



## Clouds of Witness

*Dorothy L. Sayers*

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Rustic old Riddlesdale Lodge was a Wimsey family retreat filled with country pleasures and the thrill of the hunt -- until the game turned up human and quite dead. He lay among the chrysanthemums, wore slippers and a dinner jacket and was Lord Peter's brother-in-law-to-be. His accused murderer was Wimsey's own brother, and if murder set all in the family wasn't enough to boggle the unflappable Lord Wimsey, perhaps a few twists of fate would be -- a mysterious vanishing midnight letter from Egypt...a grieving fiancée with suitcase in hand...and a bullet destined for one very special Wimsey.

## Clouds of Witness Details

Date : Published June 28th 1995 by Harper Paperbacks (first published 1926)

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Author : Dorothy L. Sayers

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## From Reader Review Clouds of Witness for online ebook

### Ann says

"Clouds of Witness" was a very delightful book! In both the mystery and the characters, I thought Sayers came through brilliantly!

Lord Peter Wimsey (the main character and detective) is truly a humorous, clever, thoughtful, and lovable character! He breezes through life, always seeing the amusement and humor in situations, but doesn't lack the ability to understand people and events for the gravity they may hold.

Wimsey himself was a delightful enough character to hold my interest through the book, but add to this his good friend (and partner in crime-solving) Mr. Parker (adorable friends!) and Mr. Bunter (another more "proper" counterpart to Wimsey) and you have an entire book set to amuse!

Oddly enough, Sayers doesn't use a lot of description. In a way it reminds a bit of Jane Austin (though the feel of the books is not similar!), in her ability to convey the characters in their uniqueness and completeness through dialogue.

The mystery also is most interesting. And while I could have felt "cheated" by the ending, I didn't because of the various sub-mysteries that were occurring throughout the book. It is, in a way, three or four mysteries all revolving around one.

Additionally, the mystery centers around Wimsey's own family, which adds another element to Wimsey's character, and the mystery itself.

A note: the book does contain a few slightly graphic descriptions of the murder, but I stress the word slightly. I have read some Agatha Christie, and think that it's probably on par with those. I am quite the queasy reader, and I had few qualms.

The only thing I regretted – if it could be called a regret – was the prevalent use of French. I can't blame or criticize Sayers on this front, only myself for not having a better grasp of the language. That said, while a times I was dismayed because I did not understand every detail or clue, for the most part everything was eventually (and in a timely manner) translated or explained.

I really enjoyed this read! And am very much looking forward to picking up another Lord Peter Wimsey mystery!!

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### Nikki says

Featuring Ian Carmichael as Lord Peter Wimsey, Peter Jones as Bunter, and Gabriel Woolf as Inspector Parker

This is the second of the Lord Peter radioplays, at least going chronologically by the order of the books. It's longer than *Whose Body?* and a bit more personal: Lord Peter has to defend his own brother, the Duke of Denver, against a charge of murder. As usual with the Wimsey radioplays, the cast is excellent, and the parts chosen directly from the novels for dramatisation are great. I think only Ian Carmichael could get exactly the right tone for me in the part where Wimsey climbs on Parker's back, looks over the wall, and then announces that it's a marvellous ditch which he is going to proceed to fall into.

And of course, the ending with everyone drunk is pretty funny...

The main thing that doesn't really work for me is, unfortunately, the sound effects. The gun sounds are more like party poppers — hardly the dramatic scenes needed. And I could maybe wish that Ian Carmichael wouldn't sing — it's in character, but something about it grates.

Originally posted on my blog.

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## Melindam says

[ that it wasn't a crime at all, but suicide (hide spoiler)]

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## Kim says

I've been a Dorothy L Sayers fan ever since I borrowed *Strong Poison* from the school library when I was about fifteen. Sayers was a woman ahead of her time and not a typical writer of crime fiction. In 1912 she won a scholarship to Oxford University, achieving first class honours in French in 1915. Women could not be awarded degrees at that time, but Sayers was in the first group of women to be finally awarded their degree in 1920. She was a published poet and had worked in a publishing house, as a teacher, a translator and an advertising copywriter by the time the first of her Peter Wimsey novels was published in 1923. Later, Sayers moved away from writing novels and forged a new career writing essays and liturgical drama. Later still she embarked on what she considered her life's work: a translation of Dante's "Divine Comedy".

