



SPIDER'S WEB

by Agatha Christie

|| **SAMUEL FRENCH** ||

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SPIDER'S WEB was first produced by Peter Saunders at the Savoy Theatre, London on December 14, 1954. The performance was directed by Wallace Douglas, with sets by Michael Weight. The cast was as follows:

SIR ROWLAND DELAHAYE Felix Aylmer
HUGO BIRCH Harold Scott
JEREMY WARRENDER Myles Eason
CLARISSA HAILSHAM-BROWN Margaret Lockwood
PIPPA HAILSHAM-BROWN Margaret Barton
MILDRED PEAKE Judith Furse
ELGIN Sidney Monckton
OLIVER COSTELLO Charles Morgan
HENRY HAILSHAM-BROWN John Warwick
INSPECTOR LORD Campbell Singer
CONSTABLE JONES Desmond Llewelyn

CHARACTERS

SIR ROWLAND DELAHAYE
HUGO BIRCH
JEREMY WARRENDER
CLARISSA HAILSHAM-BROWN
PIPPA HAILSHAM-BROWN
MILDRED PEAKE
ELGIN
OLIVER COSTELLO
HENRY HAILSHAM-BROWN
INSPECTOR LORD
CONSTABLE JONES

NOTES ON CASTING

HENRY HAILSHAM-BROWN may double with **CONSTABLE JONES**.

OLIVER COSTELLO may double with the voice of the **DOCTOR**.

Minimum number of performers: 12.

SETTING & TIME

The action of the play passes in the drawing-room of Coplestone Court, the Hailsham-Browns' home in Kent.

ACT I

An evening in March.

ACT II

Scene One: A quarter of an hour later.

Scene Two: Ten minutes later.

ACT III

A few minutes later.

NOTES ON SENSITIVE TERMINOLOGY

Language used by the author in her stage directions and by her characters to describe religion, gender, sexuality, race and class is of the period in which the play was first performed. We are confident that the author's intention was to be neutral within the stage directions - not to convey anything other than the facts of the characteristics relevant to a character's portrayal. The dialogue, however, is the embodiment of the character speaking and must express his or her intentions at that point in the play. This means that the author will have chosen terminology to be spoken with varying degrees of precision, sensitivity and, possibly, deliberate insensitivity according to the character and the circumstances in which he or she is speaking.

In our published version, therefore, we have applied the following logic:

- In stage directions, we have used terminology which is as neutral and factual as can be conceived, knowing that this will sometimes still fail.
- In dialogue, we have preserved the author's words as originally written.

We license this play on the basis that terms used in dialogue relevant to the religion, gender, sexuality, race and class of these characters may be changed in production to whichever best convey the author's intention for the audience. Sometimes this will be a neutral term, sometimes it will be a term which reflects the character's personality and/or the context in which they are speaking. Which of these applies is for directors and actors to interpret.

ACT I

(The drawing room of Copplestone Court, the Hailsham-Browns' home in Kent. An evening in March. It is a charming and comfortable room with French windows opening on to the garden. Double doors lead to the entrance hall where the foot of the staircase can be seen. Another door gives access to the library, in which there is a door that leads back to the entrance hall. There is also a concealed door or panel which is actuated by a small lever in a set of built-in bookshelves. The panel opens into the room and when open reveals a recess with a door leading to the library. The room is furnished with good quality period furniture. There is a console table with a telephone and a small, silver cigarette box on it. There is also a handsome period desk which is fitted with a secret drawer. There is a sofa with small tables either side of it and an armchair. At night the room is lit by concealed lighting behind the ceiling cornice and wall-brackets. The console table is at a right angle to the wall, and on it there is a tray with three glasses of port marked one, two and three. Also on the table is a pencil and paper. SIR ROWLAND DELAHAYE is sitting. He is aged fifty, distinguished and with very definite charm. He is blindfolded and sipping from glass number two. HUGO BIRCH is standing next to him. He is aged sixty and is a rather irascible type. He holds glass number three. HUGO and SIR ROWLAND are arguing.)

SIR ROWLAND. (*Tasting.*) I should say - yes - definitely - yes, this is the Dow '42.

(*HUGO takes the glass from SIR ROWLAND.*)

HUGO. Dow '42.

(*He hands SIR ROWLAND the next glass and notes SIR ROWLAND's opinion. SIR ROWLAND sips the port, sips again and nods affirmatively.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Ah yes, this is a wine indeed. Cockburn '27. To waste a bottle of Cockburn '27 on an experiment like this is positively sacrilegious.

(*HUGO takes the glass from him and writes. SIR ROWLAND removes the blindfold. HUGO reads from his notes.*)

HUGO. That, you say, is Cockburn '27. Number two was the Dow '42. Number one was - (*With disgust.*) Rich Ruby port type wine. Pah! Can't think why Clarissa has such a thing in the house. My turn.

(*SIR ROWLAND ties the blindfold onto HUGO.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Probably uses it for jugged hare or for flavouring soup. There you are, Hugo. Ought to turn you round three times like they do in Blind Man's Buff.

(*He leads HUGO to the chair and turns him round.*)

HUGO. Here, steady on.

(*HUGO feels for the chair.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Got it?

HUGO. Yes.

(*HUGO sits.*)

SIR ROWLAND. I'll swivel the glasses round instead.

(*He moves the glasses.*)

HUGO. No need to, think I'd be influenced by what you said? I'm as good a judge of port as you any day, Roly, my boy.

(*JEREMY WARRENDER enters by the French windows. He is an elegant young man and is wearing a raincoat. He is out of breath.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Can't be too careful.

(*He picks up glass number three.*)

JEREMY. (*Panting.*) What's going on here? The three-card trick with glasses?

(*He removes his raincoat and jacket.*)

HUGO. Who's that? Who's brought a dog into the room?

SIR ROWLAND. It's only young Warrender.

HUGO. Oh, sounds like a dog that's been chasing a rabbit.

JEREMY. Three times to the lodge gates and back in a mackintosh. The Herzoslovakian Minister did it in four minutes fifty-three seconds. I went all out but couldn't do better than six minutes ten seconds. I don't believe he did, either. Only Chris Chataway himself could do it in that time with or without a mackintosh.

SIR ROWLAND. Who told you that about the Herzoslovakian Minister?

JEREMY. Clarissa.

SIR ROWLAND. Clarissa!

HUGO. (*Snorting.*) Oh, Clarissa. Don't you pay any attention to what Clarissa tells you.

SIR ROWLAND. I'm afraid you don't know your hostess very well, Warrender. She's a young lady with a very vivid imagination.

JEREMY. Do you mean she made the whole thing up?

(*SIR ROWLAND hands glass number three to HUGO.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Well, I wouldn't put it past her.

JEREMY. You wait till I see that young woman. I'll have something to say to her. Gosh, I'm dead.

(JEREMY exits to the hall, puts his raincoat on the stairs and re-enters.)

HUGO. Stop puffing like a grampus. I want to concentrate. There's a fiver at stake. Roly and I have got a bet on.

JEREMY. Oh, what is it?

HUGO. Who's the best judge of port. We've got Cockburn '27, Dow '42 and the local grocer's special. Quiet now. This is important.

(He sips. Non-committal.)

Mmm - ah.

SIR ROWLAND. Well?

HUGO. Don't hustle me, Roly - I'm not going to rush my fences. Where's the next one?

(SIR ROWLAND hands glass number one to HUGO. He sips.)

Yes, I'm pretty sure about those two. This first one's the Dow. The second was the Cockburn.

(He hands the glasses to SIR ROWLAND, who puts them on the table and writes.)

SIR ROWLAND. Number three the Dow. Number one the Cockburn.

HUGO. Hardly necessary to taste the third, but I suppose I'd better go through with it.

(SIR ROWLAND hands HUGO glass number two.)

SIR ROWLAND. Here you are.

HUGO. *(Sipping.)* Tschah! Ugh! What unspeakable muck.

(He returns the glass to SIR ROWLAND.)

Take me an hour to get the taste out of my mouth. Here, get me out of this, Roly.

JEREMY. I'll do it.

(JEREMY removes the blindfold.)

SIR ROWLAND. So that's what you say, is it? Number two grocer's special. Rubbish! It's the Dow '42, not a doubt of it.

HUGO. Pah! You've lost your palate, Roly.

JEREMY. Let me try.

(He takes a quick sip from each glass.)

They all taste the same to me.

HUGO. You young people - it's all this confounded gin you're always drinking. Ruins your palate.

(CLARISSA HAILSHAM-BROWN enters from the library. She is aged mid-thirties to mid-forties and is an extremely vivacious character.)

CLARISSA. Hello, my darlings. Have you settled it yet?

SIR ROWLAND. Yes, Clarissa. We're ready for you.

HUGO. Number one's the Cockburn, number two's the port type stuff, three's the Dow - right, eh?

SIR ROWLAND. Nonsense, number one's the port type stuff, two's the Dow, three's the Cockburn. I'm right, aren't I?

CLARISSA. Darlings.

(She kisses HUGO, then SIR ROWLAND.)

Now, you take the tray back to the dining room. You'll find the decanter on the sideboard.

SIR ROWLAND. *The decanter?*

CLARISSA. Yes, just one decanter. It's all the same port, you know.

(JEREMY laughs.)

SIR ROWLAND. Clarissa, you unprincipled humbug.

CLARISSA. Well, it's been such a wet afternoon and you meant to play golf. You must have some fun, and you have had fun over this, darlings, haven't you?

SIR ROWLAND. Upon my soul. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, showing up your elders and betters.

HUGO. (*Laughing.*) Who was it said that he'd know Cockburn '27 anywhere?

SIR ROWLAND. Never mind, Hugo, let's have some more.

(*SIR ROWLAND picks up the tray with the glasses. He and HUGO exit to the hall. HUGO closes the doors.*)

JEREMY. Now then, Clarissa, what's all this about the Herzoslovakian Minister?

CLARISSA. What about him?

JEREMY. Did he ever run to the lodge gates and back, in a mackintosh, three times in four minutes fifty-three seconds?

CLARISSA. The Herzoslovakian Minister is a dear, but he's well over sixty and I doubt very much if he's run anywhere for years.

JEREMY. So, you did make the whole thing up. Why?

CLARISSA. You've been complaining all day about not getting enough exercise.

JEREMY. Clarissa, do you ever speak the truth?

CLARISSA. Of course I do - sometimes. But when I am speaking the truth nobody ever seems to believe me. It's very odd. I suppose when you're making things up, you get carried away and that makes it sound more convincing.

JEREMY. I might have broken a blood vessel. Fat lot you'd have cared about that.

(*She moves to the French windows.*)

CLARISSA. (*Laughing.*) I do believe it's clearing up. It's going to be a lovely evening. How delicious the garden smells after rain.

(*She sniffs.*)

Narcissus.

JEREMY. Do you really like living down here in the country?

CLARISSA. Love it.

JEREMY. You must get bored to death. It's all so incongruous for you, Clarissa. You ought to lead a gay life in London.

CLARISSA. What - parties and night clubs?

JEREMY. You'd make a brilliant hostess.

CLARISSA. It sounds like an Edwardian novel. Anyway, diplomatic parties are terribly dull.

JEREMY. But it's such a waste.

(*He tries to put his hand on her but she withdraws.*)

CLARISSA. Of me?

JEREMY. Yes. Then there's Henry.

CLARISSA. What about Henry?

JEREMY. I can't imagine why you ever married him. Years older than you, with a daughter at school. An excellent man, I have no doubt, but of all the pompous stuffed shirts. Going about looking like a boiled owl. Dull as ditchwater. No sense of humour -

(*CLARISSA looks at JEREMY and smiles.*)

- oh, I suppose you think I oughtn't to say these things.

CLARISSA. Oh, I don't mind. Say anything you like.

JEREMY. (*Eagerly.*) So you do realise that you've made a mistake?

CLARISSA. But I haven't made a mistake. (*Teasingly.*) Are you making immoral advances to me, Jeremy?

JEREMY. Definitely.

CLARISSA. How lovely. Go on.

JEREMY. I love you.

CLARISSA. (*Cheerfully.*) I'm so glad.

JEREMY. That's entirely the wrong answer. You ought to say, "I'm so sorry," in a deep, sympathetic voice.

CLARISSA. But I'm not sorry. I'm delighted. I *like* people to be in love with me. Would you do anything in the world for me?

JEREMY. (*Eagerly.*) Anything.

CLARISSA. Really? Supposing I murdered someone, would you help... No, I must stop.

JEREMY. No, go on.

CLARISSA. You said just now did I ever get bored?

JEREMY. Yes.

CLARISSA. Well, I suppose in a way I do, or rather I might if it wasn't for my private hobby.

JEREMY. Oh, what is it?

CLARISSA. You see, Jeremy, my life has always been peaceful and happy. Nothing exciting ever happens, so I began to play my little game. I call it "Supposing."

JEREMY. "Supposing"?

CLARISSA. Yes. I say to myself - supposing I were to come down one morning and find a dead body in the library, what should I do? Or supposing a woman were to be shown in here one day and told me that she and Henry had been secretly married in Constantinople, and that our marriage was bigamous, what should I say to her? Or supposing I had to choose between betraying my country and seeing Henry shot before my eyes?

(She smiles suddenly at JEREMY.)

Or, even supposing I were to run away with Jeremy, what would happen next?

JEREMY. I feel flattered. What did happen?

(He takes her hand, which she withdraws.)

CLARISSA. Well, the last time I played, we were on the Riviera at Juan les Pins, and Henry came after us. He had a revolver with him.

JEREMY. My God, did he shoot me?

CLARISSA. He said - *(Dramatically.)* "Clarissa, either you come back with me, or I kill myself."

JEREMY. Jolly decent of him. I can't imagine anything more unlike Henry. And what did you say to that?

CLARISSA. *(Smiling.)* Well, I've played it both ways.

JEREMY. Well, darling, you certainly do have fun.

(PIPPA HAILSHAM-BROWN enters from the hall. She is a lanky child aged twelve, wearing school clothes. She carries a satchel.)

PIPPA. Hullo, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. Hullo, Pippa. You're late.

PIPPA. Music lesson.

(She puts her hat and satchel on the armchair.)

Any food about? I'm starving.

CLARISSA. Didn't you get your buns to eat on the bus?

PIPPA. Oh, yes, but that was half an hour ago. Can't I have some cake or something to last me till supper?

CLARISSA. *(Laughing.)* We'll see what we can find.

(CLARISSA and PIPPA exit to the hall.)

PIPPA. *(Offstage.)* Is there any of that cake with the cherries on top?

CLARISSA. *(Offstage.)* No, you finished that yesterday.

(JEREMY moves to the desk and quickly opens and closes the drawers.)

MISS PEAKE. *(Offstage.)* Ahoy there!

(JEREMY hastily closes the drawers. The daylight commences to fade as evening falls. MILDRED PEAKE enters by the French windows. She is a big, jolly-looking woman of forty odd, in tweeds and gumboots. She stands on the window step.)

Mrs. Hailsham-Brown about?

JEREMY. Yes, she just went with Pippa to get her something to eat.

MISS PEAKE. Children shouldn't eat between meals.

JEREMY. Will you come in, Miss Peake?

MISS PEAKE. No, I won't come in because of my boots. Bring half the garden with me if I did.

(She laughs.)

MISS PEAKE. I just wanted to ask what veggies for lunch.

JEREMY. I'm afraid I...

MISS PEAKE. Tell you what, I'll come back.

(She turns to go, but stops.)

Oh, you will be careful of that desk, won't you, Mr. Warrender?

JEREMY. Yes, of course I will.

MISS PEAKE. It's a valuable antique. You oughtn't to wrench the drawers out like that.

JEREMY. I'm terribly sorry, I was only looking for notepaper.

MISS PEAKE. Middle pigeon-hole.

(JEREMY opens the middle pigeon-hole and extracts a sheet of writing paper.)

That's right. Curious how often people can't see what's right in front of their eyes.

(MISS PEAKE laughs heartily and exits by the French windows. JEREMY joins in her laughter, but stops abruptly when she has gone. PIPPA enters from the hall, munching a bun.)

PIPPA. Smashing bun.

(She closes the hall door.)

JEREMY. Hullo, there. How was school today?

PIPPA. Pretty foul. World affairs. Miss Wilkinson loves world affairs. She's terribly wet, can't keep order.

(She puts her bun on the table and takes a book from her satchel.)

JEREMY. What's your favourite subject?

PIPPA. Biology. It's heaven. Yesterday we dissected a frog's leg.

(She pushes the book in JEREMY's face.)

Look what I got in the second-hand bookstall. It's awfully rare, I'm sure. Over a hundred years old.

JEREMY. What is it, exactly?

PIPPA. It's a kind of recipe book. It's thrilling, absolutely thrilling.

(She opens the book, becoming immediately enthralled.)

JEREMY. What's it all about?

PIPPA. What?

JEREMY. It seems very absorbing.

PIPPA. What?

(To herself.) Gosh!

JEREMY. Evidently a good tuppenny-worth.

(He picks up a newspaper and begins to read.)

PIPPA. What's the difference between a wax candle and a tallow candle?

JEREMY. I should imagine that a tallow candle is markedly inferior. But surely you can't eat it?

PIPPA. *(Amused.)* "Can you eat it?" Sounds like "Twenty Questions."

(She laughs, throws the book onto the chair, then takes a pack of cards from the bottom of the bookshelves.)

Do you know Demon Patience?

(JEREMY is engrossed in his paper.)

JEREMY. Um.

PIPPA. I suppose you wouldn't like to play Beggar-My-Neighbour?

JEREMY. No.

PIPPA. I thought you wouldn't. I wish we could have a fine day for a change. Such a waste being in the country, when it's wet.

(She kneels on the floor, lays out her cards and plays Demon Patience.)

JEREMY. Do you like living in the country?

PIPPA. Rather. I like it much better than living in London.

This is a wizard house with a tennis court and everything. We've even got a priest's hole.

JEREMY. A priest's hole, in this house?

PIPPA. Yes.

JEREMY. Don't believe it. Wrong period.

PIPPA. Well, *I* call it a priest's hole. Look, I'll show you.

(She rises and moves to the bookshelves. She takes out a book and pulls down a small lever in the wall. The concealed door between the bookshelves swings open, revealing a good-sized recess, with a concealed door in its back wall, leading to the library.)

It isn't really a priest's hole, of course. Actually that door goes through into the library.

JEREMY. Oh, does it?

(JEREMY goes into the recess, opens the door in the back, glances into the library and returns.)

So it does.

PIPPA. But it's all rather secret and you'd never guess it was there unless you knew.

(She lifts the lever. The panel closes.)

I'm using it all the time. It's the sort of place that would be very convenient for putting a dead body, don't you think?

JEREMY. Absolutely made for it.

(PIPPA resumes her game. CLARISSA enters from the hall.)

The Amazon is looking for you.

CLARISSA. Miss Peake? Oh, what a bore.

(She picks up Pippa's bun and takes a bite.)

PIPPA. Hey! That's mine!

CLARISSA. Greedy thing.

(She replaces the bun.)

JEREMY. First she hailed me as though I were a ship, then ticked me off for manhandling this desk.

CLARISSA. She's a terrible pest, but she goes with the house -

(She looks at Pippa's game.)

- Black ten on the red jack -

(Turning back to JEREMY.)

- And she's really a very good gardener.

JEREMY. I know. I saw her out of my bedroom window this morning digging something that looked like an enormous grave.

CLARISSA. That's deep trenching.

(JEREMY looks at Pippa's game.)

JEREMY. Red three on the black four.

(PIPPA looks furious. SIR ROWLAND and HUGO enter from the library.)

SIR ROWLAND. Seems to have cleared at last. Too late for golf, though. Only about twenty minutes' daylight left.

(He looks at Pippa's game, then points with his foot.)

Look, that goes on there. Well, I suppose we might as well go across to the golf house.

HUGO. I'll go and get my coat.

(He leans over PIPPA to point out a card. PIPPA, furious, covers them with her body. HUGO turns to JEREMY.)

What about you, my boy?

JEREMY. I'll have to get my jacket.

(HUGO and JEREMY exit to the hall, leaving the door open. JEREMY goes up the stairs, passing ELGIN coming down. CLARISSA turns to SIR ROWLAND.)

CLARISSA. Sure you don't mind dining at the club house, darling?

SIR ROWLAND. Not a bit. Very sensible arrangement as the servants are going out.

