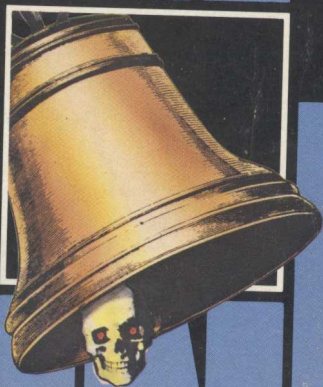


A Harvest/HBJ Book

THE



NINE
TAILORS

Dorothy L. Sayers

A LORD PETER WIMSEY MYSTERY

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THE
NINE TAILORS



CHANGES

Rung on an Old Theme

IN

TWO SHORT TOUCHES

AND

TWO FULL PEALS

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

A Harvest/HBJ Book
Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers
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THE NINE TAILORS

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THE NINE TAILORS

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WHOSE BODY?
THE UNPLEASANTNESS AT THE
BELLONA CLUB *and*
SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS

Foreword

FROM time to time complaints are made about the ringing of church bells. It seems strange that a generation which tolerates the uproar of the internal combustion engine and the wailing of the jazz band should be so sensitive to the one loud noise that is made to the glory of God. England, alone in the world, has perfected the art of change-ringing and the true ringing of bells by rope and wheel, and will not lightly surrender her unique heritage.

I have to ask the indulgence of all change-ringers for any errors I may have made in dealing with their ancient craft. The surnames used in these books are all such as I have myself encountered among the people of East Anglia, but every place and person described is wholly fictitious, as are also the sins and negligences of those entirely imaginary bodies, the Wale Conservancy Board, the Fen Drainage Board and the East Level Waterways Commission.

My grateful thanks are due to Mr. W. J. Redhead, who so kindly designed for me the noble Parish Church of Fenchurch St. Paul and set it about with cherubims.

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

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I



A SHORT TOUCH OF

KENT TREBLE BOB MAJOR



TWO COURSES

704

BY THE COURSE ENDS

64352

23456

8TH THE OBSERVATION.

*Call her in the middle with a double,
before wrong and home.*

Repeated once.

TROYTE

The Bells Are Rung Up



The coil of rope which it is necessary to hold in the hand, before, and whilst raising a bell, always puzzles a learner; it gets into his face, and perhaps round his neck (in which case he may be hanged!).

TROYTE ON CHANGE-RINGING

"THAT'S TORN IT!" said Lord Peter Wimsey.

The car lay, helpless and ridiculous, her nose deep in the ditch, her back wheels cocked absurdly up on the bank, as though she were doing her best to bolt to earth and were scraping herself a burrow beneath the drifted snow. Peering through a flurry of driving flakes, Wimsey saw how the accident had come about. The narrow, hump-backed bridge, blind as an eyeless beggar, spanned the dark drain at right angles, dropping plump down upon the narrow road that crested the dyke. Coming a trifle too fast across the bridge, blinded by the bitter easterly snowstorm, he had overshot the road and plunged down the side of the dyke into the deep ditch beyond, where the black spikes of a thorn hedge stood bleak and unwelcoming in the glare of the headlights.

Right and left, before and behind, the fen lay shrouded. It was past four o'clock and New Year's Eve; the snow that had fallen all day gave back a glimmering greyness to a sky like lead.

THE NINE TAILORS

"I'm sorry," said Wimsey. "Whereabouts do you suppose we've got to, Bunter?"

The manservant consulted a map in the ray of an electric torch.

"I think, my lord, we must have run off the proper road at Leamholt. Unless I am much mistaken, we must be near Fenchurch St. Paul."

As he spoke, the sound of a church clock, muffled by the snow, came borne upon the wind; it chimed the first quarter.

"Thank God!" said Wimsey. "Where there is a church, there is civilization. We'll have to walk it. Never mind the suitcases; we can send somebody for them. Br'rh! it's cold. I bet that when Kingsley welcomed the wild northeaster he was sitting indoors by a good fire, eating muffins. I could do with a muffin myself. Next time I accept hospitality in the Fen-country, I'll take care that it's at midsummer, or else I'll go by train. The church lies to windward of us, I fancy. It would."

They wrapped their coats about them and turned their faces to the wind and snow. To left of them, the drain ran straight as a rule could make it, black and sullen, with a steep bank shelving down to its slow, unforgiving waters. To their right was the broken line of the sunk hedge, with, here and there, a group of poplars or willows. They tramped on in silence, the snow beating on their eyelids. At the end of a solitary mile the gaunt shape of a windmill loomed up upon the farther bank of the drain, but no bridge led to it, and no light showed.

Another half-mile, and they came to a signpost and a secondary road that turned off to the right. Bunter turned his torch upon the signpost and read upon the single arm: "Fenchurch St. Paul."

There was no other direction; ahead, road and dyke marched on side by side into an eternity of winter.

