

Unlikely Traitors

by

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"For the laws of nature (as justice, equity, modesty, mercy, and, in sum, doing to others as we would be done to) of themselves, without the terror of some power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to partiality, pride, revenge and the like.

**Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan or The Matter, Forme and Power of
A Commonwealth, Ecclesiastical and Civil. 1651**

PART ONE

ENGLAND

CHAPTER ONE

CHESTER SQUARE, LONDON

JANUARY 16th, 1913

It all started with a revolver. At least in Ursula's mind it did. Not the arrest. Not Chief Inspector Harrison's face or even Lord Wrotham's impassive response. No, it was the revolver that Harrison laid on the table that started it all, its blue tinged metal barrel glinting as it caught the electric light of the standard lamp that illuminated Ursula's front parlor. As the scene unfolded she felt as though she was watching herself on a Pathé newsreel – the horror of the situation creating an illusory distance between her body and her mind. But with her hand poised in mid air, like a half finished sentence, Ursula was close enough to read the inscription, *Webley & Scott, Birmingham & London*, stamped on the revolver's cylinder bridge. The diamond-checked wooden grip was already worn from use and she shivered. Ursula could imagine the caption on the screen. *Rather than risk dishonor, the Lord chose death.*

“My Lord,” Chief Inspector Harrison's voice cut through the close-held silence. Ursula's gaze shifted and searched Lord Oliver Wrotham's face for some kind of reaction, but his countenance refused to yield to scrutiny. He stood beside the mahogany side table, casting a long shadow across the Oriental rug. Amid the tangled vines and intricate scrolls of the pattern, his silhouette looked like a sleek black panther waiting in ambush.

The way Harrison had placed the revolver on the table as he announced he was making the arrest seemed an obsolete, chivalric gesture but one that appalled Ursula. There was no doubting the implication: Lord Wrotham had best turn the gun on himself rather than face public disgrace.

“You cannot seriously consider this an option!” Ursula exclaimed.

Lord Wrotham remained motionless. His blue-grey eyes fixed upon the gun, he gave no sign of having heard her.

“I can leave the room and let your lordship decide,” Harrison said.

Lord Wrotham gave an almost imperceptible nod.

Ursula grabbed Lord Wrotham’s arm. “What are you doing?!” she cried.

“Miss Marlow,” Harrison said, stepping forward as if he were about to restrain a recalcitrant child. “You really should wait outside.”

Ursula’s grip tightened until Lord Wrotham, with slow deliberate movements, unfurled each of her fingers and moved her hand aside. Ursula rubbed her hand; his reaction had been like a slap in the face, only the sting was sharper. How could he fail to understand her anguish? Why did he not proclaim his innocence?

“I’m not going anywhere,” she informed Harrison, “until you tell me the full details of the charges.” Her head held high, hazel eyes ablaze, she tried to hold back her turmoil. She tried to replace it with outrage, but the distance the initial shock had brought, the sense that she was

watching film footage, had gone. Lord Wrotham's reaction had ensured that. She felt battered by the weight, the full impact of that terrible word. *Treason*.

Harrison looked down at the floor and kicked one of the table legs with the toe of his polished black shoe.

"Chief Inspector?" Ursula pressed.

"If you insist..." he said slowly, "though you would think a lady would rather not hear such things."

Ursula felt the old flash of indignation and was thankful. Maybe if she could claw back her anger she would find the strength she so desperately needed. Yet she knew Chief Inspector Harrison well enough by now not to overreact. Despite Harrison's continued distrust of Ursula's various causes, especially female suffrage and socialism, he had begun to show a begrudging respect for a woman who now ran her father's textile empire, and who had, on at least two occasions, helped him solve a murder investigation.

Throughout both of these investigations, Lord Wrotham had been a constant presence, one from which she drew the strength as well as the will to stand on her own. Now she felt as though all that resolve was little more than chalk crumbling in her hands. Perhaps anger would provide its own measure of comfort, thought Ursula, and she drew herself up, summoning its force, before answering.

"You know me better than this Chief Inspector. I'm hardly the sort to take to my smelling salts or be left in ignorance like some weak-minded fool who prefers to bury her head in the

sand. How can Lord Wrotham possibly be expected to defend himself when he has no idea what these charges are?” Ursula’s voice shook but refused to break.

“Oh, I think it’s safe to say that his Lordship is well aware of the circumstances leading to these charges – and what is at stake here,” Harrison responded coldly. “You only have to see his countenance, Miss Marlow, to know that’s the truth of it.”