(ELGIN, a middle-aged butler, enters from the hall.)

ELGIN. Your supper is ready in the schoolroom, Miss Pippa.

PIPPA. Oh, good! I'm ravenous.

(She darts towards the hall door.)

CLARISSA. Here, here, you put those cards away first.

PIPPA. Oh, bother.

(She reluctantly begins shovelling the cards into a heap against the sofa.)

ELGIN. Excuse me, madam.

CLARISSA. Yes, Elgin, what is it?

ELGIN. There has been a little - er - unpleasantness, over the vegetables.

CLARISSA. Oh, dear. With Miss Peake?

ELGIN. Yes, madam. Mrs. Elgin finds Miss Peake most difficult, madam. She is continually coming into the kitchen and criticising and making remarks, and Mrs. Elgin doesn't like it, she doesn't like it at all. Wherever we have been, Mrs. Elgin and myself have always had very pleasant relations with the garden.

CLARISSA. I'm very sorry. I'll - er - I'll try to arrange it.

ELGIN. Thank you, madam.

(ELGIN exits to the hall, closing the doors behind him.)

CLARISSA. How tiresome they are, and what curious things they say. How can one have pleasant relations with the garden? It sounds improper, in a pagan kind of way.

SIR ROWLAND. You're lucky with this couple you've got. Where did you get them?

CLARISSA. Registry Office.

SIR ROWLAND. I hope not that what's-its-name one where they always send you crooks.

PIPPA. Cooks?

SIR ROWLAND. No, crooks.

CLARISSA. Come on, Pippa, hurry up.

(PIPPA picks up the cards but accidentally leaves the Ace of Spades just under the end of the sofa. She replaces the cards on the bookshelves.)

PIPPA. There! I wish one didn't always have to do clearing up.

(She moves to the hall door. CLARISSA picks up the bun from the table and hands it to PIPPA.)

CLARISSA. Here, take your bun with you.

(PIPPA starts to go.)

And your satchel.

(PIPPA snatches up her satchel, then turns towards the hall door.)

Hat!

(PIPPA puts the bun on the table, picks up her hat and runs to the hall door.)

Here!

(CLARISSA picks up the bun, stuffs it in PIPPA's mouth, takes the hat, jams it on her head and pushes her into the hall.)

And shut the door.

(PIPPA exits to the hall, closing the doors behind her. The light in the room begins to fade a little. SIR ROWLAND laughs.)

SIR ROWLAND. Wonderful. She's a different child. You've done a good job there, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. I think she really likes me now, and trusts me. I quite enjoy being a stepmother.

SIR ROWLAND. She seems a normal, happy child again.

CLARISSA. I think living in the country has made all the difference, and she goes to a very nice school and is making lots of friends there. Yes, I think she's happy, and as you say, *normal*.

SIR ROWLAND. It's a shocking thing to see a kid get into the state she was in. I'd like to wring Miranda's neck.

CLARISSA. Pippa was absolutely terrified of her mother.

SIR ROWLAND. A shocking business.

CLARISSA. I feel furious every time I think of Miranda. What she made Henry suffer and what she made that child go through. I still can't understand how any woman *could*.

SIR ROWLAND. Taking drugs is a nasty business. It alters your whole character.

CLARISSA. Well, what started her on them in the first place?

SIR ROWLAND. I think it was that swine Oliver Costello. I believe he's in on the drug racket.

CLARISSA. He's a horrible man. Really evil, I always think.

SIR ROWLAND. She's married him, hasn't she?

CLARISSA. About a month ago.

SIR ROWLAND. Well, Henry's well rid of Miranda. He's a nice fellow, Henry. A really nice fellow.

CLARISSA. Do you think you need to tell me that?

SIR ROWLAND. He doesn't say much. Undemonstrative – but he's sound all through.

(He pauses.)

That young fellow, Jeremy what's-his-name. What do you know about him?

CLARISSA. *(Smiling.)* He's very amusing.

SIR ROWLAND. Ptscha! That's all people seem to care about these days. Don't – don't do anything foolish, will you?

CLARISSA. Don't fall in love with Jeremy Warrender. That's what you mean?

SIR ROWLAND. That would be extremely foolish. You know, Clarissa darling, I've watched you grow up. You really

mean a great deal to me. If ever you're in trouble of any kind, you would come to your old guardian, wouldn't you?

(She kisses him.)

CLARISSA. Of course, Roly darling. And you needn't worry about Jeremy.

(MISS PEAKE enters by the French windows. She is in her stockings and carries a head of broccoli.)

MISS PEAKE. I hope you don't mind my coming in this way, Mrs. Brown-Hailsham. I shan't make the room dirty, I've left my boots outside. I'd just like you to look at this broccoli.

(She sticks it under CLARISSA's nose.)

CLARISSA. It – er – it looks very nice.

(She thrusts it at SIR ROWLAND.)

MISS PEAKE. Take a look.

SIR ROWLAND. I can't see anything wrong with it.

(He takes the broccoli from her.)

MISS PEAKE. Of course there's nothing wrong with it. I took in just such another yesterday and that woman in the kitchen – of course, I don't want to say anything against your servants, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, though I *could* say a great deal – but that Mrs. Elgin actually told me that it was such a poor specimen she wasn't going to cook it. She said something about "If you can't do better than *that* in the kitchen garden you'd better take up some other job." I was so angry I could have killed her.

(CLARISSA starts to speak.)

I never want to make trouble, but I'm *not* going into the kitchen to be insulted. In future I shall leave the vegetables outside the back door and Mrs. Elgin can leave a list there of what is required.

(The telephone rings.)

MISS PEAKE. I'll answer it.

(She lifts the receiver.)

Hullo... Yes... Coppleshon Court... You want Mrs. Brown? ...Yes - she's here.

(CLARISSA takes the receiver.)

CLARISSA. This is Mrs. Hailsham - Hullo... Hullo... How odd! They seem to have rung off.

(She replaces the receiver. MISS PEAKE suddenly moves forward and sets the console table back against the wall.)

MISS PEAKE. Excuse me, but Mr. Sellon always liked this table flat against the wall.

(CLARISSA assists with the table.)

Thank you, and you will be careful about marks made by glasses on the furniture -

(CLARISSA looks anxiously at the table.)

- Won't you, Mrs. Brown-Hailsham - I mean Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

(She laughs heartily.)

Oh well, Brown-Hailsham, Hailsham-Brown, it's really all the same thing, isn't it?

SIR ROWLAND. No, it's not. A horse chestnut is hardly the same thing as a chestnut horse.

(MISS PEAKE laughs again, turning to HUGO as he enters from the hall.)

MISS PEAKE. I'm getting a regular ticking off. Quite sarcastic.

(She thumps HUGO on the back.)

Well, good night, all. I must be toddling back. Give me the broccoli.

(SIR ROWLAND hands the broccoli to MISS PEAKE.)

Horse chestnut, chestnut horse. Jolly good - I must remember that.

(She laughs and exits by the French windows.)

HUGO. How does Henry bear that woman?

CLARISSA. He finds her very hard to take.

HUGO. I should think so. So damned arch! All that hearty schoolgirl manner.

SIR ROWLAND. A case of arrested development, I'm afraid.

CLARISSA. I agree she's maddening but she's a very good gardener, and she goes with the house, and since the house is so wonderfully cheap...

HUGO. Cheap? Is it? You surprise me.

CLARISSA. Marvellously cheap. It was advertised. We came down and saw it and took it then and there for six months furnished.

SIR ROWLAND. Who does it belong to?

CLARISSA. It belonged to a Mr. Sellon. He died. He was an antique dealer in Maidstone.

HUGO. That's right. Sellon and Brown. I once bought a very nice Chippendale mirror there. Sellon lived here and used to go into Maidstone every day, but I believe he sometimes brought customers out here.

CLARISSA. Mind you, there are one or two disadvantages about the house. Only yesterday a man in a violent check suit drove up in a sports car and wanted to buy that desk. I told him it wasn't ours and we couldn't sell it, but he simply wouldn't believe me and kept on raising the price. He went up to five hundred pounds in the end.

SIR ROWLAND. *(Startled.)* Five hundred pounds! Good Lord! Why, even at the Antique Dealers' Fair...

(PIPPA enters from the hall.)

PIPPA. I'm still hungry.

CLARISSA. You can't be.

PIPPA. I am. Milk and chocolate biscuits and a banana aren't really filling.

SIR ROWLAND. It's a nice desk, quite genuine, but not what I'd call a collector's piece.

HUGO. Perhaps it's got a secret drawer with a diamond necklace in it.

PIPPA. It has got a secret drawer.

CLARISSA. What!

PIPPA. I found a book in the market all about secret drawers in old furniture and I tried all over the house, but this is the only one that's got one. Look, I'll show you.

(She moves to the desk and takes out a drawer.)

See, you slide out this and there's a sort of little catch thing underneath.

HUGO. Humph! Not very secret.

PIPPA. Ah, but that's not all. Underneath there's a spring - and a drawer flies out.

(She demonstrates and a small drawer shoots out of the desk.)

See!

(HUGO picks a piece of paper out of the draw.)

HUGO. Hullo, what's inside?

(He reads:)

"Sucks to you!"

SIR ROWLAND. What!

(They all laugh.)

PIPPA. I put that there.

SIR ROWLAND. Villain!

PIPPA. Actually, there was an envelope with an autograph of Queen Victoria in it. Look, I'll show you.

(She dashes to the bookshelves. CLARISSA replaces the drawers. PIPPA opens a shell box and takes out an old envelope containing three scraps of paper. She passes them to HUGO one by one, then to SIR ROWLAND.)

SIR ROWLAND. Do you collect autographs, Pippa?

PIPPA. Not really. Only as a sideline. A girl at school collects stamps and her brother's got a smashing collection himself. Last autumn he thought he'd got one like the one in the paper, a Swedish something or other, which was worth hundreds of pounds. He was awfully excited and took it to a dealer, but the dealer said it wasn't what he thought it was, but it was quite a good stamp. Anyway, he gave him five pounds for it. Five pounds is pretty good, isn't it?

(HUGO grunts agreement.)

How much is Queen Victoria's autograph worth?

SIR ROWLAND. About five to ten shillings, I should think.

PIPPA. There's Ruskin's here too, and Robert Browning's.

SIR ROWLAND. Not much either, I'm afraid.

PIPPA. I wish I had Neville Duke's and Roger Bannister's. These historical ones are rather mouldy, I think. Can I see if there are any more chocolate biscuits in the larder, Clarissa?

CLARISSA. Yes. If you like.

(PIPPA replaces the envelope and autograph in the box and exits to the hall.)

HUGO. We must get off.

(He follows PIPPA to the door and calls:)

Jeremy! Hi! Jeremy!

JEREMY. *(Offstage.)* Coming.

(JEREMY enters down the stairs. He carries a golf club.)

CLARISSA. Henry ought to be back soon.

(HUGO makes for the French windows.)

HUGO. Better go out this way. It's nearer. Good night, Clarissa. Thank you for your hospitality.

JEREMY. Good night, Clarissa.

(CLARISSA acknowledges them as they exit by the French windows.)

SIR ROWLAND. Good night. Warrender and I will probably not be in until about midnight.

CLARISSA. It's really a lovely evening. I'll come with you as far as the gate onto the golf course.

(CLARISSA and SIR ROWLAND exit by the French windows. ELGIN enters from the hall. He carries a tray of drinks, which he puts on the table. The front doorbell rings off. ELGIN exits to the hall, leaving the door open.)

ELGIN. *(Offstage.)* Good evening, sir.

OLIVER. *(Offstage.)* I've come to see Mrs. Brown.

ELGIN. *(Offstage.)* Oh yes, sir. What name, sir?

OLIVER. *(Offstage.)* Mr. Costello.

ELGIN. *(Offstage.)* This way, sir.

(ELGIN enters from the hall and stands to one side. OLIVER COSTELLO enters. He is a theatrically handsome, dark man with a rather unpleasant face.)

If you'll wait here, sir. Madam is at home. I'll see if I can find her. Mr. Costello, did you say?

OLIVER. That's right. *Oliver* Costello.

ELGIN. Very good, sir.

(ELGIN exits to the hall, closing the door. OLIVER looks around the room, listens at the hall door and the library door, then makes to the desk. He bends over it, looking at the drawers. He apparently hears something and moves away. CLARISSA enters by the French windows. OLIVER turns, surprised.)

CLARISSA. *(Intensely.)* You?

OLIVER. Clarissa! What are you doing here?

CLARISSA. That's a rather silly question, isn't it? It's my house.

OLIVER. This is your house?

CLARISSA. Don't pretend you don't know.

OLIVER. It's charming – used to belong to old what's-his-name, the antique dealer, didn't it? He brought me out here once to show me some Louis Quinze chairs.

(He takes his cigarette case from his pocket.)

Cigarette?

CLARISSA. No, thank you. And I think you'd better go. My husband will be home quite soon and I don't think he'll be very pleased to see you.

OLIVER. But I particularly do want to see him. That's why I've come here, really, to discuss suitable arrangements...

CLARISSA. Arrangements?

OLIVER. For Pippa. Miranda's quite agreeable to Pippa spending part of the summer holidays with Henry, and perhaps a week at Christmas. But otherwise...

CLARISSA. *(Interrupting.)* What do you mean? Pippa's home is here.

OLIVER. But, my dear Clarissa, you're surely aware that the court gave Miranda the custody of the child?

(He picks up a bottle of whisky off the drinks tray.)

May I?

(He pours a drink for himself.)

The case was undefended, remember?

CLARISSA. Henry allowed Miranda to divorce him, but it was agreed between them privately that Pippa should live with her father. If Miranda had not agreed to that, Henry would have divorced *her*.

OLIVER. You don't know Miranda well, do you? She so often changes her mind.

CLARISSA. I don't believe for one moment that Miranda wants that child or cares twopence about her.

OLIVER. But you're not a mother, my dear Clarissa. You don't mind my calling you Clarissa, do you? After all, now I'm married to Miranda we're practically relations-in-law.

(He swallows his drink in one gulp.)

OLIVER. Yes, I can assure you, Miranda is feeling violently maternal.

CLARISSA. I don't believe it.

OLIVER. Please yourself. After all, there was no arrangement in writing, you know.

CLARISSA. You're not going to have Pippa. The child was a nervous wreck. She's better now, and happy at school, and that's the way she's going to remain.

OLIVER. How will you manage that, my dear? The law is on our side.

CLARISSA. What's behind all this? What do you really want? Oh! What a fool I am. Of course, it's blackmail.

(ELGIN enters abruptly from the hall.)

ELGIN. I was looking for you, madam. Will it be quite all right for us to leave now, madam?

CLARISSA. Yes, quite all right, Elgin.

ELGIN. The taxi has come for us. Supper is laid all ready in the dining room.

(He eyes OLIVER.)

Do you want me to shut up in here, madam?

CLARISSA. No, I'll see to it.

ELGIN. Thank you. Good night, madam.

CLARISSA. Good night, Elgin.

(ELGIN exits to the hall.)

OLIVER. Blackmail is a very ugly word, Clarissa. Have I mentioned money?

CLARISSA. Not yet, but that's what you mean, isn't it?

OLIVER. It's true that we're not very well off. Miranda, you know, has always been extravagant. I think she feels that Henry might be able to spare her a somewhat larger allowance. After all, he's a rich man.

CLARISSA. Now listen. I don't know about Henry, but I do know about myself. You try to get Pippa away from

here and I'll fight you tooth and nail, and I don't care what weapons I use.

(OLIVER chuckles.)

It shouldn't be difficult to get medical evidence proving Miranda's a drug addict. I'd even go to Scotland Yard and talk to the Narcotic Squad, and I'd suggest they kept an eye on *you*.

OLIVER. Henry will hardly care for your methods.

CLARISSA. Then Henry will have to lump them. It's the child that matters. I'm not going to have Pippa bullied or frightened.

(PIPPA enters from the hall.)

PIPPA. Clarissa did you know there were only two chocolate biscuits in the tin?

(She sees OLIVER and stops, looking terrified.)

OLIVER. Why, hullo, Pippa. How you've grown. I've just come to make some arrangements about you. Your mother is looking forward to having you with her again. She and I are married now and...

(PIPPA runs to CLARISSA.)

PIPPA. *(Hysterically.)* I won't come. I won't come. Clarissa.

CLARISSA. Don't worry, Pippa. Your home is here with your father and with me and you're not leaving it.

OLIVER. But I assure you...

CLARISSA. Get out of here at once.

(OLIVER mockingly backs away, afraid of CLARISSA.)

At once. I won't have you in my house, do you hear?

(MISS PEAKE enters by the French windows. She carries a large garden fork.)

MISS PEAKE. Oh, Mrs. Brown-Hailsham, I...

CLARISSA. Miss Peake. Will you show Mr. Costello the way through the garden to the gate onto the links?

(**OLIVER** looks at **MISS PEAKE**. **MISS PEAKE** lifts the fork she carries.)

OLIVER. Miss - Peake?

MISS PEAKE. (*Robustly.*) Pleased to meet you. I'm the gardener here.

OLIVER. Indeed. I came here once before to look at some antique furniture.

MISS PEAKE. Oh yes, in Mr. Sellon's time. You can't see him today, you know. He's dead.

OLIVER. No, I didn't come to see him. I came to see - (*Emphatically.*) Mrs. Brown.

MISS PEAKE. Oh yes. Well, now you've seen her.

OLIVER. Good bye, Clarissa. You will hear from me, you know.

MISS PEAKE. This way, Mr. Costello. Do you want the bus or did you bring your own?

OLIVER. I left my car round by the stables.

(*They exit by the French windows.*)

PIPPA. He'll take me away from here.

CLARISSA. No.

PIPPA. I hate him. I always hated him.

CLARISSA. Pippa!

PIPPA. I don't want to go back to mother, I'd rather die. I'd much rather die. I'll kill him.

CLARISSA. Pippa!

PIPPA. (*Hysterically.*) I'll kill myself. I'll cut my wrists and bleed to death.

(**CLARISSA** seizes her by the shoulders.)

CLARISSA. Pippa. Control yourself. It's all right, I tell you. I'm here.

PIPPA. I don't want to go back to mother and I hate Oliver. He's wicked, wicked, wicked.

CLARISSA. Yes, dear, I know. I know.

PIPPA. (*Hopefully.*) Perhaps he'll be struck by lightning.

CLARISSA. Very likely. Now pull yourself together, Pippa. Everything's quite all right. Here, blow your nose.

(*She takes a handkerchief from her pocket.*)

PIPPA blows her nose.)

You go and have your bath. Mind you have a really good wash - your neck is absolutely filthy.

(**PIPPA** laughs.)

PIPPA. It always is. You won't let him take me away, will you?

CLARISSA. Over my dead body - no. Over his dead body. There! Does that satisfy you?

(**PIPPA** nods. **CLARISSA** kisses her forehead.)

Now, run along.

(**PIPPA** exits to the hall. **CLARISSA** moves to the French windows, closing them. The front door is heard. **HENRY HAILSHAM-BROWN** enters from the hall. He is a good-looking man of about forty with a rather expressionless face. He wears horn-rimmed spectacles and carries a briefcase.)

HENRY. Hullo, darling.

CLARISSA. Hullo, Henry. Hasn't it been an awful day?

HENRY. Has it?

(*He kisses CLARISSA.*)

CLARISSA. Have a drink?

HENRY. Not just now.

(*He moves to the French windows and closes the curtains.*)

Who's in the house?

CLARISSA. Nobody. It's the Elgins' night out. Black Thursday, you know. Cold ham, chocolate mousse - and the coffee will be really good because I shall make it.

HENRY. Um?

CLARISSA. Henry, is anything the matter?

HENRY. Well, yes, in a way.

CLARISSA. Something wrong? Miranda?

HENRY. No, no, nothing wrong. I should say quite the contrary. Yes, quite the contrary.

(CLARISSA speaks with affection and very faint ridicule:)

CLARISSA. Darling, do I perceive behind the impenetrable Foreign Office façade a certain human excitement?

HENRY. Well, it is rather exciting in a way. As it happens there's a slight fog in London.

CLARISSA. Is that exciting?

HENRY. No, no, not the fog, of course.

CLARISSA. Well?

(HENRY looks quickly around, then moves beside CLARISSA.)

HENRY. You'll have to keep this to yourself, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. *(Hopefully.)* Yes?