Sayers brought fierce intelligence and uncompromising artistic integrity to all of her writing, including her crime fiction. She avoided the formulaic and consequently, even in the context of writing what turned out to be a series of novels featuring Lord Peter Wimsey, she didn't write the same novel twice. And unusually for a Golden Age British crime fiction writer, Sayers allowed her central character to develop over time.

In this novel, the second in the series, Lord Peter's investigation is focussed on exonerating his brother, who has been charged with murder. In its set-up, it's a typical manor house mystery, of a kind now seen as old-fashioned, although when Sayers wrote the book there was nothing that old-fashioned about it. There are the expected twists and turns and a satisfying resolution, conveyed in Sayers' intelligent and witty prose.

I re-read this novel with my friend Jemidar. I don't usually re-read mysteries, but such is my love for Sayers' writing so much that even knowing how it turns out didn't lessen my enjoyment of the exercise.

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## Jane says

Where I got the book: purchased on Kindle. A re-read.

One thing I always appreciate about the Wimsey stories is that each book has a distinct character. In *Clouds of Witness* the pace is fast and frenetic, with a wildly confusing murder mystery at the center, and yet Sayers does more to develop her characters here than in some of the other books. The mystery itself almost takes second place to the doings of Wimsey's family, placing Wimsey himself very firmly in a distinct social

setting, his home turf where he seems more real than in many of the other books. He doesn't show off nearly as much when he's in the countryside, either; I can't help feeling that, titles aside, this is a depiction of the sort of society Sayers was raised in before she went off to London.

I also enjoy the sketch of Wimsey's sister Lady Mary Wimsey, who turns up in later novels but only as a cardboard cutout (his brother Gerald never gets his character developed, which is a great shame). Watching Parker go all chivalrous and defensive of her is always amusing, albeit out of character. Mary is real in this book: later on, the Wimsey family becomes more and more a caricature of a noble English household, and Mary becomes a boring housewife, alas.

Plenty happens to Wimsey in this book: he gets chased by dogs, shot, falls into a bog, and flies across the Atlantic (in the 1920s that was a noteworthy adventure). I have never seen a bullet wound heal with such great speed and thoroughness.

There is an absolutely priceless little cameo of two writers talking about the trends of the day, something Sayers is able to pick up in the later novels ~~once she writes herself in as Wimsey's love interest~~ when Harriet Vane comes along.

I absolutely zipped through this novel (which was supposed to be strictly a post-workout cool down read but ended up as a Main Book) despite having read it several times before. And that really defines the enduring success of the Wimsey novels; they're downright entertaining, and despite (or because of?) being set so firmly in a lost era, never seem to age.

Since I'm not reading the short stories as stated in the GR series listing (they are interesting, but they're potboilers served up by Sayers to satisfy her public and I'll read the collected edition at the end of this exercise) the next one is The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club.

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## mark monday says

dashing peter wimsey dashes into some more dashing adventures. he's one of literature's greatest detectives. but just as enjoyable is his faithful manservant bunter. peter runs around figuring things out with his clever, clever mind but it is bunter who often gets his hands dirty with rather agreeable tasks like chatting up all the maidservants and various other domestics. tasks he clearly relishes but approaches with suave professionalism. various witnesses never fail to succumb to bunter's charms. he's the man!

the novel was fun. i was never bored, so there's that. but still... well, no need to get into it. maybe i'm just spoiled because whenever i open up another Sayers i'm always expecting a Gaudy Night type experience. alas!

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## Karen ?\* says

*"Wimsey would be one of the finest detectives in England if he wasn't lazy"*

This should give you a feel for the kind of cozy mystery series that is Lord Peter Wimsey. It is more slapstick than Agatha Christie and more "pip pip, old boy, good-o" English than her too.

With the first book I kind of struggled a bit to get engaged, whereas this one I found myself more invested in the story early on. I didn't really enjoy how it all resolved, but it was still a fun ride through to the end ;)

## **Sandy \*The world could end while I was reading and I would never notice\* says**

This is the best Sayers I have read to date!

I found the beginning a little tiresome, but as soon as Lord Peter started his investigation my interest was engaged.