Ursula’s throat tightened. Hot tears pricked her eyes. God, why did Lord Wrotham not speak? Why did he remain tight-lipped and silent? She knew from experience that he had the strength to maintain his self-composure in the face of great upheaval but, even for him, this impassivity and silence was chilling. Had she misjudged him so badly?

“Regardless,” Ursula replied, steadying herself with one hand on the back of the Mackmurdo couch. “I need to know what this is all about.”

Harrison drew out the arrest warrant from the inside pocket of his dark grey jacket. The normally creaseless three-piece suit looked crumpled and worn and Ursula noticed there were mud splashes across his shoes and trouser cuffs. She felt some satisfaction when she saw Harrison’s hands shake as he unfolded the arrest warrant – he was no more immune to the horror of the situation than she.

Harrison began to read aloud.

“Lord Oliver Wrotham, Seventh Baron of Wrotham, King’s Counsel and Member of the House of Lords, is hereby charged with high treason against His Majesty King George the Fifth and his government in that he did willfully and of his own volition conspire to assassinate members of His Majesty’s government and family and sell vital information pertaining to British

naval fortifications to representatives of Kaiser Wilhelm the Second, the Irish Republican Brotherhood and other foreign interests. In exchange for said information, Lord Wrotham is charged with seeking promises of military assistance from Germany for an armed uprising in Ireland, with aiding and abetting in the overthrow of the British administration in Ireland, and, by extension, the overthrow of His Majesty's government."

Harrison paused. Ursula waited but there came no defiant disavowals, no challenges from a man who spent his life as a barrister. Lord Wrotham remained rigid, his eyes like polished granite, saying nothing.

The allegations set out in the arrest warrant, at least, provided Ursula with some measure of relief.

"I've never heard anything so ridiculous in my life!" she exclaimed. "Lord Wrotham's views on the 'Irish Question' and Ulster are well known. As a Unionist he is hardly likely to seek aid for an Irish rebellion – and as for conspiring to assassinate members of the government or the Royal family – that's utterly preposterous!"

Ursula and Lord Wrotham held diametrically opposing views on the 'Irish Question' and she was sure Lord Wrotham would never change his pro-Unionist beliefs. He could no more be a supporter of an Irish Republic than she could be a supporter of the anti- suffrage Primrose League.

Harrison's jaw clenched. "Men are not always what they seem," he answered. "It is the mark of a traitor that he can so easily deceive those who are close to him." The bitterness in his voice was a reminder of how deeply felt Lord Wrotham's betrayal was for him. Although Ursula

had never discovered the precise nature of the debt owed by Harrison to Lord Wrotham, she knew their friendship stretched back to the time when Harrison's family was tenant farmers on the Wrotham's Northamptonshire estate.

"You cannot honestly believe these charges," Ursula urged. "They are patently absurd. You, who have known him for years, cannot believe Lord Wrotham is a traitor to his country."

"Ursula, please." Lord Wrotham's voice cut through their exchange. "As much as I appreciate your stalwart defense, Harrison is just performing his duty."

"How can you remain so calm?!" she asked hotly, spinning round to face him once more. Lord Wrotham's physical presence, normally so unfaltering appeared to waver. In the fading afternoon light, as the recesses of the room grew increasingly dim and spectral, she was no longer sure she could distinguish the shadow from the man.

"Believe me Miss Marlow," Harrison intervened. "This is no easy task for me." His hands were still unsteady as he folded the arrest warrant and placed it back in his pocket. "I promise you, these charges are not without adequate foundation. We have both witnesses and documentary evidence that clearly implicates Lord Wrotham. If Admiral Smythe was here, he would, no doubt, reassure you that a man such as he would never bring such charges lightly."

Lord Wrotham watched Harrison's face closely. "You've spoken with Admiral Smythe?" he asked. Ursula frowned, there was a hidden implication beneath his words that she could not grasp.

Harrison's raised his eyebrows. "Admiral Smythe was reported missing by his housekeeper this morning."

Lord Wrotham inhaled sharply and for first time since Harrison's arrival, his composure slipped. "But I saw him just yesterday. He and I dined at the club together."

Ursula sensed his fear and dug her fingernails into palms of her hands. She had certainly heard of Admiral Smythe, but, apart from knowing that he and Lord Wrotham were old friends from Balliol College, Oxford, she knew little else about him. As far she was aware, Lord Wrotham and Admiral Smythe met exclusively at the Carlton Club and, despite her recent engagement to Lord Wrotham, she had never been introduced to the Admiral.