HENRY. It's really very secret. Nobody's supposed to know. Actually, you'll have to know.

CLARISSA. Well, come on, tell me.

(HENRY looks around again.)

HENRY. It's all very hush-hush. Kalendorff is flying to London for a conference tomorrow.

CLARISSA. *(Unimpressed.)* Yes, I know.

HENRY. *(Startled.)* What do you mean, you know?

CLARISSA. I read it in the paper last Sunday.

HENRY. I can't think why you want to read these low-class papers. Anyway, the papers couldn't possibly know that Kalendorff was coming over. It's top secret.

CLARISSA. My poor sweet. Top secret indeed. The things you high-ups believe.

HENRY. *(Worried.)* Oh dear, there must have been some leak.

CLARISSA. I should have thought that by now you'd know there always *is* a leak. I should have thought you'd all be prepared for it.

HENRY. The news was only released officially tonight. Kalendorff's plane is due at Heathrow at eight forty, but actually...

(He looks doubtfully at CLARISSA.)

Now, Clarissa, can I trust you to be discreet?

CLARISSA. I'm much more discreet than any Sunday newspaper.

HENRY. The conference is tomorrow, but it would be a great advantage if a conversation could take place first between Sir John himself and Kalendorff. Now, naturally the reporters are all waiting at Heathrow and the moment the plane arrives, Kalendorff's movements are more or less public property. But fortunately, this incipient fog has played into our hands.

CLARISSA. Go on. I'm thrilled.

HENRY. The plane, at the last moment, will find it inadvisable to land at Heathrow. It will be diverted, as is usual on these occasions...

CLARISSA. *(Interrupting.)* To Bindley Heath. That's just fifteen miles from here. I see.

HENRY. You're always very quick, Clarissa. Yes, I shall go off there now to the aerodrome in the car, meet Kalendorff and bring him here. Sir John is motoring down here directly from London. Twenty minutes will be ample for what they have to discuss, and Kalendorff will go back to London with Sir John.

(He hesitates, suddenly rather disarming.)

You know, Clarissa, this may be of very great value to me in my career. I mean, they're reposing a lot of trust in me having this meeting here.

CLARISSA. So they should. Henry, darling, I think it's all wonderful.

(She flings her arms around him.)

HENRY. By the way, Kalendorff will be referred to as Mr. Jones.

CLARISSA. Mr. Jones?

HENRY. One can't be too careful about using real names.

CLARISSA. Yes - but - Mr. Jones? Couldn't they have thought of something better than *that*? What about me? Do I retire to the harem, as it were, or do I bring in the drinks, utter greetings and then discreetly fade away?

HENRY. (*Uneasily.*) You must take this seriously, dear.

CLARISSA. But, Henry, darling, can't I take it seriously and still enjoy it a little?

HENRY. (*Considering.*) I think it would be better, perhaps, Clarissa, if you didn't appear.

CLARISSA. All right. What about food? Will they want something?

HENRY. Oh no. There need be no question of a meal.

CLARISSA. A few sandwiches? Ham sandwiches? In a napkin to keep them moist. Hot coffee, in a thermos jug. Yes, that'll do very well. The chocolate mousse I shall take up to my bedroom to console me for being excluded from the conference.

HENRY. (*Disapprovingly.*) Now, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. Darling, I am serious really. Nothing shall go wrong. I won't let it.

(She kisses him.)

HENRY. What about old Roly?

CLARISSA. He and Jeremy are dining at the club house with Hugo. They're going to play bridge afterwards, so they won't be home till about midnight.

HENRY. And the Elgins are out?

CLARISSA. Darling, you know they always go to the cinema on Thursdays. They won't be back till after eleven.

HENRY. Good. That's all quite satisfactory. Sir John and Mr. - er...

CLARISSA. Jones.

HENRY. Quite right, darling - will have left long before then. Well -

(He consults his watch.)

- I'd better have a quick wash before starting off for Bindley Heath.

CLARISSA. I'll go and make the ham sandwiches.

(CLARISSA exits to the hall.)

HENRY. (*Calling.*) You must remember about the lights, Clarissa. We're making our own electricity here. Not like London.

(He switches off the lights, then exits to the hall, closing the door behind him. The room is in darkness. OLIVER enters stealthily by the French windows, leaving the curtain open so that the moonlight streams in. He plays an electric torch carefully around the room, then goes to the desk and switches on the desk lamp. He lifts the flap of the secret drawer, thinks he hears something, switches off the lamp and stands motionless for a moment. He switches on the desk lamp again, opens the secret drawer and takes out a slip of paper. The panel slowly opens. Without looking at the paper, OLIVER shuts the secret drawer, then hears something, switches off the desk lamp and turns sharply.)

OLIVER. What the...?

(Somebody unseen behind the panel hits OLIVER on the head and he collapses behind the sofa. The panel closes. The moment OLIVER is hit, CLARISSA is heard calling off.)

CLARISSA. (*Offstage.*) Henry! Henry, do you want a sandwich before you go?

(There is a pause. HENRY enters from the hall and switches on the lights. He is polishing his spectacles.)

HENRY. *(Shouting.)* Clarissa!

(He puts on his spectacles, then fills his cigarette case with cigarettes from the box on the table.)

CLARISSA. *(Offstage.)* Here. Do you want a sandwich before you go?

HENRY. *(Shouting.)* No. I think I'd better start.

CLARISSA. *(Offstage.)* You'll be hours too early. It can't take you more than twenty minutes to drive there.

(CLARISSA enters quietly from the hall, unseen by HENRY.)

HENRY. *(Shouting.)* One never knows. I might have a puncture or something might...

(He turns and sees CLARISSA.)

(Quietly.) Oh, there you are, darling. Something might go wrong with the car.

CLARISSA. Don't fuss, darling.

HENRY. What about Pippa? She won't come down or barge in?

CLARISSA. No, I'll go up to the schoolroom and we'll have a feast together. We'll toast tomorrow's breakfast sausages and share the chocolate mousse between us.

HENRY. How good you are to Pippa. It's one of the things I'm most grateful to you for. I never can express myself very well -

(He speaks rather incoherently.)

- so much misery - and now - everything's so different. You...

(He kisses CLARISSA.)

CLARISSA. You go and meet your Mr. Jones. I still think it's a ridiculous name to have chosen. Are you going to come in by the front door? Shall I leave it unlatched?

HENRY. No. I think we'd better use the window.

CLARISSA. You'd better put on your overcoat, Henry, it's quite chilly.

(CLARISSA and HENRY exit to the hall.)

(Offstage.) And perhaps your muffler.

HENRY. *(Offstage.)* Yes, dear.

CLARISSA. *(Offstage.)* And drive carefully, darling, won't you?

HENRY. *(Offstage.)* Yes, dear.

CLARISSA. *(Offstage.)* Good bye.

HENRY. *(Offstage.)* Good bye.

(The front door is heard closing. CLARISSA enters from the hall. She carries a plate of sandwiches wrapped in a napkin, which she puts on the console table. Then, remembering, she snatches the plate off and rubs at the mark. She cannot remove it, so she covers it with the vase of flowers. She moves to the sofa, puts the sandwiches on the small table next to it, then carefully shakes the cushions. Humming to herself, she picks up Pippa's book and puts it on the bookshelves. She sings:)

CLARISSA.

COMING THROUGH THE RYE. CAN A BODY MEET A BODY,
MEET A BODY...

(She does not get the last word out, but screams as she nearly falls over OLIVER'S body.)

Oliver!

(She runs to call for HENRY but realises he has gone. She turns to the body again, then runs to the telephone, lifts the receiver, begins to dial, then stops and replaces the receiver. She stands thinking for a moment, then looks at the panel. She makes up her mind. She

reluctantly bends down and drags the body over. The panel slowly opens. PIPPA enters from the recess wearing a dressing gown.

PIPPA. Clarissa!

CLARISSA. Pippa –

(She tries to stand between PIPPA and the body.)

– don't look. Don't look.

PIPPA. *(Desperately.)* I didn't really mean to. Oh, really I didn't mean to do it.

CLARISSA. *(Horried.)* Pippa! Was it – you?

PIPPA. *(Hysterically.)* He's dead, isn't he? He's quite dead. I didn't – mean to kill him. I didn't mean to.

(She sobs.)

I didn't mean to.

CLARISSA. Quiet now, quiet. It's all right. Come, sit down.

(She leads PIPPA to the armchair and sits her in it.)

PIPPA. I didn't mean to. I didn't mean to kill him.

(CLARISSA kneels beside her.)

CLARISSA. Of course you didn't mean to. Now listen, Pippa...

(PIPPA cries even more hysterically.)

(Shouting.) Pippa, listen to me. Everything's going to be all right. You've got to forget about this. Forget all about it, do you hear?

PIPPA. Yes. But – but I...

CLARISSA. Pippa, you must trust me and believe what I'm telling you. Everything is going to be all right. But you've got to be brave and do exactly what I tell you.

(PIPPA is beside herself.)

Pippa! Will you do as I tell you? Will you?

PIPPA. Yes, yes, I will.

CLARISSA. That's right. I want you to go upstairs and get into bed.

(She helps PIPPA out of the chair.)

PIPPA. You come with me.

CLARISSA. Yes, yes, I'll come up very soon, as soon as I can, and I'll give you a nice little white tablet. Then you'll go to sleep and in the morning everything will seem quite different.

(She looks towards the body.)

There may be nothing to worry about.

PIPPA. But he is dead – isn't he? He is dead.

CLARISSA. *(Evasively.)* No, no, he may not be dead. I'll see. Now go on, Pippa. Do as I tell you.

(PIPPA, sobbing, exits by the hall door and goes up the stairs. CLARISSA turns to the body.)

Supposing I were to find a dead body in the drawing room, what should I do? What *am* I going to do?

ACT II

Scene One

(A quarter of an hour later. The armchair is now against the wall. A folding bridge table is set out with cards and markers for bridge, with four upright chairs around it. The panel is closed and the curtains have been drawn over the open French windows. The body is still behind the sofa. CLARISSA is standing above the bridge table, busily writing figures on one of the markers.)

CLARISSA. *(Muttering.)* Three spades, four hearts, four no trumps, pass -

(She points at each hand as she makes its call.)

- five diamonds, pass, six spades - double - and I think they go down. Let me see, doubled vulnerable, two tricks, five hundred - or shall I let them make it? No.

(SIR ROWLAND, JEREMY and HUGO enter by the French windows. CLARISSA rushes to SIR ROWLAND.)

Thank God you've come.

SIR ROWLAND. What is all this, my dear?

CLARISSA. Darlings, you've got to help me.

JEREMY. *(Gaily.)* Looks like a bridge party.

HUGO. Melodramatics? What are you up to, young woman?

CLARISSA. It's serious - terribly serious. You will help me, won't you?

SIR ROWLAND. Of course we'll help you, Clarissa, but what's it all about?

HUGO. What is this?

JEREMY. (*Unimpressed.*) You're up to something, Clarissa. What is it? Found a body?

CLARISSA. That's just it. I have – found a body.

HUGO. What do you mean – found a body?

CLARISSA. It's just as Jeremy said. I came in here, and I found a body.

(**HUGO** looks around.)

HUGO. Don't know what you're talking about.

CLARISSA. I'm serious. It is there. Go and look. Behind the sofa.

(**JEREMY** looks behind the sofa and whistles.)

JEREMY. She's right.

(**HUGO** and **SIR ROWLAND** bend down and look at the body.)

SIR ROWLAND. Why, it's Oliver Costello.

(**JEREMY** quickly draws the curtains.)

CLARISSA. Yes.

SIR ROWLAND. What was he doing here?

CLARISSA. He came this evening to talk about Pippa – just after you'd gone to the club.

SIR ROWLAND. What did he want with Pippa?

CLARISSA. They were threatening to take her away. But all that doesn't matter now. We've got to hurry. We've very little time.

SIR ROWLAND. Just a moment. We must have the facts clear. What happened then?

CLARISSA. I told him that he wasn't having her and he went away.

SIR ROWLAND. But he came back?

CLARISSA. Obviously.

SIR ROWLAND. How? When?

CLARISSA. I don't know. I just came into the room as I said and found him – like that.

(**SIR ROWLAND** leans over the body.)

SIR ROWLAND. I see. Well, he's dead all right. Been hit over the head with something heavy and sharp. Well, it isn't going to be a very pleasant business – but there's only one thing to be done.

(*He makes to the telephone and lifts the receiver.*)

We must ring up the police...

CLARISSA. No.

SIR ROWLAND. You ought to have done it at once, Clarissa. Still, they can't blame you much for that.

(**CLARISSA** takes the receiver from **SIR ROWLAND** and replaces it.)

CLARISSA. No, Roly, stop!

SIR ROWLAND. My dear child...

CLARISSA. I could have rung up the police myself if I'd wanted to. I knew perfectly well that it was the thing to do. I even started dialling. Then, instead, I rang *you* up. I asked you to come here, all three of you. You haven't even asked me why yet.

SIR ROWLAND. You can leave it all to us. We will...

CLARISSA. You haven't begun to understand. I want you to help me. You said you would if I was ever in trouble. Darlings, you've *got* to help me.

JEREMY. What do you want us to do, Clarissa?

CLARISSA. Get rid of the body.

SIR ROWLAND. My dear, don't talk nonsense. This is murder.

CLARISSA. That's the whole point. The body mustn't be found in this house.

HUGO. You don't know what you're talking about, my dear girl. You've been reading murder mysteries. In real life you can't go monkeying about moving dead bodies.

CLARISSA. I have moved it already. I turned it over to see if he were dead and then I started dragging it into that recess, and then I saw I'd got to have help, and so I rang you up, and whilst I was waiting for you I made a plan.

JEREMY. Including the bridge table?

(CLARISSA picks up the bridge marker.)

CLARISSA. Yes, that's going to be our alibi.

HUGO. What on earth...?

CLARISSA. Two and a half rubbers. I've imagined all the hands and put down the scores on this marker. You three must fill up the others in your own handwriting of course.

SIR ROWLAND. You're mad, Clarissa - quite mad.

CLARISSA. I've worked it out beautifully. The body has to be taken away from here. It will take two of you to do that. A dead body is terribly unmanageable - I've found that out already.

HUGO. Where the hell do you expect us to take it?

CLARISSA. The best place, I think, would be Marsden Wood. That's only two miles from here. You turn off to the left a few yards after you've left the front gate - it's a side road, hardly any traffic on it. Just leave the car by the side of the road when you get into the wood. Then you walk back here.

JEREMY. Do you mean dump the body in the wood?

CLARISSA. No, leave it in the car. It's *his* car, don't you see? He left it round by the stables. It's really all quite easy. If anybody does happen to see you walking back it's quite a dark night and they won't know who you are. And you've got an alibi. We have all four been playing bridge here.

(She replaces the marker on the bridge table. The others, stupefied, stare at CLARISSA.)

HUGO. I - I...

(He waves his hands, unable to speak.)

CLARISSA. You wear gloves, of course, so as not to leave fingerprints on anything. I've got them here all ready.

(She takes three pairs of gloves from under the cushion on the sofa and lays them out.)

SIR ROWLAND. Your natural talent for crime leaves me speechless.

JEREMY. *(Admiringly.)* She's got it all worked out, hasn't she?

HUGO. Yes, but it's all damned fool nonsense, all the same.

CLARISSA. *(Vehemently.)* But you must *hurry*. At nine o'clock, Henry and Mr. Jones will be here.

SIR ROWLAND. Mr. Jones? Who is Mr. Jones?

(CLARISSA puts her hand to her head.)

CLARISSA. Oh dear, I never realised what a terrible lot of explaining one has to do in a murder. I thought I'd ask you to help me and you would, and that is all there would be to it. Oh darlings, you must - you must - Hugo -

(She strokes HUGO's hair.)

- darling, darling, Hugo...

HUGO. Play-acting's all very well, my dear - but a dead man's a nasty serious business - and monkeying about with it might land you in a real mess. You can't go carting bodies about at dead of night.

CLARISSA. Jeremy?

JEREMY. *(Cheerfully.)* I'm game. What's a dead body or two?

SIR ROWLAND. Stop, young man. I'm not going to allow it. Clarissa, you've got to be guided by me. There's Henry to consider, too.

CLARISSA. But it's Henry I *am* considering. Something terribly important is happening tonight. Henry's gone to - to meet someone and bring him back here. It's very important and secret. No one was to know. There was to be absolutely no publicity.

SIR ROWLAND. (*Dubiously.*) A Mr. Jones.

CLARISSA. Silly name, I agree – but that's what they're calling him. I can't tell you about it. I promised I wouldn't say a word to anybody, but I have to make you see that I'm not just being an idiot and play-acting as Hugo called it. What sort of effect do you think it will have on Henry's career to walk in here and find the police in charge of a murder, and the murder of the man who has just married his former wife?

SIR ROWLAND. Good Lord! (*Suspiciously.*) You're not making all this up, Clarissa?

CLARISSA. Nobody ever believes me when I'm speaking the truth.

SIR ROWLAND. Sorry. (*Thoughtfully.*) Yes, it's a more difficult problem than I thought.

CLARISSA. You see? We must get the body away from here.

JEREMY. Where's his car, do you say?

CLARISSA. Round by the stables.

JEREMY. And the servants are out, I gather.

CLARISSA. Yes.

(*JEREMY picks up a pair of gloves.*)

JEREMY. Right. Do I take the body to the car or the car to the body?

SIR ROWLAND. Wait a moment. We mustn't rush it like this.

(*JEREMY replaces the gloves.*)

CLARISSA. But we must *hurry*.

SIR ROWLAND. I'm not sure that this plan of yours is the best one, Clarissa. Now, if we could just delay finding the body until tomorrow morning – that would meet the case, I think, and be very much simpler. If we merely moved the body to another room, for instance, that might be just excusable.

CLARISSA. It's *you* I've got to convince, isn't it? Jeremy's ready enough and Hugo will grunt and shake his head and growl but he'd do it all the same. It's you...

(*She moves to the library door and opens it.*)

Will you both go next door for a short time? I want to speak to Roly alone.

HUGO. Don't you let her talk you into any tomfoolery, Roly.

(*JEREMY turns to CLARISSA.*)

JEREMY. Good luck!

(*HUGO and JEREMY exit to the library.*)

CLARISSA closes the door.)

CLARISSA. Now!

SIR ROWLAND. My dear, I love you, and will always love you dearly, but in this case, the answer is no.

CLARISSA. That man's body mustn't be found in this house. If he's found in Marsden Wood, I can say that he was here today for a short time, and I can also tell the police exactly when he left – actually Miss Peake saw him off, which turns out to be very fortunate. There need be no question of his ever having come back here. But if his body is found *here*, then we shall all be questioned – (*Carefully.*) and Pippa won't be able to stand it.

SIR ROWLAND. (*Puzzled.*) Pippa?

CLARISSA. She'll break down and confess.

SIR ROWLAND. Pippa!

(*CLARISSA nods.*)

My God!

CLARISSA. She was terrified when he came here today. I told her I wouldn't let her be taken away but I don't think she believed me. You know what she's been through – the nervous breakdown she's had? She told me she never meant to do it, and that's true, I'm sure. It was panic. She got hold of that stick and struck out blindly.

SIR ROWLAND. What stick?

CLARISSA. The one from the hall stand. It's in the recess. I left it there, I didn't touch it.

SIR ROWLAND. (*Sharply.*) Where is she now?

CLARISSA. In bed. I've given her a sleeping pill. She ought not to wake till morning. Tomorrow I'll take her up to London – my old nanny will look after her.

(SIR ROWLAND glances at the body, then returns to CLARISSA and kisses her.)

SIR ROWLAND. You win, my dear. I apologise. That child mustn't be asked to face the music. Get the others.

(He quickly goes to the French windows, looks out, then closes the curtains. CLARISSA goes to the library door and opens it.)

CLARISSA. *(Calling.)* Hugo. Jeremy.

(HUGO and JEREMY enter from the library.)

HUGO. That butler of yours doesn't lock up very carefully. The window in the library was open. I've shut it now.

(He looks to SIR ROWLAND.)

Well?

SIR ROWLAND. I'm converted.

(JEREMY looks to CLARISSA.)

JEREMY. Well done.

SIR ROWLAND. There's no time to lose. Those gloves.

(He picks up a pair of gloves and puts them on. JEREMY and HUGO follow suit. SIR ROWLAND moves to the panel.)

Now how does this thing open?