Sayers writes with a dry wit that had me chuckling out loud in places, and reflecting on the social changes that have taken place in less than one hundred years. If anyone said "I wouldn't suggest such a thing to a woman, my lord. It goes to their heads, if I may say so." in these times, they would no doubt find themselves in court on harassment or sexual discrimination charges!....and "Ladyships don't boil water!"

And talk about keeping it all in the family! Lord Peter's sister's fiancée, Cathcart, is found dead outside the conservatory of Riddlesdale Lodge, the family retreat, in the early hours of the morning. His elder brother Gerald, stands accused of the murder. And Lord Peter has the feeling that his sister Mary knows more than she is letting on.

Aided by his friend in the police, Parker, and his irreplaceable valet Bunter, Lord Peter sets out to prove his brother's innocence and bring the true murderer to justice.

'But what was #10 blackmailing Cathcart about? Who hid a suitcase in the conservatory? And what was Gerald doing in the garden at 3am?'

This is a cracking good read in the best English Murder Mystery style.

My favourite quote (amongst many that I enjoyed) from this book : "Seems to me there's an extra allowance of fools in my family."

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## **Kaethe says**

The plot is absurdly complicated, amusingly so. There are no end of intrigues in the country house where the murder takes place.

But that's not the joy of reading a Sayers' novel: the pleasure is all in the humor. Wimsey acting a fool, Bunter's magical ability to produce anything needed, Mary's good heart, and the Dowager's formidable control of everything. It's Downton Abbey written by Oscar Wilde.

Personal copy

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## **Wanda says**

Dorothy Sayers works seem to me to be perfect for anyone who enjoys the writing of Agatha Christie and P.G. Wodehouse. Sayers imparts an acerbic edge that keeps things from getting too twee. She manages to make sharp observations on both the gentry and the socialists, sometimes at the same time. I've recently been

cataloguing the works of H.G. Wells, who wrote a lot about socialism in the early 20th century, and I find Sayers' insights on the complicated societal changes of this time period to be spot on.

She isn't gentle with her fellow authors either. I loved the following exchange, heard by Lord Peter while dining at the Soviet Club:

*The authoress was just saying impressively to her companion: '-ever know a sincere emotion to express itself in a subordinate clause?'*

*'Joyce has freed us from the superstition of syntax,' agreed the curly haired man.*

*'Scenes which make emotional history,' said Miss Heath-Warburton, 'should ideally be expressed in a series of animal squeals.'*

*'The D.H. Lawrence formula,' said the other.*

Poor old Lawrence, maligned again for trying to express what he considered to be real emotions and realistic human behaviour in his novels.

For some reason, it made me think of Dilbert, when his pointy-haired boss decrees that, "starting today, all passwords must contain letters, numbers, doodles, sign language, and squirrel noises."

Being unable to express my review in either animal squeals or squirrel noises, I must tell you in English that this series is worth trying.

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## **Jaline says**

Published in 1926, this is a terrific murder mystery by Dorothy L. Sayers. At a hunting house party, Denis Cathcart is discovered dead – shot through the chest and apparently dragged from some bushes some distance away to a spot near the conservatory door. Lord Wimsey (Gerald, or Jerry) left the house late at night and trips over the body on his way back to the house around 3:00 a.m. His sister, Lady Mary, also sees him and claims in the inquest that she heard a shot fired around 3:00 a.m. The groundskeeper said he heard a shot at 10 minutes before midnight, but nothing later.

Lord Wimsey had been heard quarrelling loudly with the deceased late that same night. Since Denis Cathcart was engaged to Lord Wimsey's sister, Lady Mary, Lord Wimsey confronted him regarding some discrediting information which resulted in Denis Cathcart abruptly leaving the house. To make matters worse, the gun was Lord Wimsey's own – kept in a drawer with the key in the lock. At the inquest, Lord Wimsey refuses to state an alibi for himself, and the mounting evidence indicates he is guilty of murder.

There is a Grand Jury hearing, and the case proceeds. It must now go to The House of Lords for Lord Wimsey to be tried before a jury of his peers. Meantime, Lord Peter (Wimsey's brother) and his friend from Scotland Yard (Charlie Parker) are chasing down clues and leads in England, in France, and ultimately even in the United States.