"You sound surprised," Harrison replied coolly. "And yet it was Admiral Smythe's file that led us to you. Perhaps you know more about his fate than anyone else." There was a cold edge of suspicion in his voice. The two men regarded each other warily. A lock of dark hair fell across Lord Wrotham's face and he brushed it away roughly with his fingers.

"The file was found in his study," Harrison continued, watching Lord Wrotham's reaction closely.

Lord Wrotham gripped the edge of the chair. "And just what does this file purport to contain?"

Harrison frowned. "Surely you must know? Or at least had your suspicions? Why else would the Admiral now be missing?" Ursula noted that the East End accent Harrison tried so hard to suppress was creeping back, coloring his words with its rough nasal inflection.

"Lord Wrotham is hardly likely to arrange Admiral Smythe's 'disappearance' and then leave an incriminating file to be found, now is he?" Ursula interjected but neither man seemed to be listening.

“Have you any idea where Admiral Smythe might be?” Lord Wrotham asked Harrison.

“We have no information about his whereabouts” – Harrison hesitated – “No one has seen him since he left the Carlton Club yesterday. His housekeeper called Scotland Yard this morning when she discovered he had not come home last night. Given who he is, we started our investigations immediately.”

Ursula opened her mouth to speak but Harrison silenced her with his hand.

“I think we have wasted enough time. My Lord” – Harrison directed himself to Lord Wrotham now – “I can take you down to the Yard directly or” – he paused – “if you would prefer?” Harrison motioned his head toward the revolver that still lay on the table.

“I appreciate that, Harrison,” Lord Wrotham replied and even his voice seemed to have lost its resonance. “This won’t take long.”

“Very well,” Harrison replied somberly. “Miss Marlow, if you will kindly come with me.” He gestured for her to follow.

Ursula shook her head. This was not how it was going to end. She may feel like a terrified animal caught in a snare but, by God, she would not leave this room until she had the truth from Lord Wrotham. She was not about to let the man she loved leave her. Not like this.

Harrison, white-faced and defeated, seemed unable to summon the strength to argue. His own inner struggle was etched on his face. The thought of leaving a man to his death, especially a man whom Harrison had known and trusted for the last ten years, had taken its toll.

“Could I prevail upon you to allow Miss Marlow a moment with me alone?” Lord Wrotham interceded. “You have my word I shall make no attempt to flee or in any way compromise your investigation, but Miss Marlow deserves at least an explanation before...” Lord Wrotham let the implication hang in the air. Harrison, his face contorted by emotions barely held in check, nodded quickly and exited the room.

Lord Wrotham picked up the revolver, holding it first in one hand and then the other.

“You aren’t actually thinking of going through with it?” Ursula asked.

“I see no alternative,” he said.

Despite his words, he placed the revolver back on the table.

“How can you say that?”

Lord Wrotham did not reply. There was no explanation. Only grim silence.

“You didn’t even question the charges,” Ursula said, lowering herself onto the sofa before her legs gave way altogether. The cool folds of the silken upholstery provided a welcome respite.

“No,” Lord Wrotham eventually replied, and she noticed the slight tremble in his hands as he lit and raised a cigarette to his lips. “If it has come to this then it can mean only one thing.”

Ursula closed her eyes. “And that is?”

“I shall hang.”

Ursula's body started to shake uncontrollably. "How can you be so?—" she could speak no further.

Lord Wrotham sat down beside her on the Mackmurdo sofa. He closed his eyes for a moment and let the cigarette fall limp between his fingers. Ursula reached out and clasped his wrist. She closed her eyes and let the world, in all its senses and sounds, fade away. The rhythm of his pulse under her thumb seemed to be the only thing that stirred in the stagnant stillness of the room.

"This cannot be happening," Ursula whispered. Lord Wrotham sat motionless beside her. "I thought we had finally found happiness..."

With a flash of anguish across his grey-blue eyes, Lord Wrotham yanked his hand away from hers and the world, in all its cacophony, came crashing back into the room. The call of the newspaper boy on the street corner, the shriek of tires as a motor car drew up next door, the muffled voices of the policemen in the hallway – all seemed deafening to Ursula's heightened senses.

Lord Wrotham pressed the palm of his hands against his temple, the cigarette between his fingers still smoldering, unnoticed. "God, Ursula. If there was any other way...I would do anything to save you from this, but I have no choice. I will not risk exposing you to society's utter condemnation. I cannot face a trial knowing what it will do to you and my family."