JEREMY. Like this, sir, Pippa showed me.

(He moves the lever and opens the panel. SIR ROWLAND looks into the recess and brings out the knobkerry.)

SIR ROWLAND. Heavy enough. Weighted in the head. All the same, I shouldn't have thought...

HUGO. What wouldn't you have thought?

SIR ROWLAND. I should have thought it would have been something with a sharper edge – metal of some kind.

HUGO. You mean a god-damned chopper?

JEREMY. That stick looks pretty murderous to me. You could easily crack a man's head open with that.

SIR ROWLAND. Evidently. Hugo, will you burn this in the kitchen stove.

(He hands the knobkerry to HUGO.)

Warrender, you and I'll get the body to the car.

(The front doorbell suddenly peals off.)

What's that?

CLARISSA. It's the front doorbell.

(They all stand petrified.)

Who can it be? It's much too early for Henry and Mr. Jones. It must be Sir John.

SIR ROWLAND. Sir John? You mean the Foreign Secretary?

CLARISSA. Yes.

SIR ROWLAND. Hm – yes. Well, we've got to do something.

(The bell rings again.)

Clarissa, go and answer the door. Use what delaying tactics you can. In the meantime, we'll clear up in here.

(CLARISSA exits to the hall.)

Now then, we'll get him in here. Later, when everyone's in here at the pow-wow, we can take him out through the library.

JEREMY. Good idea.

(JEREMY and SIR ROWLAND lift the body.)

HUGO. Give you a hand?

JEREMY. No. It's all right.

(JEREMY and SIR ROWLAND carry the body into the recess. HUGO picks up the torch. SIR ROWLAND comes out of the recess and presses the lever as JEREMY slips out. HUGO slips under JEREMY's arm into the recess with the torch and stick. The panel closes. SIR ROWLAND is checking his coat for blood.)

SIR ROWLAND. Gloves.

(They remove the gloves and put them under the cushion of the sofa.)

Bridge.

(They take their seats at the bridge table.)

Come along, Hugo.

(HUGO knocks from inside the recess. JEREMY and SIR ROWLAND look at each other. JEREMY rushes to the switch and opens the panel. SIR ROWLAND ushers HUGO out of the recess.)

Come along, Hugo.

JEREMY. Hurry up, Hugo.

(JEREMY closes the panel. SIR ROWLAND takes Hugo's gloves and puts them under the cushion. They all run to their seats and pick up their cards. CLARISSA, INSPECTOR LORD and CONSTABLE JONES enter from the hall.)

CLARISSA. *(Surprised.)* It's the police, Uncle Roly.

INSPECTOR. I'm sorry to intrude, gentlemen, but we have received information that a murder has been committed here.

(The following four lines are spoken together.)

HUGO. What!

JEREMY. A murder!

SIR ROWLAND. What!

CLARISSA. Isn't it extraordinary!

INSPECTOR. We had a telephone call at the station. Good evening, Mr. Birch.

HUGO. *(Mumbling.)* Er - good evening, Inspector.

SIR ROWLAND. It looks as though somebody's been hoaxing you, Inspector.

CLARISSA. We've been playing bridge here all evening.

(The others nod agreement.)

Who did they say had been murdered?

INSPECTOR. No names were mentioned. The caller just said that a man had been murdered at Coppleshore Court and would we come along immediately. They rang off before any additional information could be obtained.

CLARISSA. It must have been a hoax. *(Virtuously.)* What a wicked thing to do.

(HUGO tut-tuts.)

INSPECTOR. You'd be surprised, madam, at the potty things people do.

(HUGO clears his throat.)

Well now, according to you, nothing out of the ordinary has happened here this evening? Perhaps I'd better see Mr. Hailsham-Brown as well.

CLARISSA. He's not here. I don't expect him back until late tonight.

INSPECTOR. I see. Who is there in the house?

(CLARISSA indicates them in turn.)

CLARISSA. Sir Rowland Delahaye. Mr. Warrender.

(SIR ROWLAND and JEREMY murmur acknowledgements.)

And my little step-daughter. She's in bed and asleep.

INSPECTOR. What about servants?

CLARISSA. It's their night out. They're at the pictures in Maidstone.

INSPECTOR. I see.

(ELGIN enters from the hall and looks at the INSPECTOR.)

ELGIN. Would you be wanting anything, madam?

CLARISSA. *(Startled.)* I thought you were at the pictures, Elgin?

(The INSPECTOR looks sharply at CLARISSA.)

ELGIN. We returned almost immediately, madam. My wife was not feeling well - *(Delicately.)* er - gastric trouble.

(He looks from the INSPECTOR to the CONSTABLE.)

ELGIN. Is anything – wrong?

INSPECTOR. What's your name?

ELGIN. Elgin. I'm sure I hope there's nothing...

INSPECTOR. Someone rang up the station and said that a murder had been committed here.

ELGIN. A murder?

INSPECTOR. What do you know about that?

ELGIN. Nothing, nothing at all.

INSPECTOR. It wasn't you who rang up?

ELGIN. No, indeed.

INSPECTOR. You came in by the back door I suppose?

ELGIN. Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. Notice anything unusual?

ELGIN. Now I think of it, there was a strange car standing near the stables.

INSPECTOR. A strange car?

ELGIN. I wondered at the time whose it might be. It seemed a curious place to leave it.

INSPECTOR. Anybody in it?

ELGIN. Not so far as I could see, sir.

INSPECTOR. Go and take a look at it, Jones.

CLARISSA. *(Startled.)* Jones!

INSPECTOR. I beg your pardon?

CLARISSA. *(Smiling.)* Nothing – just – I didn't think he looked very Welsh.

(The INSPECTOR signs to the CONSTABLE and ELGIN, indicating they should go. They exit to the hall, closing the door. JEREMY rises, moves to the sofa and takes a sandwich. The INSPECTOR looks to the bridge table.)

INSPECTOR. It seems that someone called here tonight who is unaccounted for. You weren't expecting anyone?

CLARISSA. Oh, no – no. We didn't want anyone. You see, we were just the four of us for bridge.

INSPECTOR. Oh, I'm fond of a game of bridge myself.

CLARISSA. Oh, are you? Do you play Blackwood?

INSPECTOR. I just like a common-sense game. You haven't been here very long, have you, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown?

CLARISSA. No, about six weeks.

INSPECTOR. And there's been no funny business of any kind since you've been here?

SIR ROWLAND. What exactly do you mean by funny business, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. Well, it's rather a curious story, sir. This house belonged to Mr. Sellon the antique dealer. He died six months ago.

CLARISSA. Yes, he had some kind of accident, didn't he?

INSPECTOR. That's right. Fell downstairs, pitched on his head.

(He looks at JEREMY.)

Accidental death, they brought in. Might have been that, might not.

CLARISSA. You mean, somebody might have pushed him?

INSPECTOR. That, or else somebody hit him a crack on the head –

(They freeze. He turns to JEREMY.)

– and arranged him to look right at the bottom of the stairs.

CLARISSA. These stairs here?

INSPECTOR. No, at the shop. No evidence, of course – but he was rather a dark horse, Mr. Sellon.

SIR ROWLAND. In what way, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. Once or twice he had a couple of things to explain, as you might say. And the Narcotic Squad came down and had a word with him once –

(He turns to JEREMY.)

– but it was all only suspicion.

SIR ROWLAND. Officially, that is to say.

INSPECTOR. That's right, sir, officially.

SIR ROWLAND. Whereas unofficially...?

INSPECTOR. I'm afraid we can't mention that.

(He turns to JEREMY.)

But there was one rather curious circumstance. There was an unfinished letter on Mr. Sellon's desk, in which he mentioned that he'd come into possession of something which he described as an unparalleled rarity, which he would -

(He turns to SIR ROWLAND.)

- guarantee wasn't a forgery and he was asking fourteen thousand pounds for it.

SIR ROWLAND. Fourteen thousand pounds, that's a lot of money. I wonder what it could be? Jewellery, I suppose, but the word forgery... A picture, perhaps?

(JEREMY continues to eat the sandwiches.)

INSPECTOR. Yes. There was nothing in the shop worth such a sum of money. The insurance inventory made that clear.

(He turns to JEREMY.)

Mr. Sellon's partner was a woman who has a business on her own in London, and she wrote and said she couldn't give us any help.

SIR ROWLAND. So he might have been murdered and the article, whatever it was, stolen.

INSPECTOR. It's possible, but again the would-be thief mayn't have been able to find it.

SIR ROWLAND. Now why do you think that?

INSPECTOR. Because the shop has been broken into twice since then -

(He turns to JEREMY.)

- broken into and ransacked.

CLARISSA. Why are you telling us all this, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. Because, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, it's occurred to me that whatever was hidden away by Sellon may have been hidden *here*, and not at the shop in Maidstone, and that's why I asked you if anything peculiar had come to your notice.

CLARISSA. Somebody rang up today and asked to speak to me, and when I came to the phone, whoever it was - just hung up. In a way, that's rather odd. Oh yes, of course -

(She turns to JEREMY.)

- that man who came the other day and wanted to buy things - a horsey sort of man in a check suit. He wanted to buy that desk.

(The INSPECTOR makes to the desk.)

INSPECTOR. This one here?

CLARISSA. Yes. I told him, of course, that it wasn't ours to sell but he didn't seem to believe me. He offered a large sum, far more than it's worth.

INSPECTOR. Interesting.

(He studies the desk.)

These things often have a secret drawer.

CLARISSA. Yes, this one has. But there was nothing very exciting in it: only some old autographs.

(The CONSTABLE enters from the hall. He carries a car registration book and a pair of gloves.)

INSPECTOR. Yes, Jones?

(The CONSTABLE speaks with a Welsh accent.)

CONSTABLE. I've examined the car, sir. Pair of gloves in the driving seat. Registration book in the side pocket.

(CLARISSA and JEREMY smile at the accent. The CONSTABLE hands the book to the INSPECTOR, who examines it.)

INSPECTOR. Oliver Costello, twenty-seven, Morgan Mansions, S.W. Three. (*Sharply.*) Has a man called Costello been here today?

(**CLARISSA** and **SIR ROWLAND** exchange a glance.)

CLARISSA. Yes, he was here about - let me see - half-past six.

INSPECTOR. A friend of yours?

CLARISSA. No. I shouldn't call him a friend. I had met him once or twice.

(*She deliberately looks embarrassed.*)

It's - a little awkward...

(*She looks to SIR ROWLAND.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Perhaps it would be better if I explained the situation, Inspector. It concerns the first Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. There was a divorce just over a year ago, and recently she married Mr. Oliver Costello.

INSPECTOR. I see. And Mr. Costello came here today - why? By appointment?

CLARISSA. (*Easily.*) Oh, no. As a matter of fact, when Miranda left she took with her one or two things that weren't really hers. Oliver happened to be in this part of the world and he just looked in to return them.

INSPECTOR. What kind of things?

CLARISSA. (*Smiling.*) Nothing very important.

(*She picks up the small silver cigarette box from the table, showing it to the INSPECTOR.*)

This was one of them. It belonged to my husband's mother and he values it for sentimental reasons.

INSPECTOR. How long did Mr. Costello remain?

CLARISSA. Oh, a very short time. He said he was in a hurry. About ten minutes, I should think.

INSPECTOR. And your interview was quite amicable?

CLARISSA. Oh, yes. I thought it was very kind of him to take the trouble to return the things.

INSPECTOR. Did he mention where he was going when he left here?

CLARISSA. No, actually he went out by that window. As a matter of fact, my lady gardener, Miss Peake, was here and she offered to show him out through the garden.

INSPECTOR. Your gardener. Does she live on the premises?

CLARISSA. Yes, she lives in the cottage.

INSPECTOR. I think I should like a word with her. Jones!

CLARISSA. There's a telephone connection through to the cottage. Shall I get her for you, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. If you would be so kind, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

CLARISSA. Oh, not at all.

(*She lifts the receiver and presses a knob on the telephone.*)

I don't suppose she'll have gone to bed yet.

(*She smiles at the INSPECTOR. The INSPECTOR looks bashful. JEREMY smiles and takes another sandwich.*)

Hullo, Miss Peake. This is Mrs. Hailsham-Brown... Would you mind coming over? Something rather important has happened... Oh yes, that will be all right, thank you.

(*She replaces the receiver.*)

She's been washing her hair but she'll dress and come right over.

INSPECTOR. Thank you. He may have mentioned to her where he was going.

CLARISSA. Yes, he may have.

INSPECTOR. The question is why is Mr. Costello's car still here, and where is Mr. Costello?

(*CLARISSA momentarily glances at the panel.*)

Apparently Miss Peake was the last person to see him. He left, you say, by that window. Did you lock it after him?

CLARISSA. No.

INSPECTOR. Oh.

CLARISSA. I - I don't think so.

INSPECTOR. So he *might* have re-entered that way. I think, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, that with your permission, I should like to search the house.

CLARISSA. (*Smiling.*) Of course. You've seen this room. Nobody could be hidden here.

(She holds the window curtains open for a moment.)

Look!

(She crosses to the library door and opens it.)

Through here is the library. Would you like to go in there?

INSPECTOR. Thank you. Jones!

(The INSPECTOR and the CONSTABLE go into the library. Once inside, the INSPECTOR indicates the door to the hall.)

Just see where that door leads to, Jones.

CONSTABLE. (*Offstage.*) Very good, sir.

(SIR ROWLAND moves to the panel, gesticulating.)

SIR ROWLAND. What's the other side?

CLARISSA. Bookshelves.

(SIR ROWLAND nods.)

CONSTABLE. (*Offstage.*) Just through to the hall, sir.

(The INSPECTOR and the CONSTABLE enter from the library.)

INSPECTOR. Right.

(He notices that SIR ROWLAND has moved.)

Now we'll search the rest of the house.

CLARISSA. I'll come with you if you don't mind, in case my step-daughter should wake up and be frightened. Not that I think she will. It's extraordinary how deeply

children sleep. You have fairly to shake them awake. Have you got any children, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. Boy and girl.

(The INSPECTOR exits and goes up the stairs.)

CLARISSA. Isn't that nice.

(She turns to the CONSTABLE.)

Mr. Jones.

(The CONSTABLE exits to the hall. CLARISSA follows him off, her smile dropping as she shuts the door. HUGO wipes his hands and JEREMY mops his forehead.)

JEREMY. And now what?

(He takes another sandwich.)

SIR ROWLAND. I don't like this. We're getting in deep.

HUGO. If you ask me, there's only one thing to do, come clean. Own up now before it's too late.

JEREMY. Damn it, we can't do that. It would be too unfair to Clarissa.

HUGO. We'll get her in a worse mess if we keep on with this. How are we ever going to get the body away? The police will impound the fellow's car.

JEREMY. We'll use mine.

HUGO. Well, I don't like it. I don't like it at all. Damn it, I'm a local J.P. What do you say, Roly? You've got a good level head.

SIR ROWLAND. Personally, I am committed to the enterprise.

HUGO. I don't understand you.

SIR ROWLAND. Take it on trust, if you will. We're in a very bad jam, all of us. But if we stick together and have reasonable luck, I think there's a chance we may pull it off. Once the police are satisfied that Costello isn't in this house, they'll go off and look elsewhere. Plenty of reasons, you know, why he might have left his car and gone off on foot. I don't see why suspicion should

attach itself to any of us. We're all respectable people - Hugo's a J.P., Henry's in the Foreign Office.

HUGO. And I suppose you've had a blameless and even distinguished career. All right then, we brazen it out.

JEREMY. Can't we do something about that straightaway?

(He nods towards the recess.)

SIR ROWLAND. No time. They'll be back any minute. Safer where it is.

JEREMY. I must say Clarissa's a marvel. Doesn't turn a hair. She's got that police inspector eating out of her hand.

(The front doorbell rings.)

SIR ROWLAND. That's Miss Peake, I expect. Go and let her in, Warrender.

(JEREMY exits to the hall. HUGO beckons to SIR ROWLAND.)

HUGO. Roly - what's up, Roly? What did that girl tell you when she got you to herself?

JEREMY. *(Offstage.)* Good evening, Miss Peake.

(SIR ROWLAND starts to speak, but on hearing MISS PEAKE's voice indicates "not now.")

MISS PEAKE. *(Offstage.)* Good evening, Mr. Warrender.

JEREMY. *(Offstage.)* I think you'd better come in here.

(JEREMY and MISS PEAKE enter from the hall. MISS PEAKE is rather hastily dressed and has a towel around her head.)

MISS PEAKE. What is all this? Mrs. Brown-Hailsham was most mysterious on the phone. Has anything happened?

SIR ROWLAND. *(Courteously.)* I'm so sorry you've been routed out like this, Miss Peake. Do sit down.

(HUGO pulls out a chair for MISS PEAKE.)

MISS PEAKE. Oh, thank you.

SIR ROWLAND. As a matter of fact we've got the police here, and...

MISS PEAKE. The police? Has there been a burglary?

SIR ROWLAND. No, not that - but...

(CLARISSA, the INSPECTOR and the CONSTABLE enter from the hall.)

CLARISSA. Inspector, this is Miss Peake.

INSPECTOR. Good evening, Miss Peake.

MISS PEAKE. Good evening, Inspector. I was just asking Sir Rowland - has there been a robbery, or what?

INSPECTOR. We received a rather peculiar telephone call which brought us out here and we think you could probably clear up the matter for us.

(MISS PEAKE gives a jolly laugh.)

MISS PEAKE. This is mysterious.

INSPECTOR. It concerns Mr. Costello, Mr. Oliver Costello of twenty-seven Morgan Mansions, Chelsea.

MISS PEAKE. Never heard of him.

INSPECTOR. He was here this evening, visiting Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, and I believe you showed him out through the garden.

MISS PEAKE. Oh, that man. Mrs. Hailsham-Brown did mention his name. Yes, what do you want to know?

INSPECTOR. I should like to know exactly what happened, and when you last saw him.

MISS PEAKE. Let me see, we went out through the window, and I said there was a shortcut if he wanted the bus, and he said no, he'd come in his car, and he'd left it round by the stables.

INSPECTOR. Rather an odd place to leave a car.

(MISS PEAKE slaps the INSPECTOR's arm.)

MISS PEAKE. Just what I thought. You'd think he'd drive right up to the front door, wouldn't you? People are so odd.

INSPECTOR. And then?

MISS PEAKE. He went off to his car and I suppose he drove away.

INSPECTOR. You didn't see him do so?

MISS PEAKE. No – I was putting my tools away.

INSPECTOR. And that's the last you saw of him?

MISS PEAKE. Yes, why?

INSPECTOR. His car is still here. A call was put through to the police station at seven forty-nine, saying a man had been murdered at Copplestone Court.

MISS PEAKE. Murdered? Here? Ridiculous!

INSPECTOR. That's what everybody seems to think.

MISS PEAKE. Of course I know there are all these maniacs about, attacking women – but you say a *man* was murdered...

INSPECTOR. You didn't hear a car this evening?

MISS PEAKE. Only Mr. Hailsham-Brown's.

INSPECTOR. Mr. Hailsham-Brown? I thought he wasn't expected home until late.

(His glance swings to CLARISSA.)

CLARISSA. My husband did come home, but he had to go out again almost immediately.

INSPECTOR. Oh, is that so? Exactly when did he come home?

CLARISSA. Let me see – about...

MISS PEAKE. It was about quarter of an hour before I went off duty – I work a lot of overtime, Inspector. I never stick to regulation hours. Be keen on your job, that's what I say. Yes, it was about a quarter past seven when Mr. Hailsham-Brown got in.

INSPECTOR. Shortly after Mr. Costello left.

(His manner imperceptibly changes.)

They probably passed each other.

MISS PEAKE. You mean that he may have come back again to see Mr. Hailsham-Brown.

CLARISSA. Oliver definitely *didn't* come back to the house.

MISS PEAKE. But you can't be sure of that, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. He might have got in by that window without

your knowing anything about it. Golly! You don't think he *murdered* Mr. Hailsham-Brown? I say. I am sorry.

CLARISSA. Of course he didn't murder Henry.

INSPECTOR. Where did your husband go when he left here?

CLARISSA. I've no idea.

INSPECTOR. Doesn't he usually say where he's going?

CLARISSA. I never ask questions. I think it must be so boring for a man if his wife is always asking questions.

(MISS PEAKE gives a sudden squeal.)

MISS PEAKE. But how stupid of me. Of course, if that man's car is still here, then *he* must be the one who's been murdered.

