know, they're, they're dragging the river and then he has the idea of like, where do, where does the flotsam and jetsam usually wash up? So they go and they find the stomach on, on this spit of land surrounded by seagulls. And you know, it's "a long unseemly object like a drab purse lay on the shore," you know, so they take it back into the house, MacPherson dissects the stomach and they find 11 of the 12 diamonds in it. And I love that Maggie-- so so yeah, so it turns out that you know, Uncle Joseph had swallowed all the diamonds right before he did away with himself. And I love that Maggie, the housekeeper says "he must have been a grand man for a pill" with respect. Which, yeah, it's quite a feat.

**Charis Ellison 44:55**

It really is.

**Sharon Hsu 44:56**

Yeah. So those diamonds are now Dr. MacPherson's. Or soon-to-be-Dr. Macpherson's, you know, and they think, Okay, well, I guess a seagull got the last one. And the final line is Jock being like, I'm going to go get a gun.

**Charis Ellison 45:11**

"7000 pounds in a seagull??"

**Sharon Hsu 45:13**

Right? Like, Off I go! Yeah. And and I guess, you know, this is wrapping back a little bit. But it might be worth mentioning that great uncle Joseph had said in his will that he was leaving MacPherson the stomach, one because you know, they'd always had sort of this little joke where he's like, a good digestion is the most precious thing a man can have. Which, as someone who has kind of a funny tummy at times, I am like, Yes, it is very true. But in his will, he says, you know, basically, "I wish him to understand that no riches in the world are comparable to the riches of a good digestion. And I desire of him that he will, in the exercise of his medical profession, use his best endeavours to preserve to his

patients the blessing of good digestion unimpaired, not needlessly filling their stomachs with drugs out of concern for his own pocket," etc, etc. And I just wanted to briefly touch on that because we have, you and I have talked before, especially in these early books about how many, how many villains Sayers has who are like medical people run amok basically, or like medical people who are more concerned for their own wealth, or their own reputation, etc. And then they use the like, the trust that's placed in them by their patients for their own gain. So so it's really interesting to me that we have this short story that's almost calling that out and giving an alternative. And I, you know, I don't know what it say that the alternative is like, Oh, well, if you have lots of money, then you can, then you can be nice to people.

**Charis Ellison 46:49**

I always find it easier to be nice to people when I have lots of money. But the same is not true for other people who have lots of money.

**Sharon Hsu 46:57**

And yeah, there's there's probably an upper threshold. But yeah, there we go. That is "The Piscatorial Farce of the Stolen Stomach."

**Charis Ellison 47:07**

It's like it's a bit of a romp, isn't it? It's just kind of fun. And like, fundamentally such a kind of silly premise.

**Sharon Hsu 47:16**

Yeah. Yeah. But it's nice. It's nice to see Peter detecting a crime that's not a murder.

**Charis Ellison 47:22**

Yes. And like in the books, you know, Peter has that irreverent attitude. And, you know, like, at the beginning of UNNATURAL DEATH when he's being like nosy, just to be nosy. And in the books, we always see that attitude being tempered by the realization that, you know, like, this is serious. This is murder. This is people's lives at stake. And so like in this story, we just kind of like we get that fun side of Peter without being brought down. Yeah, you know, we don't we don't have to lose that buzz of how fun it is to be nosy and to make yourself a nuisance.

**Sharon Hsu 48:05**

Which is, uh, yeah, I'm thinking about various especially, you know, Golden Age detective fiction, right? There is this like... that is, that is the DNA that all good detectives really have to share. And it's interesting, who gets allowed to do that, like Miss Marple is allowed to do it. And I guess Miss Climpson, because everybody knows old ladies are nosy. So yeah, you know, it's fine if your maiden aunt is coming in asking these questions. And, you know, for Peter, I mean, part of it is the silly ass act that he puts on so that people think he's harmless. But you know, I also have to imagine some of it is that because he is, you know, His Lordship gets to ask a few more questions than the rest of us.

**Charis Ellison 48:45**

Alright, listeners, thank you so much for joining us for our conversation about this wonderful short story. We did talk longer than we planned to. Found a lot to dig into, but we're looking forward to next time

talking about Montague Egg, taking a little break from Lord Peter to introduce a different Dorothy L. Sayers detective and we hope that soon this is going to lead to us being back on track with our usual schedule and getting back into the novels.

**Sharon Hsu** 49:18

Yes, fingers crossed. 2020: the year of no plans! But no, I found this really invigorating, Charis, and I think, I hope our listeners did as well and thank you for sticking with us listeners even when we just kind of ghosted you for a while and--

**Charis Ellison** 49:35

We didn't mean to. We love you.

**Sharon Hsu** 49:37

Yeah, we really didn't mean to. Doing this podcast with you, Charis, and, and obviously inviting other people into the conversation, has been just a deeply wonderful thing in the last year, and especially in the last like sixish, however many months into quarantine and this pandemic we are in, so thank you. Thank you listeners, and yeah, join us again in two weeks.

**Charis Ellison** 50:02

Yeah. Which, and Sharon we should probably acknowledge we're recording this on October the fourth. And by the time this is posted, it will have been our one year anniversary of the podcast.

**Sharon Hsu** 50:14

That is wild.

**Charis Ellison** 50:18

We've been doing this for a year.

**Sharon Hsu** 50:20

Oh, my goodness.

**Charis Ellison** 50:21

Minus our unplanned vacation.

**Sharon Hsu** 50:23

Yeah, it both feels like that it happened in an instant and also I can't believe it was only a year. What is time. Time is a flat circle.

**Charis Ellison** 50:35

Time has no meaning.

**Sharon Hsu** 50:36

My 2020 memoir. Well, happy anniversary, Charis.

**Charis Ellison** 50:41

Happy Anniversary, Sharon.

**Sharon Hsu** 50:44

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 Ellison** 51:02

Our logo is by Gabby 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 podcaster of choice. We also hope that you'll tell all of your friends who love Dorothy L. Sayers as much as we do.

**Sharon Hsu** 51:23

See you next time for more talking piffle!