"Even if you are innocent?" Ursula voice was hoarse. "For I cannot believe—"

The clock on the mantel struck the hour with four long, solemn chimes. Ursula stared blankly at the fireplace adorned with glazed green and blue tiles. Above the fireplace, framed

against the eggshell blue walls, was a simple silver mirror, juxtaposed by two paintings by Kandinsky. Her eyes caught sight of the Liberty Tudric pewter bowl Lord Wrotham had given her, and their latest acquisition, the first piece of pottery they had ever bought together – A Ruskin high-fired, blue-vein vase.

She blinked back her tears once more.

Lord Wrotham tossed the cigarette into the fire. “What would you say if I told you the accusations were true?”

His face was inscrutable.

Ursula stared at him. “Then you may as well hand me the revolver and I will shoot you myself. Because if what Harrison said was actually true, then all that I know about you, all that I love about you, would be false.”

They faced each other squarely. Lord Wrotham’s eyelids flickered.

Ursula held her breath.

“I am no traitor,” he said slowly, “but I am bound by an obligation of secrecy which I cannot break. All I can tell you is that Admiral Smythe’s disappearance makes that obligation all the more confounding. Without him, I cannot defend myself against the charges made.”

Ursula felt a surge of adrenaline accompanying his words. At least now there was something tangible, something solid, she could grasp. He had confirmed his innocence and, amid all the uncertainty and fear, maybe this was her opportunity to prove herself worthy of his

confidence. There were many locked doors in Lord Wrotham's life. She was determined to open this one.

"Let me try and find the Admiral," she urged.

He shook his head. "I fear it is too late," he replied.

"I cannot believe that!" Ursula responded desperately, her sense of relief shattered. "I refuse to accept that you have no option but to shoot yourself or hang for a crime you did not commit!"

Lord Wrotham shuddered. "I've run through it over and over and I cannot...the alternative would be ruin for you. I will not subject you to that, no matter that I am innocent."

"Trust in me then!" she responded vehemently. "Trust that I will uncover the truth and clear your name."

He looked up with a faint, cynical smile. "Ursula, you cannot be expected to perform miracles."

"Damn it! I'm serious. I've a brain in my head haven't I? Need I remind you of the other cases I've helped with?"

"This is different," Lord Wrotham said.

"I'm not offering you a choice," Ursula retorted. "Why do you insist on being so utterly pig-headed?" She gathered up her breath to continue but something in the set of his jaw made her hopes sink. "Oh God, spare me from the Englishmen's sense of honor," she muttered, "and here I was thinking I was engaged to an intelligent" – She got no further before Lord Wrotham

gathered her up in his arms and kissed her. For a moment she thought he was actually going to accept her offer, but then she felt him pull back and knew, with a stab of pain, that he was refusing her.

“I do this for you!” he said roughly. “I could not bear the pain this will inflict on you. I will not allow you to risk everything for me.”

“So you still doubt me?” she whispered.

Chief Inspector Harrison pounded on the door to the parlor. “My Lord!” he shouted.

“It is not you that I doubt,” Lord Wrotham said, ignoring Harrison. He scrutinized her with searching eyes. “I always knew there was a possibility that it would come to this.”

“I will not let you take your own life – not like this, not now,” Ursula replied, gripping his wrists once more.

“Ursula.” Lord Wrotham extricated himself from her grasp. “Don’t make this any harder than it already is. Say your goodbyes now and leave this room.”

Her heart, which had been pounding so hard and furiously that her chest felt fit to burst, gave a sudden spasm. She moved quickly and was beside the table, the revolver in her hand, before Lord Wrotham could stop her. She held the gun unsteadily with the barrel pointing at her chest. She expected Lord Wrotham to be angry but instead her actions appeared to sap the last of his strength. He stood with his arms hanging by his sides, looking gaunt and pale, like one of the ‘penitent proud’ weighed down by heavy stones in Dante’s *Purgatorio*.

“My Lord!” Chief Inspector Harrison pounded once more on the door.

“What is it to be then?” Ursula asked shakily. “Both our deaths or the possibility of reprieve if you let me try and help you?”

The parlor door burst open and Harrison entered accompanied by two uniformed policemen. “Miss Marlow,” he stammered as he saw the revolver in her hand.

Ursula took a step back, and the cliff-edge to which she had forced them both, fell away.