"Fenchurch St. Paul for us," said Wimsey. He led the way into the side-road, and as he did so, they heard the clock again—nearer—chiming the third quarter.

A few hundred yards of solitude, and they came upon the first sign of life in this frozen desolation: on their left, the roofs of a farm, standing some way back from the road, and,

on the right, a small, square building like a box of bricks, whose sign, creaking in the blast, proclaimed it to be the Wheatsheaf public-house. In front of it stood a small, shabby car, and from windows on the ground and first floors light shone behind red blinds.

Wimsey went up to it and tried the door. It was shut, but not locked. He called out, "Anybody about?"

A middle-aged woman emerged from an inner room.

"We're not open yet," she began, abruptly.

"I beg your pardon," said Wimsey. "Our car has come to grief. Can you direct us——?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, sir. I thought you were some of the men. Your car broke down? That's bad. Come in. I'm afraid we're all in a muddle——"

"What's the trouble, Mrs. Tebbutt?" The voice was gentle and scholarly, and, as Wimsey followed the woman into a small parlour, he saw that the speaker was an elderly parson.

"The gentlemen have had an accident with their car."

"Oh, dear," said the clergyman. "Such a terrible day, too! Can I be of any assistance?"

Wimsey explained that the car was in the ditch, and would certainly need ropes and haulage to get it back to the road again.

"Dear, dear," said the clergyman again. "That would be coming over Frog's Bridge, I expect. A most dangerous place, especially in the dark. We must see what can be done about it. Let me give you a lift into the village."

"It's very good of you, sir."

"Not at all, not at all. I am just getting back to my tea. I am sure you must be wanting something to warm you up. I trust you are not in a hurry to reach your destination. We should be delighted to put you up for the night."

Wimsey thanked him very much, but said he did not want to trespass upon his hospitality.

"It will be a great pleasure," said the clergyman, courteously. "We see so little company here that I assure you you will be doing my wife and myself a great favour."

"In that case——" said Wimsey.

"Excellent, excellent."

"I'm really most grateful. Even if we could get the car

out tonight. I'm afraid the axle may be bent, and that means a blacksmith's job. But couldn't we get rooms at an inn or something? I'm really ashamed——"

"My dear sir, pray don't think twice about it. Not but what I am sure Mrs. Tebbutt here would be delighted to take you in and would make you very comfortable—very comfortable indeed; but her husband is laid up with this dreadful influenza—we are suffering from quite an epidemic of it, I am sorry to say—and I fear it would not be altogether convenient, would it, Mrs. Tebbutt?"

"Well, sir, I don't know as how we could manage very well, under the circumstances, and the Red Cow has only one room——"

"Oh, no," said the clergyman, quickly, "not the Red Cow; Mrs. Donnington has visitors already. Indeed, I will take no denial. You must positively come along to the Rectory. We have ample accommodation—too much, indeed, too much. My name, by the way, is Venables—I should have mentioned it earlier. I am, as you will have gathered, rector of the parish."

"It's extremely good of you, Mr. Venables. If we're really not putting you out, we will accept your invitation with pleasure. My name is Wimsey—here is my card—and this is my man, Bunter."

The Rector fumbled for his glasses, which, after disentangling the cord, he perched very much askew on his long nose, in order to peer at Wimsey's card.

"Lord Peter Wimsey—just so. Dear me! The name seems familiar. Have I not heard of it in connection with—ah! I have it! *Notes on the Collection of Incunabula*, of course. A very scholarly little monograph, if I may say so. Yes. Dear me. It will be charming to exchange impressions with another book-collector. My library is, I fear, limited, but I have an edition of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* that may interest you. Dear me! Yes. Delightful to have met you like this. Bless my heart, there's five o'clock striking. We must be off, or I shall get a scolding from my wife. Good afternoon, Mrs. Tebbutt. I hope your good man will be much improved by tomorrow; I really think he is looking better already."

"Thank you, sir; Tom's always so pleased to see you. I'm sure you do him a lot of good."

"Tell him to keep his spirits up. Such a nasty, depressing complaint. But he's over the worst now. I will send a little bottle of port wine as soon as he is able to take it. Tuke Holdsworth 'o8," added the Rector, in an aside to Wimsey; "couldn't harm a fly, you know. Yes. Dear me! Well! We really must be going. I'm afraid my car is not much to boast of, but there's more room in it than one would think. Many's the christening party we've managed to squeeze into it, eh, Mrs. Tebbutt? Will you sit beside me, Lord Peter? Your man and your—dear me! have you any luggage? . . . Ah! down at Frog's Bridge? I will send my gardener to fetch it. It will be quite safe where it is; we're all honest people about here, aren't we, Mrs. Tebbutt? That's right. You must have this rug about your legs—yes, I insist. No, no, thank you. I can start her up quite well. I am so well accustomed to do it. There, you see! A few good pulls and she comes up as brisk as a bell. All right behind, my man? Good. Excellent. *Good* afternoon, Mrs. Tebbutt!"