(She roars with laughter.)

SIR ROWLAND. We've no reason to believe anyone has been murdered, Miss Peake. In fact, the inspector believes it was all some silly hoax.

MISS PEAKE. But the car. I do think the car is very suspicious. Have you looked about for the body, Inspector?

SIR ROWLAND. The inspector has already searched the house.

(The INSPECTOR looks to SIR ROWLAND, but MISS PEAKE taps him on the shoulder.)

MISS PEAKE. I'm sure those Elgins have something to do with it. I've had my suspicions of them all along. I saw a light in their bedroom window as I came along here just now. And that in itself is suspicious. It's their night out and they usually don't return until past eleven. Have you searched their quarters?

(The INSPECTOR opens his mouth to speak.)

Now, listen. Suppose this Mr. Costello recognised Elgin as a man with a criminal record. He might decide to come back and warn Mrs. Hailsham-Brown about the man, and Elgin assaulted him. Then, of course, Elgin would have to hide the body somewhere quickly, so that he could dispose of it later in the night. Now, where would he hide it, I wonder.

(She indicates the French windows.)

MISS PEAKE. Behind a curtain or...

CLARISSA. Oh, really, Miss Peake, there isn't anybody hidden behind any of the curtains. And I'm sure Elgin would never murder anybody. It's quite ridiculous.

MISS PEAKE. You're so trusting, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. When you're my age, you'll realise how often people are not quite what they seem.

(The INSPECTOR opens his mouth to speak.)

Now then, where would a man like Elgin hide the body? There's that cupboard place between here and the library. You've looked there, I suppose?

SIR ROWLAND. Miss Peake, the inspector has looked both here and in the library.

(The INSPECTOR looks at SIR ROWLAND.)

INSPECTOR. What do you mean by "that cupboard place," Miss Peake?

(The others give a definite, though controlled reaction.)

MISS PEAKE. Oh, it's a wonderful place when you're playing sardines. You'd really never dream it was there. I'll show it to you.

(She makes to the panel.)

CLARISSA. No.

(They turn to CLARISSA.)

There's nothing there now. I know because I went that way, through to the library, just now.

MISS PEAKE. *(Disappointed.)* Oh well, in that case, then...

(She turns away from the panel.)

INSPECTOR. Just show me all the same. I'd like to see.

MISS PEAKE. It was a door originally - matched the one over there.

(She actuates the lever.)

You pull this catch back, and the door comes open. You see.

(The panel opens. The body slumps down and falls forward. MISS PEAKE screams. The INSPECTOR looks at CLARISSA.)

INSPECTOR. So there was a murder here tonight.

(MISS PEAKE continues to scream.)

Scene Two

(Ten minutes later. The body is lying collapsed in the recess, the panel of which is open. CLARISSA is lying on the sofa. SIR ROWLAND is holding a glass of brandy, which he is making CLARISSA sip. The INSPECTOR is talking on the telephone. The CONSTABLE is standing by the door to the hall.)

INSPECTOR. Yes, yes... What's that? ...Hit and run? ... Where? ...Oh, I see... Yes, well, send them along as soon as you can... Yes, we'll want photographs... Yes, the whole bag of tricks.

(He replaces the receiver and turns to the CONSTABLE.)

Everything comes at once. Weeks go by and nothing happens, now the divisional surgeon's out at a smash on the London road. It'll all mean a bit of delay.

(He looks at the body in the recess.)

However, we'll get on as best we can until the M.O. arrives. Better not move him until they've taken the photographs - not that it will tell us anything, he wasn't killed there. He was put there afterwards. You can see where his feet have dragged.

(They crouch down, looking at the carpet.)

SIR ROWLAND. How are you feeling?

CLARISSA. *(Faintly.)* Better.

INSPECTOR. Might be as well to close the bookcase door, we don't want any more hysterics.

CONSTABLE. Right, sir.

(He closes the panel on the body.)

SIR ROWLAND. Mrs. Hailsham-Brown has had a bad shock. I think she ought to go to her room and lie down.

INSPECTOR. *(Politely.)* Certainly, in a moment or two. I'd just like to ask her a few questions first.

SIR ROWLAND. She's not fit to be questioned.

CLARISSA. *(Faintly.)* I'm all right. Really, I am.

SIR ROWLAND. *(Warningly.)* It's very brave of you, my dear. But I really think it's wiser not.

CLARISSA. Dear Uncle Roly.

(She looks to the INSPECTOR.)

He's so sweet to me always.

INSPECTOR. Yes, I can see that.

CLARISSA. Do ask me anything you want to, Inspector. Though actually I can't help you, I'm afraid, because I just don't know anything at all.

(SIR ROWLAND sighs, shakes his head slightly and turns away.)

INSPECTOR. We shan't worry you much, madam.

(He moves to the library door and opens it for SIR ROWLAND.)

Will you join the other gentlemen, sir?

SIR ROWLAND. I think I'd better remain here in case...

INSPECTOR. *(Firmly.)* I'll call you if it should be necessary.

(There is a slight duel of eyes. SIR ROWLAND reluctantly exits to the library. The INSPECTOR closes the door. CLARISSA sits up. The CONSTABLE takes out his notebook and pencil to record the questions and answers.)

Now, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, if you're ready.

(He picks up the cigarette box from the table, examining it.)

CLARISSA. Dear Uncle Roly. He always wants to spare me everything.

(She sees the INSPECTOR with the cigarette box and becomes anxious. She smiles enchantingly at him.)

This isn't going to be the third degree, is it?

INSPECTOR. Nothing of that kind. Just a few simple questions. Are you ready, Jones?

CONSTABLE. All ready, sir.

INSPECTOR. Now, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, you had no idea that a body was concealed in that recess?

CLARISSA. (*Wide-eyed.*) No, of course not. It's horrible - quite horrible.

INSPECTOR. When we were searching this room, why didn't you call our attention to that recess?

CLARISSA. D'you know, the thought never struck me. You see we never use it, so it never came into my head.

INSPECTOR. But you said you had just been through there into the library.

CLARISSA. (*Quickly.*) Oh, no. You must have misunderstood me.

(She points to the library door.)

What I meant was that door.

INSPECTOR. (*Grimly.*) I certainly misunderstood you. Now you've no idea when Mr. Costello came back to this house, or what he came for?

CLARISSA. I simply can't imagine.

INSPECTOR. But the fact remains that he did come back.

CLARISSA. Yes, of course.

INSPECTOR. He must have had some reason.

CLARISSA. I suppose so.

INSPECTOR. Perhaps he wanted to see your husband?

CLARISSA. (*Quickly.*) Oh, no, I'm quite sure he didn't. Henry and he never liked each other.

INSPECTOR. Oh! Had there been a quarrel between them?

CLARISSA. (*Quickly.*) Oh no, they haven't quarrelled. Henry just thought he wore the wrong shoes. (*Smiling.*) You know how odd men are.

INSPECTOR. He didn't come back here to see you?

CLARISSA. Me? Oh no, I'm sure he didn't.

INSPECTOR. Is there anybody else in the house he might have wanted to see?

CLARISSA. I can't think who. I mean, who is there?

INSPECTOR. Mr. Costello comes here, returns the articles which the first Mrs. Hailsham-Brown had taken away. He says "goodbye," then comes back here -

(He makes to the French windows.)

- presumably through this window - he is killed - his body is pushed into that recess - all in a space of about ten - twenty minutes, and nobody hears anything.

CLARISSA. I know. It's extraordinary, isn't it?

INSPECTOR. You're sure you didn't hear anything?

CLARISSA. Nothing. It really is fantastic.

INSPECTOR. (*Grimly.*) Almost too fantastic.

(He pauses.)

That's all for the present, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

(CLARISSA makes rather quickly to the library door.)

Not that way.

(He opens the hall door.)

CLARISSA. I think, really, I'd rather join the others.

INSPECTOR. Later.

(CLARISSA rather reluctantly exits to the hall. He closes the door.)

Where's the other woman? Miss - er - Peake?

CONSTABLE. Put her on the spare room bed. After she came out of the hysterics, that is. Terrible time I had with her, laughing and crying something terrible she was.

INSPECTOR. Doesn't matter if Mrs. H.B. goes and talks to her. But not to those three there. We'll have no comparing of stories, no prompting. You locked the door from the library to the hall?

CONSTABLE. Yes, sir. I've got the key here.

INSPECTOR. Good, we'll take them one at a time. But first I'll have a word with that butler chap.

CONSTABLE. Elgin?

INSPECTOR. Yes, call him in. I've an idea he knows something.

CONSTABLE. Yes, indeed, sir.

(He opens the hall door and calls:)

Elgin, come you in here, please.

(When the door opens, ELGIN is seen standing on the stairs listening. He starts to go up them guiltily but stops, turns and comes into the room. The CONSTABLE closes the door.)

INSPECTOR. Sit down, Elgin.

(ELGIN sits at the bridge table.)

Now, you started off for the pictures this evening but you came back. Why was that?

ELGIN. I've told you, sir, my wife wasn't feeling well.

INSPECTOR. It was you who let Mr. Costello into the house when he called here this evening?

ELGIN. Yes, sir.

INSPECTOR. Why didn't you tell us at once that it was Mr. Costello's car outside?

ELGIN. I didn't know, sir. Mr. Costello didn't drive up to the front door - I didn't know he'd come in a car.

INSPECTOR. Rather peculiar, eh?

ELGIN. Yes, sir. I expect he had his reasons.

INSPECTOR. Just what do you mean by that?

ELGIN. *(Smugly.)* Nothing, sir. Nothing at all.

INSPECTOR. *(Sharply.)* Ever seen Mr. Costello before?

ELGIN. Never, sir.

INSPECTOR. *(Meaningly.)* It wasn't because of Mr. Costello that you came back this evening?

ELGIN. I've told you, sir, my wife...

INSPECTOR. I don't want to hear any more about your wife. How long have you been with Mrs. Hailsham-Brown?

ELGIN. Six weeks, sir.

INSPECTOR. And before that?

ELGIN. *(Uneasily.)* I'd - I'd been having a little rest.

INSPECTOR. A rest? You realise that in a case like this, your references will have to be looked into very carefully.

(ELGIN half rises from his seat.)

ELGIN. Would that be...?

(He resumes his seat.)

I - I wouldn't wish to deceive you, sir. It wasn't anything really wrong - what I mean is - the original reference having got torn - I couldn't quite remember the wording...

INSPECTOR. So you wrote your own references - that's what it comes to.

ELGIN. I didn't mean any harm. I've got my living to earn...

INSPECTOR. *(Interrupting.)* At the moment, I'm not interested in fake references. I want to know what happened here tonight, and what you know about Mr. Costello.

ELGIN. I'd never set eyes on him before.

(He looks round at the hall door.)

But I've a good idea of why he came here.

INSPECTOR. Why?

ELGIN. Blackmail - he had something on *her*.

INSPECTOR. On Mrs. Hailsham-Brown?

ELGIN. *(Eagerly.)* Yes. I came in to ask if there was anything more, and I heard them.

INSPECTOR. What did you hear exactly?

ELGIN. *(Dramatically.)* I heard her say, "But that's blackmail. I'll not submit to it."

INSPECTOR. *(Doubtfully.)* Hm! Anything more?

ELGIN. No - they stopped when I came in - and when I went out they dropped their voices.

INSPECTOR. I see.

ELGIN. (*Whining.*) You'll not be hard on me, sir. I've had a lot of trouble one way and another.

INSPECTOR. Get out.

ELGIN. (*Quickly.*) Yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

(*ELGIN exits quickly to the hall.*)

INSPECTOR. Blackmail - eh?

CONSTABLE. (*Primly.*) And Mrs. Hailsham-Brown such a nice seeming lady.

INSPECTOR. (*Curtly.*) I'll see Mr. Birch, now.

(*The CONSTABLE opens the library door.*)

CONSTABLE. Mr. Birch, please.

(*HUGO enters from the library. He looks dogged and rather defiant. The CONSTABLE closes the door. The INSPECTOR indicates a chair at the bridge table.*)

INSPECTOR. (*Pleasantly.*) Come in, Mr. Birch. Sit down here, please.

(*HUGO sits.*)

A very unpleasant business, I'm afraid, sir. What have you to say about it?

HUGO. (*Defiantly.*) Nothing.

INSPECTOR. Nothing?

HUGO. What do you expect me to say? The blinking woman snaps open the blinking cupboard and out falls a blinking corpse. Took my breath away. I've not got over it yet. It's no good asking me anything because I don't know anything.

INSPECTOR. That's your statement, is it? You know nothing at all about it?

HUGO. I'm telling you. I didn't kill the fellow. I didn't even know him.

INSPECTOR. You didn't know him. But you'd heard of him?

HUGO. Yes, and I heard he was a nasty bit of goods.

INSPECTOR. In what way?

HUGO. Oh, I don't know. Fellow that women liked and men had no use for. That sort of thing.

INSPECTOR. You've no idea why he should come back to this house a second time this evening?

HUGO. Not a clue.

INSPECTOR. Anything between him and the present Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, do you think?

HUGO. (*Shocked.*) Clarissa? Good Lord, no! Nice girl, Clarissa. Got a lot of sense. Wouldn't look twice at a fellow like that.

INSPECTOR. So you can't help us?

HUGO. Sorry. There it is.

INSPECTOR. You'd no idea that the body was in that recess?

HUGO. Of course not.

INSPECTOR. Thank you, sir.

HUGO. (*Vaguely.*) What?

INSPECTOR. That's all, thank you, sir.

(*He moves to the desk and picks up a copy of Who's Who. HUGO rises and moves to the library door, but the CONSTABLE bars his way. HUGO turns towards the French windows.*)

CONSTABLE. This way, Mr. Birch, please.

(*He moves to the hall door and HUGO exits through it. The CONSTABLE closes the door.*)

He was a mine of information, wasn't he? Mind you, not very nice for a J.P. to be mixed up in a murder.

(*The INSPECTOR searches the book.*)

INSPECTOR. (*Reading.*) "Delahaye, Sir Rowland Edward Mark, K.C.B., M.V.O...."

CONSTABLE. What have you got there?

(*He peers over the INSPECTOR's shoulder.*)

CONSTABLE. "Who's Who."

INSPECTOR. (*Reading.*) "Educated Eton - Trinity College..."

Um! "Attached Foreign Office - second Secretary - Madrid - Plenipotentiary..."

CONSTABLE. Ooh!

(*The INSPECTOR gives a surprised look to the CONSTABLE.*)

INSPECTOR. "Constantinople Foreign Office - special commission rendered - Clubs - Boodles - Whites."

CONSTABLE. Do you want *him* next, sir?

INSPECTOR. No. I'll leave him till the last. We'll have young Warrender.

(*The CONSTABLE moves to the library door and opens it.*)

CONSTABLE. Mr. Warrender, please.

(*JEREMY enters from the library. He is attempting, rather unsuccessfully, to look quite at ease. The CONSTABLE closes the library door.*)

INSPECTOR. Sit down.

(*JEREMY sits.*)

Your name?

JEREMY. Jeremy Warrender.

INSPECTOR. Address?

JEREMY. Three hundred and forty Broad Street, and thirty-four Grosvenor Square. Country address, Hepplestone, Wiltshire.

INSPECTOR. A gentleman of independent means?

JEREMY. No. I'm private secretary to Sir Lazarus Stein. Those are his addresses.

INSPECTOR. How long have you been with him?

JEREMY. About a year.

INSPECTOR. Did you know this man Oliver Costello?

JEREMY. Never heard of him till tonight.

INSPECTOR. You didn't see him when he came to the house earlier this evening?

JEREMY. No. I'd gone over to the golf club with the others. We were dining there, you see. It was the servants' night out and Mr. Birch had asked us to dine with him at the club.

INSPECTOR. Was Mrs. Hailsham-Brown asked, too?

JEREMY. No.

(*The INSPECTOR raises his eyebrows. JEREMY hurries on.*)

That is, she could have come if she'd liked.

INSPECTOR. She was asked, then? And she refused?

JEREMY. (*Rattled.*) No. No. What I mean is - well, Hailsham-Brown is usually quite tired when he gets down here, and Clarissa said they'd just have a scratch meal here, as usual.

INSPECTOR. So Mrs. Hailsham-Brown expected her husband to dine here? She didn't expect him to go out again as soon as he came in?

JEREMY. (*Flustered.*) I - er - well - er - really I don't know. No - I believe she did say he was going to be out this evening.

INSPECTOR. It seems odd then that Mrs. Hailsham-Brown should not come out to the club, instead of remaining here to dine all by herself.

JEREMY. Well - er - well - (*Quickly.*) I mean it was the kid - Pippa, you know. Clarissa wouldn't have liked to go out to leave the kid all by herself in the house.

INSPECTOR. (*Significantly.*) Or perhaps she was making plans to receive a visitor of her own?

JEREMY. (*Hotly.*) I say, that's a rotten thing to say. And it isn't true. I'm sure she never planned anything of the kind.

INSPECTOR. Yet Oliver Costello came here to meet someone. The servants were out. Miss Peake has her own cottage. There was really no one he could have come to the house to meet except Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

JEREMY. All I can say is – you ask her.

INSPECTOR. I have asked her.

JEREMY. What did she say?

INSPECTOR. (*Easily.*) Just what you say, Mr. Warrender.

JEREMY. There you are.

INSPECTOR. Now tell me how you all happened to come back here from the club. Was that the original plan?

JEREMY. Yes. I mean, no.

INSPECTOR. Which do you mean, sir?

JEREMY. Well, it was like this. We all went over to the club. Rowland and old Hugo went straight into the dining room and I came in a bit later. It's all a cold buffet, you know. I'd been knocking balls about till it got dark and then, well, somebody said, "Bridge?" and I said, "Well, why not come back and play here?" So we did.

INSPECTOR. I see. It was your idea?

JEREMY. I don't remember who suggested it first. Hugo Birch, I think.

INSPECTOR. And you arrived back here – when?

JEREMY. Can't say exactly. Probably left the club house just a bit before eight.

INSPECTOR. And it's what – five minutes' walk?

JEREMY. Just about. The golf course adjoins this garden.

INSPECTOR. And then you played bridge?

JEREMY. Yes.

INSPECTOR. That must have been about twenty minutes before my arrival.

(He looks to the bridge table.)

Surely you hadn't time to complete two rubbers and start –

(He shows JEREMY Clarissa's marker.)

– a third?

JEREMY. What? Oh, no. No. That first rubber must have been yesterday's score.

(The INSPECTOR indicates the other markers.)

INSPECTOR. Only one person seems to have scored.

JEREMY. Yes. I'm afraid we're all a bit lazy about scoring. We left it to Clarissa.

INSPECTOR. Did you know about the passageway between this room and the library?

JEREMY. You mean the place the body was found?

INSPECTOR. That's what I mean.

JEREMY. No. No, I'd no idea. Wonderful bit of camouflage, isn't it? You'd never guess.

(The INSPECTOR sits on the arm of the sofa, dislodging the cushion. He sees the gloves.)

INSPECTOR. Consequently you couldn't know there was a body in it. Could you?

JEREMY. You could have knocked me over with a feather, as the saying goes. Absolute blood and thunder melodrama. Couldn't believe my eyes.

(The INSPECTOR holds up one of the pairs of gloves.)

INSPECTOR. Are these your gloves, Mr. Warrender?

JEREMY. No. I mean, yes.

INSPECTOR. You were wearing them when you came over from the golf club?

JEREMY. Yes. There's a bit of a nip in the air this evening.

INSPECTOR. I think you're mistaken.

(He indicates the initials in the gloves.)

These have Mr. Hailsham-Brown's initials inside them.

JEREMY. Oh, funny. I've got a pair just the same.

(The INSPECTOR produces the second pair of gloves.)

INSPECTOR. These perhaps?

JEREMY. You don't catch me a second time.

(He laughs.)

JEREMY. After all, one pair of gloves looks exactly like another.

INSPECTOR. Three pairs of gloves. All with Hailsham-Brown's initials inside. Curious.

JEREMY. Well, it is his house, after all. Why shouldn't he have three pairs of gloves lying about?

INSPECTOR. The only interesting thing is that you thought one of them might have been yours. And I think that your gloves are just sticking out of your pocket, now.

(JEREMY puts his hand in his right pocket.)

No, the other pocket.

(JEREMY takes the gloves from his left pocket.)

JEREMY. Oh, yes. Yes, so they are.