“As you can see, Chief Inspector, we won’t be needing this.” Ursula handed over the revolver carefully. “In the future,” she said. “You and Lord Wrotham should leave such dramatics to me.”

Harrison stared at her in astonishment.

Lord Wrotham walked over to the fireplace, took his silver cigarette case out, and opened it with steadying hands. He lit another cigarette and inhaled deeply.

After a minute of silence, Lord Wrotham spoke, this time in the smooth, even tones he used as King’s Counsel summing up a case before the High Court.

“Please advise Pemberton what has happened.” Lord Wrotham’s lips curled as he spoke. “See if he will deign to represent me. He’s the best criminal barrister I know.” The coldness of his tone was unbearable but, before she had time to respond, he started speaking again.

“I’m afraid I must also rely on you to break the news to mother.” Lord Wrotham was in full mastery of his self-control now, and his face had assumed the cold, angular aloofness that she remembered from their first meeting. “While you may not require smelling salts,” he

continued, “she most certainly will.” He paused. “You’d also best let James drive you to Bromley Hall, he’s more familiar with the roads.”

Ursula looked at him blankly. She had visited Bromley Hall on numerous occasions and both she and Samuels, her own driver, knew the way there – but there was something subtle yet purposeful in his tone of voice and, though she did not think Harrison or the other police constables present detected it, she suspected there was a hidden significance to Lord Wrotham’s choice of his own chauffeur.

Ursula nodded her head, her eyes never leaving his.

“Tomorrow,” Lord Wrotham said, “you must also place a notice in *The Times*, calling off our engagement.”

Ursula’s head jerked back.

“No, Ursula, this is not a subject for negotiation,” he said calmly. “By morning this will be in all the newspapers. It will no doubt cause some measure of public hysteria and you will be the object of intense scrutiny. You should profess utter disgust and horror at the charges and, if necessary, toward me. No”– Ursula opened her mouth to protest–“it is the only way. Anything else and you expose yourself to vilification.”

Ursula shook her head. “But you are innocent! I will not abandon you. Not in private. Not in public. I will stand by you.” Even as she spoke, however, the truth of the situation started to sink in. She knew better than anyone else the power of scandal; she had been exposed to it enough by now. The magnitude of this case could overrun her entirely. No one would do

business with anyone associated with an alleged traitor – not with the ever-present threat of war with Germany.

“Ursula,” Lord Wrotham said quietly. “There is no other way.”

She scrubbed her eyes fiercely with the cuffs of her tailored silk blouse. Part of her wanted to launch into an indignant tirade, but the other part of her, a quiet and insistent voice within, knew he was right. Her only means of survival was to call off their engagement and distance herself from him.

“You must pass on my regards to Admiral Smythe’s family,” Lord Wrotham continued, less evenly. “And yours too. Express our deep concern for the Admiral’s safe return. I’ve been a close friend of the family for many years and I would hate them to think” – Lord Wrotham stopped and Ursula, sensing his self control was finally faltering, automatically interjected.

“But of course.”

Harrison shifted from one foot to the other. “My apologies, my Lord,” he said. “But my orders were to bring you in immediately. I really cannot delay any further.”

“I understand, Chief Inspector,” Lord Wrotham answered as he threw the cigarette butt into the fireplace. He straightened his black cashmere frockcoat, flipped open his fob watch, checked the time with a quick glance, and tucked it into his waistcoat pocket once more. Then, presenting the very image of the composed urbane gentleman, he said, “I’m ready.”

One of the uniformed policemen, head glistening with hair oil, walked forward, struggling to undo a pair of handcuffs.

“Jackson!” Harrison exclaimed. “Those will hardly be necessary. We are dealing with a gentleman here, not your common or garden criminal!”

The young police constable turned beet red, halted, and stood in the middle of the room. “Oh, sorry...I mean, pardon...pardon me, my Lord...” he stumbled over his words.

Lord Wrotham regarded him impassively. “Please,” he replied with a shrug. “No need to apologize.”

That night, Ursula sat in her study, staring at the fire. Her feet were curled up in the chair and a plate of supper lay discarded and uneaten on the floor beside her. Chief Inspector Harrison had refused to allow her to accompany Lord Wrotham to Scotland Yard, where he was to be formally charged and placed in protective custody. Instead, she had been forced to remain at home, like some domestic pet, caged and abandoned. Ursula, never one to tolerate captivity easily, had spent the next two hours restlessly pacing the room and making telephone calls.