The ancient car, shuddering to her marrow-bones, lurched away down the straight and narrow road. They passed a cottage, and then, quite suddenly, on their right, there loomed out of the whirling snow a grey, gigantic bulk.

"Great Heavens!" exclaimed Wimsey, "is that your church?"

"Yes, indeed," said the Rector, with pride. "You find it impressive?"

"Impressive!" said Wimsey. "Why, it's like a young cathedral. I'd no idea. How big is your parish, then?"

"You'll be surprised when I tell you," said the Rector, with a chuckle. "Three hundred and forty souls—no more. Astonishing, is it not? But you find the same thing all over the Fens. East Anglia is famous for the size and splendour of its parish churches. Still, we flatter ourselves we are almost unique, even in this part of the world. It was an abbey foundation, and in the old days Fenchurch St. Paul must have been quite an important place. How high should you say our tower was?"

Wimsey gazed up at the great pile.

"It's difficult to tell in this darkness. Not less than a hundred and thirty feet, surely."

"Not a bad guess. A hundred and twenty-eight, to be exact, to the top of the pinnacles, but it looks more, because of the comparative lowness of the clerestory roof. There aren't many to beat us. St. Peter Mancroft, of course—but that's a town church. And St. Michael's, Coventry, is one hundred and thirty feet without the spire. But I would venture to back Fenchurch St. Paul against them all for beauty of proportion. You will see that better when we turn the corner. Here we are. I always blow my horn here; the wall and the trees make it so very dangerous. I sometimes think we ought to have the churchyard wall set back a little, in the public interest. Ah! now you get a little idea. Very fine, is it not, the piling of the aisle and clerestory? You will be able to judge better in daylight. Here is the Rectory—just opposite the church. I always blow my horn at the gate for fear anybody should be about. The bushes make it so very dark. Ah! safely negotiated. I'm sure you will be glad to get into the warm and have a cup of tea—or possibly something stronger. I always blow my horn at the door, so as to tell my wife I am back. She gets nervous when I am out after lighting-up time; the dykes and drains make these roads so very awkward, and I am not as young as I was. I fear I am already a little late. Ah! here is my wife. Agnes, my dear, I am sorry to be a little behind time, but I have brought a guest back with me. He has had an accident with his car and will stay the night with us. The rug! Allow me! I fear that seat is something of a *res angusta*. Pray be careful of your head. Ah! all is well. My dear—Lord Peter Wimsey."

Mrs. Venables, a plump and placid figure in the lamp-light from the open door, received the invasion with competent tranquillity.

"How fortunate that my husband should have met you. An accident? I do hope you are not hurt. I always say these roads are perfect death-traps."

"Thank you," said Wimsey. "There is no harm done. We stupidly ran off the road—at Frog's Bridge, I understand."

"A very nasty place—quite a mercy you didn't go into the Thirty-foot Drain. Do come in and sit down and get your-

selves warm. Your man? Yes, of course. Emily! Take this gentleman's manservant into the kitchen and make him comfortable."

"And tell Hinkins to take the car and go down to Frog's Bridge for the luggage," added the Rector. "He will find Lord Peter's car there. He had better go at once, before the weather gets worse. And, Emily! tell him to send over to Wilderspin and arrange to get the car out of the dyke."

"Tomorrow morning will do for that," said Wimsey.

"To be sure. First thing tomorrow morning. Wilderspin is the blacksmith—an excellent fellow. He will see to the matter most competently. Dear me, yes! And now, come in, come in! We want our tea. Agnes, my dear, have you explained to Emily that Lord Peter will be staying the night?"

"That will be all right," said Mrs. Venables, soothingly. "I do hope, Theodore, you have not caught cold."

"No, no, my dear. I have been well wrapped up. Dear me, yes! Hal! What do I see? Muffins?"

"I was just wishing for muffins," said Wimsey.

"Sit down, sit down and make a good meal. I'm sure you must be famished. I have seldom known such bitter weather. Would you prefer a whisky-and-soda, perhaps?"

"Tea for me," said Wimsey. "How jolly all this looks! Really, Mrs. Venables, it's tremendously good of you to take pity upon us."

"I'm only so glad to be able to help," said Mrs. Venables, smiling cheerfully. "Really, I don't think there's anything to equal the dreariness of these fen roads in winter. It's most fortunate your accident landed you comparatively close to the village."

"It is indeed." Wimsey gratefully took in the cosy sitting-room, with its little tables crowded with ornaments, its fire roaring behind a chaste canopy of velvet overmantel, and the silver tea-vessel winking upon the polished tray. "I feel like Ulysses, come to port after much storm and peril."

He bit gratefully into a large and buttery muffin.

"Tom Tebbutt seems a good deal better today," observed the Rector. "Very unfortunate that he should be laid up just now, but we must be thankful that it is no worse. I only hope there are no further casualties. Young Pratt will manage very well, I think; he went through two long