INSPECTOR. They're not really very like these. Are they?

JEREMY. Actually, these are my golfing gloves.

INSPECTOR. Thank you, Mr. Warrender. That's all for now.

JEREMY. *(Upset.)* Look here, you don't think...

INSPECTOR. I don't think what?

JEREMY. Nothing.

(He makes for the library door, but the CONSTABLE intercepts him and points to the hall door. JEREMY exits to the hall, closing the door. The INSPECTOR moves to the bridge table and looks through Who's Who once more.)

INSPECTOR. Here we are. *(Reading.)* "Stein, Sir Lazarus. Chairman of Saxon-Arabian Oil Company, Gulf Petroleum Company. Clubs..." Hmm! "Recreations: philately, golf, fishing. Address, three hundred and forty Broad Street, thirty-four Grosvenor Square."

(While the INSPECTOR is reading, the CONSTABLE sharpens his pencil. He stoops to pick up some shavings from the floor and finds the playing card left by Pippa.)

What have you got there?

CONSTABLE. Just a card, sir. Found it over there, under the sofa.

(The INSPECTOR takes the card.)

INSPECTOR. The Ace of Spades. A very interesting card. Here, wait a minute.

(He turns the card over.)

Red. Same pack.

(He picks up the red pack of cards from the table and spreads them out.)

Well, well, no Ace of Spades. Now, that's very remarkable, don't you think, Jones?

(He puts the card in his pocket. The CONSTABLE tidies the cards on the table.)

CONSTABLE. Very remarkable indeed, sir.

INSPECTOR. Now, we'll have Sir Rowland Delahaye.

(He collects the gloves and puts them in pairs on the bridge table. The CONSTABLE opens the library door, calling:)

CONSTABLE. Sir Rowland Delahaye.

(SIR ROWLAND enters from the library.)

INSPECTOR. Come in, Sir Rowland. Sit down, please.

(SIR ROWLAND moves to the bridge table, sees the gloves, pauses a moment, then sits.)

You are Sir Rowland Delahaye. Your address?

SIR ROWLAND. Long Paddock, Littlewich Green, Lincolnshire.

(He touches the copy of Who's Who.)

Couldn't you find it, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. Now, if you please, I'd like *your* account of the evening, after you left here shortly before seven.

SIR ROWLAND. It had been raining all day, and it suddenly cleared up. We had already arranged to go to the golf

club for dinner as it is the servants' night out. So we did that. As we were finishing dinner, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown rang up and suggested that, as her husband had unexpectedly gone out, we three should return here and make up a four for bridge. We did so. About twenty minutes after we'd started playing you arrived, Inspector. The rest - you know.

INSPECTOR. That's not quite Mr. Warrender's account of the matter.

SIR ROWLAND. Indeed. How did he put it?

INSPECTOR. He said that the suggestion to come back here and play bridge came from one of you three. Mr. Birch, he thought.

SIR ROWLAND. (*Easily.*) Ah, but you see Warrender came into the dining room rather late. He did not realise that Mrs. Hailsham-Brown had rung up.

(*SIR ROWLAND and the INSPECTOR measure glances.*)

You must know better than I do, Inspector, how very rarely two people's account of the same thing agrees. In fact, if three people were to agree exactly, I should regard it as suspicious. Very suspicious, indeed.

INSPECTOR. I'd like to discuss the case with you, sir, if I may?

SIR ROWLAND. How very agreeable of you, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. The dead man, Mr. Oliver Costello, came to this house with some particular object in view. Do you agree to that, sir?

SIR ROWLAND. He came to return certain objects which Mrs. Miranda Hailsham-Brown had taken away in error.

INSPECTOR. That may have been his excuse, sir, though I'm not even sure of that. But it wasn't the real reason that brought him here.

SIR ROWLAND. You may be right. I can't say.

INSPECTOR. He came, perhaps, to see a particular person. It may have been you, it may have been Mr. Warrender, it may have been Mr. Birch.

SIR ROWLAND. If he had wanted to see Mr. Birch he would have gone to his house, he wouldn't have come here.

INSPECTOR. That is probably so. Therefore, that leaves us with the choice of four people. You, Mr. Warrender, Mr. Hailsham-Brown and Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. Now how well did you know Oliver Costello?

SIR ROWLAND. Hardly at all. I've met him once or twice, that's all.

INSPECTOR. Where did you meet him?

SIR ROWLAND. (*Reflecting.*) Twice at the Hailsham-Browns' in London, over a year ago, and once in a restaurant, I believe.

INSPECTOR. But you had no reason for wishing to murder him?

SIR ROWLAND. (*Smiling.*) Is that an accusation, Inspector?

INSPECTOR. No, Sir Rowland. I should call it more an elimination. I don't think you have any motive for doing away with Oliver Costello. That leaves three people.

SIR ROWLAND. This sounds like a variant of *Ten Little Soldier Boys*.

(*The INSPECTOR smiles.*)

INSPECTOR. We'll take Mr. Warrender. How well do you know him?

SIR ROWLAND. I met him here for the first time two days ago. He appears to be an agreeable young man, well-bred, well educated. I know nothing about him, but I should say an unlikely murderer.

INSPECTOR. So much for Mr. Warrender. That brings me to my next question.

SIR ROWLAND. (*Anticipating.*) How well do I know Henry Hailsham-Brown and how well do I know Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. I know Henry Hailsham-Brown very well indeed. He is an old friend. Of Clarissa I know all

there is to know. She is my ward and inexpressibly dear to me.

INSPECTOR. Yes, sir. I think that answer makes certain things very clear.

SIR ROWLAND. Does it, indeed?

INSPECTOR. Why did you change your plans this evening? Why did you come back here and pretend to play bridge?

SIR ROWLAND. (*Sharply.*) Pretend?

(The INSPECTOR takes the playing card from his pocket.)

INSPECTOR. This card was found on the other side of the room under the sofa. I can hardly believe that you would have played two rubbers of bridge and started a third with a pack of fifty-one cards, and the Ace of Spades missing.

(SIR ROWLAND takes the card, looks at the back of it and then returns it.)

SIR ROWLAND. Yes. Perhaps that is a little difficult to believe.

(The INSPECTOR looks despairingly upwards.)

INSPECTOR. I also think that three pairs of Mr. Hailsham-Brown's gloves need a certain amount of explanation.

(SIR ROWLAND pauses a moment.)

SIR ROWLAND. I'm afraid, Inspector, you won't get any explanation from me.

INSPECTOR. No, sir. I take it that you are out to do your best for a certain lady. But it's not a bit of good, sir. Truth will out.

SIR ROWLAND. I wonder.

INSPECTOR. Mrs. Hailsham-Brown knew that body was in the recess. Whether she dragged it there herself, or whether you helped her, I don't know. But she knew. Now, I suggest that Oliver Costello came here to see Mrs. Hailsham-Brown and to obtain money from her by threats.

SIR ROWLAND. Threats? Threats of what?

INSPECTOR. That will come out, no doubt. Mrs. Hailsham-Brown is young and attractive, gay. This Mr. Costello was attractive to the ladies, they say. Now Mrs. Hailsham-Brown is newly married and...

SIR ROWLAND. Stop! I must put you right on certain matters. You can confirm what I tell you easily enough. Henry Hailsham-Brown's first marriage was unfortunate. His wife was a beautiful woman, but unbalanced and neurotic. Her health and disposition had degenerated to such an alarming state that her little daughter had to be removed to a nursing home. Yes, a really shocking state of affairs. It seemed that she had become a drug addict. How she obtained these drugs was not found out, but it was a very fair guess that she had been supplied with them by this man, Oliver Costello. She was infatuated with him and finally ran away with him. Henry Hailsham-Brown allowed her to divorce him. He's old-fashioned in his views. He has now found happiness and peace in his marriage with Clarissa and I can assure you, Inspector, that there are no guilty secrets in Clarissa's life. There is nothing, I can swear, with which Costello could possibly threaten her. Don't you think, Inspector, that you're on the wrong tack altogether? Why should you be so certain it was a person Costello came here to see? Why couldn't it have been a place?

INSPECTOR. What do you mean, sir?

SIR ROWLAND. When you were talking to us about the late Mr. Sellon, you mentioned that the Narcotic Squad took an interest in him. Isn't there a possible link there? Drugs - Sellon - Sellon's house. Costello has been here once before, I understand, ostensibly to look at Sellon's antiques. Supposing Oliver Costello wanted something in this house. In that desk perhaps.

(The INSPECTOR looks at the desk.)

There is the curious incident of a man who came here and offered an exorbitant price for that desk.

Supposing it was that desk that Oliver Costello wanted to examine – search, if you like. Supposing that he was followed here by someone. And that that someone struck him down, there by the desk.

INSPECTOR. There's a good deal of supposition...

SIR ROWLAND. It's a very reasonable hypothesis, I think.

INSPECTOR. The hypothesis being that this somebody put the body in the recess?

SIR ROWLAND. Exactly.

INSPECTOR. That would mean someone who knew about the recess.

SIR ROWLAND. Someone who knew the house in the *Sellons'* time.

INSPECTOR. (*Impatiently.*) Yes – that's all very well, sir, but it still doesn't explain one thing...

SIR ROWLAND. What's that?

INSPECTOR. Mrs. Hailsham-Brown knew the body was in that recess. She tried to prevent us looking there. It's no good trying to convince me otherwise. She knew.

(*A pause.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Inspector. Will you allow me to speak to my ward?

INSPECTOR. Only in my presence, sir.

SIR ROWLAND. That will do.

INSPECTOR. Jones!

(*The CONSTABLE exits to the hall.*)

SIR ROWLAND. We are very much in your hands, Inspector. I will ask you to make what allowances you can.

(*The CONSTABLE enters from the hall and holds the door open.*)

CONSTABLE. Come in here, please, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

(*CLARISSA enters from the hall. SIR ROWLAND takes her by the hands and speaks very solemnly.*)

SIR ROWLAND. Clarissa, my dear. Will you do what I ask you? Tell the inspector the truth.

CLARISSA. (*Doubtfully.*) The truth?

(*SIR ROWLAND speaks with emphasis.*)

SIR ROWLAND. The truth. It's the only thing to do.

(*SIR ROWLAND looks at CLARISSA for a moment, then exits to the hall. The CONSTABLE closes the door.*)

INSPECTOR. Sit down, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

(*CLARISSA smiles at the INSPECTOR, but he looks stern. Slowly she sits, waiting a moment before she speaks.*)

CLARISSA. I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry I told you all those lies. I didn't mean to. (*Ruefully.*) One gets into things, if you know what I mean?

INSPECTOR. (*Coldly.*) I can't say that I do know. Now, give me the facts, please.

CLARISSA. Well, it's really all quite simple.

(*She ticks these off:*)

Oliver left; then Henry came home; then I saw him off again in the car; then I came in here with the sandwiches.

INSPECTOR. Sandwiches?

CLARISSA. Yes. You see my husband is bringing home a very important delegate from abroad.

INSPECTOR. Oh, who is this delegate?

CLARISSA. A Mr. Jones.

(*The INSPECTOR looks at the CONSTABLE.*)

INSPECTOR. I beg your pardon.

CLARISSA. They were going to have the sandwiches while they talked and I was going to have mousse in the schoolroom.

INSPECTOR. Mousse in the... Yes, I see...

CLARISSA. I put the sandwiches down there -

(She points.)

- then I began tidying up and I went to put a book back in the bookshelf and - then - and then I practically fell over it.

INSPECTOR. You fell over the body?

CLARISSA. Yes. It was here behind the sofa. And I looked to see if it - if he was dead, and he was. It was Oliver Costello and I didn't know what to do. In the end I rang up the golf club and I asked Sir Rowland, Mr. Birch and Jeremy Warrender to come over.

INSPECTOR. *(Coldly.)* It didn't occur to you to ring up the police?

CLARISSA. It occurred to me, yes, but then - well - *(She smiles.)* I didn't.

INSPECTOR. You didn't.

(He looks at the CONSTABLE and lifts his hands despairingly.)

Why not?

CLARISSA. Well, I didn't think it would be nice for my husband. I don't know whether you know many people in the Foreign Office, Inspector, but they're frightfully unassuming. They like everything very quiet, not noticeable. You must admit that murders are noticeable.

INSPECTOR. Quite so.

CLARISSA. *(Warmly.)* I'm so glad you understand.

(Her story becomes more and more unconvincing as she feels that she is not making headway.)

I mean, he was quite dead because I felt his pulse, so we couldn't do anything for him. What I mean is, he might be just as well dead in Marsden Wood as in our drawing room.

INSPECTOR. Marsden Wood? Where's Marsden Wood come into it?

CLARISSA. That's where I was thinking of putting him.

INSPECTOR. *(Firmly.)* Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, have you never heard that a dead body, if there's any suggestion of foul play, should never be moved?

CLARISSA. Of course I know that, it says so in all the detective stories, but you see this is real life.

(The INSPECTOR lifts his hands in despair.)

I mean, real life's quite different.

INSPECTOR. Do you realise the seriousness of what you're saying?

CLARISSA. Of course I do, and I'm telling you the truth. So, you see, in the end I rang up the club and they all came over.

INSPECTOR. And you persuaded them to hide the body in that recess.

CLARISSA. No. That came later. My plan, as I told you, was that they should take Oliver's body away in his car and leave the car in Marsden Wood.

INSPECTOR. *(Unbelievingly.)* And they agreed?

CLARISSA. They agreed.

(She smiles at him.)

INSPECTOR. *(Brusquely.)* Frankly, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, I don't believe a word of it. I don't believe that three reputable men would agree to obstruct the course of justice in such a manner for such a paltry cause.

CLARISSA. I knew you wouldn't believe me if I told you the truth. What do you believe then?

INSPECTOR. I can see only one reason why those three men should agree to lie.

CLARISSA. Oh, you mean...?

(She pauses.)

INSPECTOR. If they believed - or *knew* - that *you* had killed him.

CLARISSA. But I had no reason for killing him. Absolutely no reason. Oh, I knew you'd react like this. That's why...

(She breaks off.)

INSPECTOR. That's why what?

(CLARISSA thinks. Some moments pass, then her manner changes. From now on she is convincing.)

CLARISSA. All right, then. I'll tell you.

INSPECTOR. I think it would be wiser.

CLARISSA. Yes, I suppose I'd better tell you the *truth*.

INSPECTOR. *(Smiling.)* I can assure you that telling the police a pack of lies will do you very little good, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. You'd better tell me the real story.

CLARISSA. I will. Oh dear, I thought I was being so clever.

INSPECTOR. Much better not to try to be clever. Now then, what really did happen this evening?

CLARISSA. It all started as I explained. I said good bye to Oliver and he'd gone off with Miss Peake. I had no idea he would come back again and I still can't understand why he did. Then, my husband came home, explaining he would have to go out again immediately. He went off in the car and it was just after I shut the front door, and made sure it was latched and bolted, that I suddenly began to feel nervous.

INSPECTOR. Nervous? Why?

(CLARISSA acts her part with great feeling.)

CLARISSA. I'm not usually nervous, but it occurred to me that I'd never been alone in the house at night.

INSPECTOR. Well?

CLARISSA. Well, I told myself not to be so silly. I said to myself, "You've got the phone, haven't you? You can always ring for help." I said to myself, "Burglars don't come at this time of the evening. They come in the middle of the night." But I still kept thinking I heard a door shutting somewhere, footsteps up in my bedroom - so I thought I'd better do something.

INSPECTOR. Yes?

CLARISSA. I went into the kitchen and made the sandwiches for Henry and Mr. Jones to have when they got back. I got them all ready on a plate with a napkin round them to keep them soft, and I was just coming across the hall to put them in here when - *(Dramatically.)* I really heard something.

INSPECTOR. Where?

CLARISSA. In this room. I knew that this time I wasn't imagining it. I heard drawers being pulled open and shut, then I suddenly remembered the window in here wasn't locked. Somebody had come in that way.

INSPECTOR. Go on, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown.

CLARISSA. I didn't know what to do. I was petrified. Then I thought, "Suppose I'm just being a fool? Suppose it is Henry come back for something - or even Sir Rowland or one of the others. A nice fool you'll look if you go upstairs and ring the police on the extension." So then I thought of a plan.

INSPECTOR. Yes?

CLARISSA. I went to the hall stand and I took the heaviest stick I could find. I went into the library; I didn't turn the light on. I felt my way across the room to that recess. I opened it very gently and slipped inside. I thought I could ease the door into here and see who it was. Unless anyone knew about it you'd never dream there was a door just there.

INSPECTOR. No, you certainly wouldn't.

CLARISSA. I eased the catch open, then my fingers slipped, the door swung right open and hit against a chair. A man who was standing by the desk straightened up. I saw something bright and shining in his hand. I thought it was a revolver. I was terrified. I thought he was going to shoot me. I hit out at him with the stick with all my might and he fell.

(She collapses and leans on the table, her face in her hands.)

CLARISSA. Could I – could I have a little brandy, please?

INSPECTOR. Yes, of course. Jones!

(The CONSTABLE pours some brandy into a glass and hands it to the INSPECTOR. CLARISSA drinks, coughs and returns the glass.)

Do you feel able to continue, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown?

CLARISSA. Yes. You're very kind. The man just lay there. He didn't move. I switched on the light and I saw then that it was Oliver Costello. He was dead. It was terrible. I – I couldn't understand. What was he doing there, tampering with the desk? It was all like some ghastly nightmare. I was so frightened I rang the golf club. I wanted my guardian. They all came over. I begged them to help me, to take the body away – somewhere.

INSPECTOR. But why?

CLARISSA. Because I was a coward. A miserable coward. I was frightened of the publicity, of having to go to a police court. And it would be so bad for my husband and for his career. If it had really been a burglar perhaps I could have gone through with it, but being someone we actually knew, someone who is married to Henry's first wife... Oh, I just felt I couldn't go through with it.

INSPECTOR. Possibly because the dead man had, a short while before, attempted to blackmail you?

CLARISSA. *(Confidently.)* Blackmail me? Oh, nonsense! That's just silly. There's nothing anyone could blackmail me about.

INSPECTOR. Elgin, the butler, overheard a mention of blackmail.

CLARISSA. I don't believe he heard anything of the kind. He couldn't. If you ask me he's making the whole thing up.

INSPECTOR. Come now, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, do you deliberately tell me that the word blackmail was never mentioned?

CLARISSA. I swear it wasn't. I assure you...

(She stops mid-sentence and laughs.)

Oh, how silly. Of course. That was it.

INSPECTOR. You've remembered?

CLARISSA. It was nothing really. It was just that Oliver was saying something about the rent of furnished houses being absurdly high and I said we'd been amazingly lucky and were only paying four guineas a week for this. And he said, "I can hardly believe it, Clarissa. What's your pull? It must be blackmail." And I laughed and said, "That's it. Blackmail."

(She laughs.)

Just a silly, joking way of talking. Why, I didn't even remember it.

INSPECTOR. I'm sorry, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, but I really can't believe that.

CLARISSA. Can't believe what?

INSPECTOR. That you're only paying four guineas a week furnished here.

CLARISSA. You really are the most unbelieving man I've ever met. You don't seem to believe a single thing I've said to you this evening. Most things I can't prove, but this one I can. And this time I'm going to show you.

(She goes to the desk, opens a drawer and searches through the papers in it.)

Here it is. No, it isn't. Ah! Here we are.

(She takes a document and shows it to the INSPECTOR.)

Here's the agreement for a furnished tenancy. It's with a firm of solicitors acting for the executors and, *see, four guineas per week.*

INSPECTOR. *(Jolted.)* Well, I'm blessed! It's extraordinary. Quite extraordinary.

CLARISSA. Don't you think, Inspector, that you ought to beg my pardon?

INSPECTOR. *(Responding.)* I apologise, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, but it really is extremely odd.

CLARISSA. Why?

(CLARISSA moves to the desk and replaces the document in the drawer.)

INSPECTOR. It so happens a lady and gentleman were down here with orders to view this house and the lady happened to lose a very valuable brooch. She called in at the police station to give particulars and she happened to mention this house. She said they were asking an absurd price. She thought eighteen guineas a week for a house right in the country and miles from anywhere was ridiculous. I agreed with her.

CLARISSA. Yes, that is extraordinary, very extraordinary. I understand why you were sceptical. But perhaps now you'll believe some of the other things I said.