The first call she made was to Sir Robert Pemberton KC, who sounded as though he had just returned to his Mayfair home from a long, late lunch at White’s. His response was one of bewilderment, but in slightly halting tones (he had obviously indulged in some fine wine over the course of the afternoon), he assured her he would go directly to Scotland Yard and apply for Lord Wrotham’s release on bail. Ursula knew there was little likelihood of bail being granted but regardless she clung to that hope and waited anxiously by the front parlor window. By nine o’clock it was clear Lord Wrotham was not returning and she stalked back into the study. Since making this first telephone call, Ursula had spoken to no one else except Biggs, her butler, who,

upon hearing the news of Lord Wrotham's arrest, paled but otherwise gave no outward indications of alarm. The fact that he promptly returned with a strong cup of coffee was comfortingly predictable, although Ursula had been surprised to find it was liberally laced with whiskey.

By ten o'clock Ursula was frantic. How she wished her good friend Winifred ('Freddie') Stanford-Jones was here rather than on an extended lecture tour of the United States. Freddie had long been missed, having left for New York almost six weeks ago, but now Ursula felt entirely bereft.

Not knowing what else to do, Ursula contemplated calling Hugh Carmichael, her business partner and friend, but knew he would only insist on rushing to London to try and help and she feared that would only fuel further rumors. London society already viewed her as an improper and unsuitable match for Lord Wrotham and she wanted to avoid any additional speculation that she was turning to another man in her 'hour of need'. Having been the subject of many a lurid story, she knew all too well how the newspapers could manipulate the truth.

Ursula collapsed on the chair next to her father's desk and buried her head in her hands. She felt she had to speak to someone or she would go mad. She picked up the telephone receiver, hesitated, replaced it again, and then finally placed a call to Gerard Anderson, her father's old business colleague and her financial advisor. Ursula regretted her decision as soon as she heard his voice. Anderson, would, of course, focus on the potential business losses a scandal of this magnitude was likely to inflict. He was incapable of providing her the comfort she yearned for. *What was she thinking?*

After fifteen minutes of expressing his disbelief and outlining all the worst case scenarios possible for Marlow Industries, Anderson finally said, "I'm proud of you, Ursula. Your telephoning me shows you've finally learned to think with your head rather than your heart." His words left her feeling cold and empty. *Was this the woman she had really become? The sort of woman who called her business colleagues ahead of her friends?*

This dreadful thought depressed her still further until she found, to her astonishment, she was lifting the receiver once more to call Mrs. Eudora Pomfrey-Smith. Mrs. Pomfrey-Smith had been her father's paramour and, ever since his death, she had attempted to act as Ursula's guide through the intricacies of London society. For the past three years Ursula had rebuffed most of her offers for 'societal assistance,' but tonight she felt she had no one else to turn to.

"My dear!" Mrs. Pomfrey-Smith cried as Ursula broke the news. "You shall be ruined!" Ursula nearly hung up the receiver then and there, but Mrs. Pomfrey-Smith, with what Ursula could only imagine was an ingrained sense of loyalty to her father, immediately offered her unbridled support. Motherless since she was a child, Ursula had always spurned Mrs. Pomfrey-Smith's kindness in the past, feeling somehow that it would be an affront to her mother's memory. The lone voice of maternal kindness now reduced her to sobs. Ursula agreed to let Mrs. Pomfrey-Smith place the notice in *The Times* calling off her engagement. It was a task too terrible for her to bear.

After the drama of the afternoon, the restless pacing and the telephone calls, the mantel clock finally struck eleven and the house fell eerily quiet. Ursula dismissed Biggs and ignored her maid Julia's entreaties to come upstairs and get some sleep. Instead, she sat, alone and weary, amid the books and papers that once belonged to her father. Inside her head a thousand questions

screamed, but she had exhausted her tears. She wasn't the same woman she was three years ago when her father had been taken from her. She had defied society's dire predictions and proven herself to be a successful businesswoman. She had built a life of her own, in which she remained true to her principles as best she could. Yet without Lord Wrotham it felt as if a piece of her soul had already been carved away and she was bleeding internally. The lack of him, the absence of him, was palpable in the room.

Ursula was in danger of sinking into a deep depression when she reminded herself that Lord Wrotham was innocent. He had assured her of that. And despite all his protestations and stiff upper lip, he needed her help. It was this need that revived her. It helped her focus the questions in her mind. She got up and walked across the room to the window, clearing her head with each step and reaffirming her determination to remain undaunted. Courage, she told herself, courage and conscience. That was all she needed to defy them all.