Lord Peter may cast an appearance that is frivolous and shallow at times, but no-one can fault him as a brother. Even Lady Mary comes under suspicion when new evidence shows up that showed she lied about certain things in the inquest. Lord Peter does everything he can to get his brother freed from prison and to ensure his sister doesn't take his place. This includes some frightening moments – being stuck in a bog and nearly losing his life there, not to mention his return flight from the United States when the plane is brought down due to bad weather – fortunately before it can crash into the ocean.

There were several times – at least three or four – where I thought I knew for sure who the killer was. Even when reading books and I do know who dunnit, it is half the fun to figure out how it all happened. This time I was wrong – oh, so very wrong. And that was fun, too!

I enjoyed this book immensely – even the stuffy atmosphere of the trial in the House of Lords was interesting, long concluding speeches and all! I am amazed at the quality of writing in this series and look forward to reading the third one.

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### **Jason Koivu says**

Amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey's family is neck-deep in the soup...the murder soup! (Most delicious!)

The police aren't much help, so with the help of his friend, Chief Inspector Detective Guy Man And Other Words Charles Parker, Wimsey attempts to solve a devilishly difficult case involving his brother, sister and sundry others related and not.

This is all very hoity-toity, upper English society stuff where a spot of murder is nothing next to the accusation of cheating at cards. Bunch of silly asses, if you ask me, but there you have it!

Dorothy Sayers (no relation to Gale, that I know of) was a P.G. Wodehouse fan and her mysteries are very Wodehousian. It's sort of like reading a book in which Bertie and Jeeves solve a murder, so this is right up my alley!

Highly recommended for Agatha Christie fans looking for slightly better developed characters and more of a sense of fun.

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### **Carol ?? says**

Sayers may be the perfect mystery writer for me - she combines the plotting of Christie with the wit of Heyer & I get the wonderful Golden Age setting from all of them!

Everything is improved (other than Bunter, he was already wonderful!) from Lord Peter while still insouciant is no longer Bertie Wooster playing at detectives. His is a well rounded character who lives a life filled with varied interests as well as his work as an amateur sleuth.

So many witty quotations - I've added a couple to the GR data base!

The detective story was very well done - I didn't guess the solution. My only criticisms are that a few things seem to be pulled out of thin air and that Gerald was such a bonehead!

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### **? Irena ? says**

*Clouds of Witness* is wonderful. I was in the mood for a lovely mystery. This one seemed to fit the bill perfectly.

I've decided to read these in order they appear on Goodreads. I liked Lord Peter Wimsey in *Whose Body?* and I loved him here. Not much has changed in this book. His quirks work so well in his world.

In *Clouds of Witness* he is trying to save his brother (the Duke) who has been accused of murder. From their estate to Paris and back, from England to somewhere very far away, through the dangers of the moor and strange situations involving unexpectedly violent farmers, the Duke's side has their hands full. Lord Peter Wimsey, Bunter and Parker tirelessly work to find what exactly happened that night. The resolution is perfect.

I found Peter's sister annoying as hell, but I guess certain things can be forgiven under the circumstances.

Beside Lord Peter Wimsey, Bunter and Parker, one of my favourite characters ever is the Dowager Duchess.

'My dear child, you can give it a long name if you like, but I'm an old-fashioned woman and I call it mother-wit, and it's so rare for a man to have it that if he does you write a book about him and call him Sherlock Holmes.'

I'll avoid quoting half of the book, but its greatest strength is the humour. Some of it is profound, some ordinary, but it is never dull.

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## **Susan says**

This delightful mystery is the second featuring Lord Peter Wimsey. When his brother, the Duke of Denver, is accused of murder then it is Lord Peter's job to clear his name. The Duke is found standing over the body of his sister's fiancé, who he has recently argued with about claims that the victim, Captain Denis Cathcart, was a card sharp. However, when questioned, he refuses to give a reasonable account of why he was wandering around outside, in the middle of the night. Why is he being so secretive and what is their sister, Mary, hiding?

This is a wonderful, Golden Age mystery, with Lord Peter Wimsey and Charles Parker truly collaborating. There are some great, atmospheric scenes, most notably when Wimsey and Bunter are lost on the moors. The scenes in the House of Lords, where the Duke of Denver is tried, are also very interesting. Much of the fun in these books is in Wimsey himself and his light-hearted banter and eccentric behaviour. He is one of the greatest fictional amateur detectives and this is one of his best cases.

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