INSPECTOR. I'm not doubting your *final* story, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. We usually know the truth when we hear it. I knew too, that there would have to be some serious reason for those three gentlemen to cook up this harebrained scheme of concealment.

CLARISSA. You mustn't blame them too much, Inspector. It was my fault. I went on and on at them.

INSPECTOR. Ah, I've no doubt you did. But what I don't understand is, who telephoned the police?

CLARISSA. *(Startled.)* How extraordinary! Yes, I'd forgotten that.

INSPECTOR. It clearly wasn't you, and it wouldn't be any of the three gentlemen...

CLARISSA. Elgin, Miss Peake...

INSPECTOR. Not Miss Peake. She didn't know the body was there.

CLARISSA. *(Thoughtfully.)* I wonder...

INSPECTOR. Why, when the body was discovered she had hysterics.

CLARISSA. Oh, anyone can have hysterics.

(CLARISSA realises what she has said. The INSPECTOR does a double-take. CLARISSA smiles at him.)

INSPECTOR. Anyway, she doesn't live in the house. She has her own cottage.

CLARISSA. She could have been in the house. She has keys to all the doors.

INSPECTOR. It looks to me more like Elgin who telephoned.

CLARISSA. You won't send me to prison, will you? Uncle Roly said you wouldn't.

INSPECTOR. *(Austerely.)* It's a good thing you changed your story in time and told the truth, madam. If you'll let me advise you, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, you'll get in touch with your solicitor as soon as possible. In the meantime, I'll get your statement typed out and read over to you and perhaps you will sign it.

(SIR ROWLAND enters from the hall.)

SIR ROWLAND. I couldn't keep away any longer. Inspector, is it all right? Do you understand?

CLARISSA. Roly, darling. I've made a statement and the police, Mr. Jones - is going to type it. Then I've got to sign it and I've told them everything.

(She holds his hand and speaks with emphasis.)

How I thought it was a burglar and hit him on the head -

(SIR ROWLAND looks in alarm at CLARISSA.)

- and then it turned out to be Oliver so I got in a terrible flap and rang you; and how I begged and begged and at last you gave in. I see now how wrong of me it was - but at the time I was just scared stiff and I thought it would be cosier for everybody, me, Henry, and even Miranda, if Oliver was found in Marsden Wood.

SIR ROWLAND. Clarissa! What have you been saying?

INSPECTOR. *(Complacently.)* Mrs. Hailsham-Brown has made a very full statement, sir.

SIR ROWLAND. *(Dryly.)* So it seems.

CLARISSA. It was the best thing to do. It was the only thing to do. The inspector made me see that.

INSPECTOR. It will lead to far less trouble in the end. Now, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, I shan't ask you to go into the recess while the body is there, but I'd like you to show me exactly where the man was standing when you came through that way.

CLARISSA. Oh - yes - well - he was...

(She crosses to the desk.)

No - he was standing here like this.

(The INSPECTOR motions to the CONSTABLE, who puts his hand on the panel switch.)

INSPECTOR. I see - Jones - and then the door opened.

(The CONSTABLE actuates the switch and the panel opens.)

And you came through that way. And then -

(He does a double-take. The recess is empty except for a small piece of paper.)

- what the hell! Where's the body?

(The CONSTABLE goes into the recess and picks up the piece of paper. The INSPECTOR looks accusingly at CLARISSA and SIR ROWLAND.)

CONSTABLE. *(Reading.)* "Sucks to you!"

INSPECTOR. It will lead to far less trouble in the end. Now, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, I shan't ask you to go into the recess while the body is there, but I'd like you to show me exactly where the man was standing when you came through that way.

CLARISSA. Oh - yes - well - he was...

(She crosses to the desk.)

No - he was standing here like this.

(The INSPECTOR motions to the CONSTABLE, who puts his hand on the panel switch.)

INSPECTOR. I see - Jones - and then the door opened.

(The CONSTABLE actuates the switch and the panel opens.)

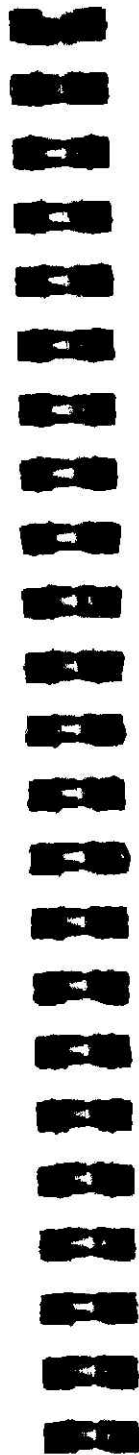
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(He does a double-take. The recess is empty except for a small piece of paper.)

- what the hell! Where's the body?

(The CONSTABLE goes into the recess and picks up the piece of paper. The INSPECTOR looks accusingly at CLARISSA and SIR ROWLAND.)

CONSTABLE. *(Reading.)* "Sucks to you!"



ACT III

(A few minutes later. The panel is now closed. SIR ROWLAND is looking into the hall. CLARISSA is next to him. Voices are heard off.)

INSPECTOR. *(Offstage.)* I'm really very sorry, Doctor, but we did have a body.

DOCTOR. *(Offstage.)* Really, Inspector Lord, to bring me all this way on a wild-goose chase.

INSPECTOR. *(Offstage.)* But I assure you, Doctor, we did have a body.

CONSTABLE. *(Offstage.)* The inspector's right, Doctor, we did have a body.

HUGO. *(Offstage.)* I can't think how you policemen ever get anything done: losing bodies.

JEREMY. *(Offstage.)* I don't understand why a guard wasn't put on the body.

DOCTOR. *(Offstage.)* Well, I'm not wasting any more time - you'll hear more about this, Inspector Lord.

INSPECTOR. *(Offstage.)* Yes, Doctor. Good night, Doctor.

(The front door slams.)

Now, Elgin.

ELGIN. *(Offstage.)* I know nothing about it, I assure you, sir, nothing at all.

(SIR ROWLAND closes the hall door. The voices fade.)

SIR ROWLAND. Rather a bad moment for the police reinforcement to arrive. The divisional surgeon, in particular, seems very annoyed at finding no corpse to examine.

CLARISSA. But who can have spirited it away? Do you think Jeremy managed it somehow?

SIR ROWLAND. I don't see how he could have done. They didn't let anyone back into the library and the door from the library to the hall was locked. Pippa's "Sucks to you" was the last straw.

(**CLARISSA** laughs.)

Still it shows us one thing. Costello had opened the secret drawer.

(*His manner changes.*)

Clarissa, why didn't you tell the truth to the inspector?

CLARISSA. I did, except for the part about Pippa. He didn't believe me.

SIR ROWLAND. Why on earth did you have to stuff him with all that nonsense?

CLARISSA. It seemed to me the most likely thing the inspector would believe. (*Triumphantly.*) And he *has* believed me.

SIR ROWLAND. And a nice mess you're in now. Manslaughter for all you know.

CLARISSA. Self-defence.

(**JEREMY** and **HUGO** enter from the hall.)

HUGO. (*Grumbling.*) Pushing us around here and there. Now it seems they've gone and lost the body.

(**JEREMY** closes the doors and takes a sandwich.)

JEREMY. Damn funny, I call it.

CLARISSA. It's fantastic. The whole thing's fantastic. Who rang up the police and said there'd been a murder here?

JEREMY. Elgin.

HUGO. That Peake woman.

CLARISSA. But *why*? It doesn't make sense.

(**MISS PEAKE** enters from the hall and closes the door. She looks around with a conspiratorial glance.)

MISS PEAKE. Hullo, coast clear? No bobbies about? They seem to be swarming all over the place.

SIR ROWLAND. They're searching the house and grounds.

MISS PEAKE. What for?

SIR ROWLAND. The body. It's gone.

MISS PEAKE. (*Laughing.*) What a lark! The disappearing body, eh?

HUGO. It's a nightmare. The whole thing's a damn nightmare.

MISS PEAKE. Quite like the films, eh, Mrs. Brown-Hailsham?

SIR ROWLAND. (*Courteously.*) I hope you are feeling better now, Miss Peake?

MISS PEAKE. Oh, I'm all right. Pretty tough really, you know. Just bowled over by opening that door and finding a corpse. Turned me up for the moment, I must admit.

CLARISSA. I wondered, perhaps, if you knew it was there?

MISS PEAKE. Who? Me?

CLARISSA. Yes. You.

HUGO. It doesn't make sense. Why take the body away? We all know there is a body, we know his identity and everything. No point in it.

MISS PEAKE. Oh, I wouldn't say *that*, Mr. Birch. You've got to *have* a body, you know. *Habeas corpus* and all that. Remember? You've got to have a body before you can bring a charge of murder against anybody. So don't you worry, Mrs. Brown-Hailsham. Everything's going to be all right.

CLARISSA. Me? Do you mean...?

MISS PEAKE. I've kept my ears open this evening. I haven't spent all my time lying on the spare-room bed. I never liked that man Elgin, or his wife. Listening at doors, and running to the police with stories about blackmail.

CLARISSA. So you heard?

MISS PEAKE. What I always say is, stand by your own sex.

(She looks at HUGO and snorts.)

Men! I don't hold with them. If they can't find the body, my dear, they can't bring a charge against you. And I say, if that brute was blackmailing you, you did quite right to crack him over the head and good riddance.

CLARISSA. *(Faintly.)* But I didn't...

MISS PEAKE. I heard you tell that inspector all about it. And if it wasn't for that eavesdropping, skulking fellow Elgin, your story would sound quite all right.

CLARISSA. Which one?

MISS PEAKE. About mistaking him for a burglar. It's the blackmail angle that puts a different complexion on it all. So I thought there was only one thing to do; get rid of the body and let the police chase their tails looking for it. Pretty smart work, if I say so myself.

(They all stare at MISS PEAKE.)

JEREMY. *(Fascinated.)* D'you mean to say - that it was you?

MISS PEAKE. We're all friends here, aren't we? Yes. I moved the body.

(She taps her pocket.)

Locking the door! I've got keys to all the doors in this house.

CLARISSA. But how? Where - where did you put it?

MISS PEAKE. *(Whispering.)* The spare room bed. You know, that big four-poster. Right across the head of the bed under the bolster. Then I remade the bed and lay down on top of it.

CLARISSA. But how did you get the body up to the spare room? You couldn't manage it all by yourself.

MISS PEAKE. *(Heartily.)* You'd be surprised. Good old fireman's lift. Slung it over my shoulder.

SIR ROWLAND. Supposing you'd met someone, on the stairs?

MISS PEAKE. Ah, but I didn't. The police were in here with Mrs. Hailsham-Brown; you three were in the dining room. So I grabbed my chance and of course the body, took it through the hall, locked the library door again and popped it up the stairs to the spare room.

SIR ROWLAND. Well, upon my soul!

CLARISSA. But he can't stay under the bolster forever.

MISS PEAKE. No, not forever, of course, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown. Twenty-four hours, though. By that time the police will have finished with the house and grounds. They'll be looking further afield. Now, I've been thinking. I took out a nice deep trench this morning - for the sweet peas. Well, we'll bury the body there and plant a nice double row of sweet peas all along it.

SIR ROWLAND. I'm afraid, Miss Peake, grave digging is no longer a matter for private enterprise.

MISS PEAKE. *(Laughing.)* Oh, you men! Always such sticklers. Now, we've got more sense. We can even take murder in our stride. Eh, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown?

HUGO. Of course, she didn't kill him. Don't believe a word of it.

MISS PEAKE. *(Breezily.)* If she didn't kill him, who did?

(PIPPA enters from the hall. She is yawning and walks in a half-drunk, sleepy manner. She is carrying a dish containing chocolate mousse with a teaspoon in it.)

CLARISSA. *(Startled.)* Pippa! What are you doing out of bed?

PIPPA. I came down. I'm so frightfully hungry.

(Reproachfully.) You said you'd bring this up.

(CLARISSA takes the mousse from PIPPA and sits her on the sofa.)

CLARISSA. I thought you were asleep.

PIPPA. *(Yawning.)* I was asleep. Then I thought a policeman came in and looked at me. I'd been having an awful

dream and then I half woke up; then I was hungry, so I thought I'd come down.

(She shivers.)

Besides, I thought it might be true.

SIR ROWLAND. What might be true?

PIPPA. That horrible dream about Oliver.

SIR ROWLAND. What was your dream about Oliver, Pippa? Tell me.

(PIPPA takes a small piece of moulded wax from her dressing gown pocket.)

PIPPA. I made this tonight. I melted down a wax candle, then I made a pin red hot and stuck it through it.

(She gives the figure to SIR ROWLAND.)

JEREMY. Good Lord!

(JEREMY darts around the room, hunting for Pippa's book.)

PIPPA. I said the right words and everything, but I couldn't do it *quite* as the book said.

(JEREMY looks on the bookshelves and finds the book.)

CLARISSA. What book? I don't understand.

JEREMY. Here it is.

(He hands the book to CLARISSA.)

She got it in the market today. She called it a recipe book.

PIPPA. *(Laughing.)* And you said, "Can you eat it?"

CLARISSA. *(Reading.)* "A hundred well tried and trusty spells."

(She opens the book.)

How to cure warts; how to get your heart's desire; how to *destroy your enemy.*" Oh, Pippa - is that what you did?

PIPPA. Yes.

(CLARISSA hands the book to JEREMY.)

It isn't very *like* Oliver and I couldn't get any clippings of his hair. But it was as like him as I could make it - and then - then - I dreamed, I thought - I came down here and he was there. And it was all true. He was there, dead. I *had* killed him. Is it true? Did I kill him?

CLARISSA. No, darling. No.

PIPPA. But he *was* there.

SIR ROWLAND. I know, Pippa, but you didn't kill him. When you stuck the pin through that wax figure, it was your hate and your fear of him you killed that way. You're not afraid of him and you don't hate him any longer. Isn't that true?

PIPPA. Yes, it's true. But I saw him. I came down here and I saw him lying there, dead. I did see him.

SIR ROWLAND. Yes, dear, you did see him. But it wasn't you that killed him. Now, listen to me, Pippa. Somebody hit him over the head with a big stick. You didn't do that, did you?

PIPPA. Oh, no.

(SIR ROWLAND looks at CLARISSA.)

Not a stick. You mean a golf stick like Jeremy had?

(There is a slight reaction from SIR ROWLAND.)

JEREMY. No, not a golf club, Pippa. That big stick that's kept in the hall stand.

PIPPA. The one that belonged to Mr. Sellon and Miss Peake calls a knobkerry?

(JEREMY nods.)

Oh, no, I wouldn't do anything like that. I couldn't. Oh, Uncle Roly, I wouldn't have killed him *really.*

CLARISSA. Of course you wouldn't. Now come along, darling, you eat up your chocolate mousse and forget all about it.

(She offers it to PIPPA, but she refuses.)

MISS PEAKE. I don't understand a word of all this. What is that book?

(**SIR ROWLAND** and **CLARISSA** lay **PIPPA** on the sofa to sleep.)

JEREMY. "How to bring a murrain on your neighbour's cattle." Does that attract you, Miss Peake? I daresay with a little adjusting you could bring black spot to your neighbour's roses.

MISS PEAKE. I don't know what you're talking about.

JEREMY. Black magic.

MISS PEAKE. I'm not superstitious, thank goodness.

HUGO. I'm in a complete fog.

MISS PEAKE. Me, too. So I'll just have a peep and see how the boys in blue are getting on.

(**MISS PEAKE**, laughing, exits to the hall.)

SIR ROWLAND. Now where are we?

CLARISSA. What a fool I've been. I should have known Pippa couldn't possibly... I didn't know anything about this book. Pippa said she killed him and I - I thought it was true.

HUGO. Oh, you mean that you thought Pippa...

CLARISSA. Yes, darling.

HUGO. Oh, I see. That explains it. Good God!

JEREMY. Well, we'd better go to the police.

SIR ROWLAND. I don't know. She's already told them three stories...

CLARISSA. No. Wait. I've got an idea. Hugo, what was the name of Mr. Sellon's shop?

HUGO. It was an antique shop.

CLARISSA. (*Impatiently.*) Yes, I know that. But what was it called?

HUGO. What do you mean, "What was it called?"

CLARISSA. Oh, dear. You are being difficult. You said it earlier and I want you to say it again. But I don't want to tell you to say it.

(**HUGO**, **JEREMY** and **SIR ROWLAND** look at each other.)

HUGO. Do you know what the girl is getting at, Roly?

SIR ROWLAND. No idea. Try again, Clarissa.

(**PIPPA** sleeps.)

CLARISSA. It's perfectly simple. What was the name of the antique shop?

HUGO. It hadn't got a name. I mean, antique shops aren't called "Seaview" or anything.

CLARISSA. Heaven give me patience. What was written up over the door?

HUGO. Written up? Nothing. What should be written up? Only "Sellon and Brown," of course.

CLARISSA. At last. I thought that was what you said before, but I wasn't sure. Sellon and Brown. *My* name is Hailsham-Brown - we got this house dirt cheap; other people who came to see it before us were asked such an exorbitant rent that they went away in disgust. Now have you got there?

HUGO. No.

JEREMY. Not yet.

SIR ROWLAND. In a glass, dimly.

CLARISSA. Mr. Sellon's partner who lives in London is a woman. Today someone rang up and asked to speak to Mrs. Brown. Not Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, just Mrs. Brown.

SIR ROWLAND. I see what you're getting at.

HUGO. I don't.

CLARISSA. A horse chestnut or a chestnut horse - one of them makes all the difference.

HUGO. You're not delirious or anything, are you, Clarissa?

CLARISSA. Somebody killed Oliver. It wasn't any of you three; it wasn't me or Henry - it wasn't Pippa - thank God - then who was it?

SIR ROWLAND. It's as I said to the inspector. An outside job. Someone followed Oliver here.

CLARISSA. But *why* did they? When I left you at the gate today, I came back and in through that window and Oliver was standing near that desk. He was very surprised to see me. He said, "What are you doing here, Clarissa?" I just thought it was an elaborate way of annoying me. But suppose it was just what it seemed? He *was* surprised to see me. He thought the house belonged to someone else. He thought the person he'd find here would be the Mrs. Brown who was Mr. Sellon's partner.

SIR ROWLAND. Wouldn't he know that you and Henry had this house? Wouldn't Miranda know?

CLARISSA. When Miranda has to communicate she always does it through her lawyers. I tell you, Oliver had no idea he was going to see me. Oh, he recovered pretty quickly and made the excuse that he'd come to talk about Pippa. Then he pretended to go away but he came back because...

(MISS PEAKE enters from the hall.)

MISS PEAKE. The hunt's still on. They've looked under all the beds, I gather, and now they're out in the grounds.

(She laughs.)

CLARISSA. Miss Peake, do you remember what Mr. Costello said just before he left. Do you?

MISS PEAKE. Haven't an idea.

CLARISSA. He said, didn't he, "I came to see Mrs. Brown"?

MISS PEAKE. I believe he did. Yes. Why?

CLARISSA. But it wasn't me he came to see.

MISS PEAKE. Well, if it wasn't you, then I don't know who it was.

(She laughs.)

CLARISSA. It was *you*. You're Mrs. Brown, aren't you?

(MISS PEAKE is startled, unaware for a moment how to act. When she does speak, her manner has changed. She speaks gravely, and has dropped the jolly, hearty touch.)

MISS PEAKE. That's bright of you. Yes. I'm Mrs. Brown.

CLARISSA. You're Mr. Sellon's partner. You own this house; you inherited it with the business. You had the idea of finding a tenant for it whose name was Brown. You thought that wouldn't be too difficult. In the end you compromised on Hailsham-Brown. I don't know exactly why you wanted me to be in the limelight whilst you watched. I don't understand the ins and outs...

MISS PEAKE. Charles Sellon was murdered. He'd got hold of something that was very valuable. I don't know how - I don't even know what it was. He wasn't always very - *(Hesitating.)* scrupulous.

SIR ROWLAND. So we have heard.

MISS PEAKE. Whatever it was, he was killed for it. And whoever killed him didn't find the thing. Probably because it wasn't in the shop, it was *here*. I thought whoever it was who killed him would come here sooner or later. I wanted to be on the watch, therefore I wanted a dummy Mrs. Brown.

SIR ROWLAND. *(With feeling.)* It didn't worry you that Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, a perfectly innocent woman, would be in danger?

MISS PEAKE. I've kept an eye on her, haven't I? So much so that it annoyed you all sometimes. The other day when a man came along and offered her a ridiculous price for that desk I was sure I was on the right track. Yet I'll swear there was nothing in that desk that meant anything at all.

SIR ROWLAND. Did you examine the secret drawer?

MISS PEAKE. A secret drawer, is there?

CLARISSA. There's nothing there now. Pippa found the drawer but there were only some old autographs in it.

SIR ROWLAND. Clarissa, I'd rather like to see those autographs again.

CLARISSA. Pippa, where did you put...? Oh, she's asleep.

MISS PEAKE. Fast asleep. That's all the excitement. Tell you what, I'll carry her up and dump her on her bed.

SIR ROWLAND. No.

MISS PEAKE. She's no weight. Not a quarter as heavy as the late Mr. Costello.

SIR ROWLAND. All the same, I think she'll be safer here.

CLARISSA. Safer?

(They all look at MISS PEAKE.)

MISS PEAKE. Safer?

SIR ROWLAND. That's what I said. That child said a very significant thing just now.

(They all watch SIR ROWLAND. There is a pause.)

HUGO. What did she say?

SIR ROWLAND. If you all think back, perhaps you'll realise it.

(The others look at each other. SIR ROWLAND picks up the copy of Who's Who and looks at it.)

HUGO. I don't get it.

JEREMY. What did she say?

CLARISSA. *(Frowning.)* I can't imagine. The policeman? Dreaming? Coming down here? Half-awake?

HUGO. Don't be damned mysterious, Roly. What is all this?

(SIR ROWLAND looks up from the book; absent-mindedly:)

SIR ROWLAND. What? Oh, yes. Those autographs. Where are they?

HUGO. I believe I remember Pippa putting them in that shell box over there.

(JEREMY moves to the bookshelves.)

JEREMY. Up here?

(JEREMY opens the shell box and takes out the envelope. He waits just a second, catching his breath, as he looks inside.)

Quite right. There we are.

(He takes the autographs from the envelope, hands them to SIR ROWLAND, at the same time slipping the envelope into his pocket. SIR ROWLAND examines the autographs with his eyeglass.)

SIR ROWLAND. Victoria right, God bless her. Faded brown ink. John Ruskin - yes, authentic, I should say. Robert Browning - paper not as old as it ought to be.

CLARISSA. *(Excitedly.)* Roly! What do you mean?

SIR ROWLAND. I had some experience of invisible inks and that sort of thing, during the war. If you wanted to make a secret note of something, it wouldn't be a bad idea to write it in invisible ink on a sheet of paper and then fake an autograph. Put that autograph with other genuine autographs and nobody would notice it or look at it twice, probably. Any more than we did.

MISS PEAKE. But what *could* Charles Sellon have written which would be worth fourteen thousand pounds?

SIR ROWLAND. Nothing at all, dear lady. But it occurs to me, you know, that it might have been a question of safety.

MISS PEAKE. Safety?

SIR ROWLAND. Costello is suspected of supplying drugs. Sellon, so the inspector tells us, was questioned once or twice by the Narcotic Squad. There's a connection there, don't you think? But, of course, it might be just a foolish idea of mine.

(He looks down at the paper.)

SIR ROWLAND. I don't think it would be anything elaborate on Sellon's part. Lemon juice perhaps, or a solution of barium chloride. Gentle heat might do the trick. We can always try iodine vapour later. Yes, a little gentle heat. Shall we try the experiment?

CLARISSA. There's an electric fire in the library. Jeremy, will you get it? We can plug it in here.

(JEREMY exits to the library.)

MISS PEAKE. The whole thing's ridiculous. Too far-fetched for words.

CLARISSA. I think it's a wonderful idea.

(JEREMY enters from the library, carrying a small electric radiator.)

Got it?

JEREMY. Here it is. Where's the plug?

CLARISSA. Down there.

(JEREMY plugs the lead into the skirting. They gather round it.)

SIR ROWLAND. We mustn't hope for too much. After all, it's only an idea - but there must have been some very good reason why Sellon kept these bits of paper in such a secret place.

HUGO. Takes me back years. I remember writing secret messages with lemon juice when I was a kid.

JEREMY. Which shall we start with?

CLARISSA. Queen Victoria.

JEREMY. Six to one, Ruskin.

SIR ROWLAND. I'm putting my money on Robert Browning.

(He bends over and holds the paper in front of the radiator.)

HUGO. Most obscure chap - never could understand a word of his poetry.

SIR ROWLAND. Exactly. Full of hidden meaning.

(They all crane over.)

CLARISSA. I can't bear it if nothing happens.

SIR ROWLAND. I believe - yes.

JEREMY. Yes, there is something coming up.

CLARISSA. Is there! Let me see.

(HUGO pushes between CLARISSA and JEREMY.)

HUGO. Move above, young man.

SIR ROWLAND. Steady. Don't joggle me - yes - there is writing. We've got it.

(He straightens up.)

MISS PEAKE. What have you got?

SIR ROWLAND. A list of six names and addresses. Distributors in the drug racket I should say; and one of those names is *Oliver Costello*.

(They all exclaim.)

CLARISSA. Oliver! So that's why he came and someone must have followed him and... Oh, Uncle Roly, we must tell the police. Come along, Hugo.

(CLARISSA rushes to the hall door, followed by HUGO.)

HUGO. Most extraordinary thing I ever heard of.

(CLARISSA and HUGO exit to the hall. JEREMY unplugs the radiator and exits with it to the library. SIR ROWLAND picks up the other autographs, then makes to the hall door.)

SIR ROWLAND. Coming, Miss Peake?

MISS PEAKE. You don't want me, do you?

SIR ROWLAND. I think we do. You were Sellon's partner.

MISS PEAKE. I've never had anything to do with the drug business. I ran the antique side - did all the London buying and selling.

SIR ROWLAND. I see.

(SIR ROWLAND exits to the hall. MISS PEAKE looks back at PIPPA for a moment, turns out the lights and exits to the hall. JEREMY enters from the library. He glances at PIPPA. He slowly picks up a cushion from the sofa. PIPPA stirs in her sleep. JEREMY stands frozen for a moment, then slowly lowers the cushion over her face. CLARISSA enters from the hall, closing the door behind her.)

CLARISSA. Hullo, Jeremy.

(JEREMY, on hearing the door, carefully places the cushion over PIPPA's feet.)

JEREMY. I remembered what Sir Rowland said, so I thought perhaps we oughtn't to leave Pippa all alone. Her feet seemed a bit cold, so I was just covering them up.

CLARISSA. All this excitement has made me feel terribly hungry.

(She looks at the plate of sandwiches.)

Oh, Jeremy. You've eaten them all.

JEREMY. Sorry, but I was starving.

CLARISSA. I don't see why you should be. You've had dinner. I haven't.

JEREMY. I haven't had dinner either. I was practising approach shots. I only came into the dining room just after your telephone call came.

CLARISSA. *(Negligently.)* Oh, I see.

(Suddenly, her eyes widen.)

I see - you...

JEREMY. What do you mean?

(CLARISSA speaks almost to herself.)

CLARISSA. You...

JEREMY. What did you mean by "You"?!

CLARISSA. What were you doing with that cushion when I came into the room?

JEREMY. I was covering up Pippa's feet. They were cold.

CLARISSA. Were you? Is that really what you were going to do? Or were you going to put that cushion over her mouth?

JEREMY. Clarissa!

CLARISSA. I said none of us could have killed him. But one of us could. You. You were out on the golf course alone. You could have come back to the house, in through the library window, which you'd left open, you had your

golf club still in your hand. That's what Pippa saw. That's what she meant when she said, "A golf stick like Jeremy had." She *saw* you.

JEREMY. That's nonsense, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. No, it isn't. Then after you'd killed Oliver you went back to the club and rang the police so that they should come here, find the body and think it was Henry or I had killed him.

JEREMY. What absolute rubbish!

CLARISSA. It's true. I know it's true. But why? That's what I don't understand. Why?

(There is a pause. JEREMY takes the envelope from his pocket.)

JEREMY. This.

CLARISSA. That's the envelope the autographs were kept in.

JEREMY. There's a stamp on it. It's what's known as an error stamp. Printed in the wrong colour. One from Sweden sold last year for fourteen thousand three hundred pounds.

(CLARISSA staggers back.)

CLARISSA. So that's it.

JEREMY. This stamp came into Sellon's possession. He wrote to my boss about it. I opened the letter. I came down and saw Sellon...

CLARISSA. And killed him.

(JEREMY nods.)

But you couldn't find the stamp.

JEREMY. No. It wasn't in the shop so I felt sure it must be here -

(He circles round CLARISSA, who backs away.)

- and tonight I thought Costello had beaten me to it.

CLARISSA. And so you killed him, too.

(JEREMY nods.)

And just now you would have killed Pippa?

JEREMY. Why not?

CLARISSA. I can't believe it.

JEREMY. My dear Clarissa, fourteen thousand pounds is a great deal of money.

CLARISSA. But why are you telling me this? Do you imagine for one moment that I shan't go to the police?

JEREMY. They'll never believe you.

CLARISSA. Oh yes, they will.

JEREMY. Besides, you're not going to get the chance.

(He advances on her.)

Do you think that when I've killed two people I shall worry about killing a third?

(He grabs CLARISSA by the throat. CLARISSA screams. SIR ROWLAND enters from the hall and switches on the lights. The CONSTABLE enters by the French windows. The INSPECTOR enters from the library and grabs JEREMY.)

INSPECTOR. All right, Warrender. Thank you. That's just the evidence we need. Give me that envelope.

JEREMY. A trap. Very clever.

(JEREMY hands the envelope to the INSPECTOR.)

INSPECTOR. Jeremy Warrender, I arrest you for the murder of Oliver Costello, and I must warn you that anything you say may be taken down and may be given in evidence.

JEREMY. You can save your breath, Inspector. It was a good gamble.

INSPECTOR. Take him away.

(The CONSTABLE takes JEREMY's arm.)

JEREMY. Forgotten your handcuffs, Mr. Jones?

(The CONSTABLE twists JEREMY's arm behind his back and marches him off by the French windows.)

SIR ROWLAND. Are you all right, my dear?

CLARISSA. Yes, yes, I'm all right.

SIR ROWLAND. I never meant to expose you to this.

CLARISSA. You knew it was Jeremy, didn't you?

INSPECTOR. But what made you think of the stamp, sir?

SIR ROWLAND. Well, Inspector, it rang a bell when Pippa gave me the envelope this evening. Then when I found from *Who's Who* that Sir Lazarus Stein was a stamp collector my suspicion developed, and just now when he had the impertinence to pocket the envelope under my nose, I felt it was a certainty. Take great care of it, Inspector, you'll probably find it's extremely valuable, besides being evidence.

INSPECTOR. It's evidence all right. A particularly vicious young criminal is going to get his desserts. However, we've still got to find the body.

CLARISSA. Oh, that's easy, Inspector. Look in the spare room bed.

INSPECTOR. *(Disapprovingly.)* Now really, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown...

CLARISSA. Why does nobody ever believe me? It is in the spare room bed. You go and look, Inspector. Across the bed, under the bolster. Miss Peake put it there, trying to be kind.

INSPECTOR. Trying to be...?

(He breaks off, moves to the hall door and turns.)

(Reproachfully.) You know, Mrs. Hailsham-Brown, you haven't made things easier for us tonight; telling us all these tall stories. I suppose you thought your husband had done it, and were lying to cover up for him. But you shouldn't do it, madam. You really shouldn't do it.

(The INSPECTOR exits to the hall.)

CLARISSA. Well!

(She looks to PIPPA on the sofa.)

Oh, Pippa...

SIR ROWLAND. Better get her up to bed. She'll be safe now.

(**CLARISSA** gently wakes **PIPPA**.)

CLARISSA. Come on, Pippa. Ups-a-daisy. Time you were in bed.

(**PIPPA** gets up, waveringly. **CLARISSA** leads her to the hall door.)

PIPPA. (*Murmuring.*) Hungry.

CLARISSA. Yes, yes, I know. We'll see what we can find.

SIR ROWLAND. Good night, Pippa.

PIPPA. Good night.

(**CLARISSA** and **PIPPA** exit to the hall. **SIR ROWLAND** moves to the bridge table and puts the cards in their boxes.)

HUGO. (*Offstage.*) Can I help you, Clarissa?

CLARISSA. (*Offstage.*) No, thank you. I can manage.

(**HUGO** enters from the hall.)

HUGO. God bless my soul! I'd never have believed it. Seemed a decent enough young fellow. Been to a good school. Knew all the right people.

SIR ROWLAND. But was quite willing to commit murder for the sake of fourteen thousand pounds. It happens now and then, Hugo, in every class of society. An attractive personality and no moral sense.

(**MISS PEAKE** enters from the hall.)

MISS PEAKE. I thought I'd just tell you, Sir Rowland, I've got to go along to the police station. They want me to make a statement. They're not too pleased at the trick I played them, I'm in for a wiggling, I'm afraid.

(*She roars with laughter and exits to the hall.*)

HUGO. You know, Roly, I don't quite get it. Was Miss Peake - Mrs. Sellon, or was Mr. Sellon - Mr. Brown? Or the other way round?

(*The INSPECTOR enters from the hall.*)

INSPECTOR. We're removing the body now, sir.

SIR ROWLAND. Oh yes, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. Would you mind advising Mrs. Hailsham-Brown that if she tells these fancy stories to the police, one day she'll get into real trouble.

SIR ROWLAND. (*Gently.*) She did actually tell you the true story once, you know, Inspector. But you simply wouldn't believe her.

INSPECTOR. Yes - hmmm - well. Frankly, sir, it was a bit difficult to swallow, you'll admit.

SIR ROWLAND. Oh, I admit it.

INSPECTOR. (*Confidentially.*) Not that I blame you, sir. Mrs. Hailsham-Brown is a lady with a very taking way with her. Good night, sir.

SIR ROWLAND. Good night, Inspector.

INSPECTOR. Good night, Mr. Birch.

HUGO. Well done, Inspector.

(**HUGO** holds out his hand and the **INSPECTOR** shakes it.)

INSPECTOR. Oh, thank you, sir.

(*He exits to the hall.*)

HUGO. Oh, well. Suppose I'd better be going home to bed. Some evening, eh?

(**SIR ROWLAND** starts to tidy the bridge table.)

SIR ROWLAND. As you say, Hugo, some evening. Good night.

HUGO. Good night.

(**HUGO** exits to the hall. **SIR ROWLAND** leaves the cards and markers in a neat pile on the table. **CLARISSA** enters from the hall. She puts her hand on **SIR ROWLAND**'s arm.)

CLARISSA. Darling Roly. And so clever, too.

SIR ROWLAND. You lucky young woman. A good thing you didn't lose your heart to that young man.

CLARISSA. If I lost my heart to anybody, darling, it would be to you.

SIR ROWLAND. Now, now, none of your tricks with me.

(HENRY enters by the French windows.)

CLARISSA. *(Startled.)* Henry!

HENRY. *(Preoccupied.)* Hullo, Roly. Thought you were at the club tonight?

SIR ROWLAND. Well - er - I thought I'd turn in early. It's been rather a strenuous evening.

(HENRY looks at the bridge table.)

HENRY. Bridge?

SIR ROWLAND. Bridge and - *(Smiling.)* er - other things. Good night.

(CLARISSA blows a kiss to SIR ROWLAND.

SIR ROWLAND blows a kiss to CLARISSA and exits to the hall.)

CLARISSA. *(Eagerly.)* Where's Kalen- Mr. Jones?

HENRY. He didn't come.

CLARISSA. What!

HENRY. The plane arrived with nothing but a half-baked aide-de-camp in it. First thing he did was to turn round and fly back again where he'd come from.

CLARISSA. Why?

HENRY. How do I know? Suspicious, it seems. Suspicious of what? I ask you?

CLARISSA. But what about Sir John?

HENRY. That's the worst of it. He'll be arriving down any minute now, I expect.

(He consults his watch.)

Of course I rang up at once from the aerodrome, but he'd already started. Oh, the whole thing's a most ghastly fiasco.

(The telephone rings.)

CLARISSA. I'll answer it. It may be the police.

(She lifts the receiver.)

HENRY. The police?

CLARISSA. Yes... Yes, this is Copplestone Court... Yes, he's here. It's for you, darling. Bindley Heath aerodrome.

(HENRY rushes across to the telephone, but halfway over stops and proceeds at a dignified walk. He takes the receiver.)

HENRY. Hullo? ...Yes - speaking... *What?* ...Ten minutes later? ...Shall I? ...Yes... Yes, yes... No... No, no... You have? ...I see... Yes... Right.

(He replaces the receiver and shouts:)

Clarissa! Another plane came in just ten minutes after the first and Kalendorff was on it.

CLARISSA. Mr. Jones, you mean.

HENRY. Quite right, darling. One can't be too careful. Yes, it seems that the first plane was a kind of security precaution. Really, one can't fathom how these people's minds work. Well, anyway, they're sending him over here now with an R.A.F. escort. He'll be here in about a quarter of an hour. Now then, is everything all right? Get rid of those cards, will you?

(CLARISSA hurriedly collects the cards and markers and puts them away. HENRY picks up the sandwich plate and mousse dish.)

What's this?

(CLARISSA seizes the plate and dish.)

CLARISSA. Pippa was eating it. I'll take it away. I'll go and make some more ham sandwiches.

HENRY. Not yet - the chairs. *(Reproachfully.)* I thought you were going to have everything ready?

(He crosses to the bridge table and folds the legs. CLARISSA puts the plate and dish down, then begins tidying the chairs away.)

What have you been doing all the evening?

(He puts the bridge table in the library.)

CLARISSA. Oh, Henry, it's been the most terribly exciting evening. You see, I came in here with some sandwiches soon after you left, and the first thing that happened was I fell over a body. There – behind the sofa.

HENRY. *(Interrupting.)* Yes, yes, darling. Your stories are always enchanting, but really there isn't time now.

(They both go to the armchair and push it into its original position.)

CLARISSA. But, Henry, it's *true*. That's only the beginning. The police came and it was just one thing after another. There was a narcotic ring; and Miss Peake isn't Miss Peake, she's really Mrs. Brown, and Jeremy turned out to be the murderer and he was trying to steal a stamp worth fourteen thousand pounds.

(HENRY is busy tidying and not really listening.)

HENRY. Hmm! Must have been a second Swedish yellow.

CLARISSA. That's just what it was.

HENRY. *(Affectionately.)* The things you imagine, Clarissa.

CLARISSA. But, darling, I didn't imagine it. I couldn't have imagined half as much.

(HENRY plumps up the sofa cushions.)

How extraordinary it is; all my life nothing has really happened to me and tonight I've had the lot. Murder, police, drug addicts, invisible ink, secret writing, almost arrested for manslaughter and very nearly murdered. You know, in a way, it's almost *too* much all in one evening.

HENRY. Do go and make that coffee, darling. You can tell me all your lovely rigmarole tomorrow.

CLARISSA. But don't you realise, Henry, that *I* was nearly murdered?

(HENRY looks at his watch.)

HENRY. Either Sir John or Mr. Jones might arrive at any minute.

CLARISSA. What I've been through this evening. Oh, dear, it reminds me of Sir Walter Scott.

(HENRY gives the room the once-over.)

HENRY. What does?

CLARISSA. My aunt made me learn it by heart.

(Quoting.) "Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practise to deceive."

(HENRY looks at CLARISSA; suddenly conscious, he puts his arms around her.)

HENRY. My adorable spider!

CLARISSA. Do you know the facts of life about spiders? They eat their husbands.

HENRY. *(Passionately.)* I'm more likely to eat you.

(He kisses her. The front doorbell rings.)

CLARISSA. Sir Jones!

HENRY. Mr. John!

CLARISSA. You go out and answer the front door. I'll put coffee and sandwiches in the hall and you can bring them in when you want them. High-level talks will now begin.

(HENRY buttons up his jacket and straightens his tie.)

Good luck, darling.

HENRY. Good luck. I mean, thanks.

(HENRY exits to the hall, leaving the door open. CLARISSA picks up the plate and dish.)

(Offstage.) Good evening, Sir John.

(CLARISSA moves towards the hall doors, stops, hesitates, then goes to the bookshelves and actuates the panel switch. The panel opens. The front door slams.)

CLARISSA. (*Dramatically.*) Exit Clarissa mysteriously.

(**CLARISSA** *disappears into the recess.*)

End of Play

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