

ACT ONE

Scene I

(Scene – The Great Hall at Monkswell Manor. Late afternoon.)

(The house looks not so much a period piece but a house which has been lived in by generations of the same family with dwindling resources. There are tall windows up centre; a big arched opening up right leading to the entrance hall, the front door and the kitchen; and an arched opening left leading upstairs to the bedrooms. Up left leading off the stairs is the door to the library; down left is the door to the drawing-room; and down right the door (opening onstage) to the dining-room, right is an open fireplace and beneath the window up centre a window seat and a radiator.)

(The Hall is furnished as a lounge. There is some good old oak, including a large refectory table by the window up centre, an oak chest in the entrance hall up right, and a stool on the stairs left. The curtains and the upholstered furniture – a sofa left centre, an armchair centre, a large leather armchair right, and a small Victorian armchair down right – are shabby and old-fashioned. There is a combined desk and bookcase left, with a radio and telephone on it and a chair beside it. There is another chair up right centre by the window, a Canterbury containing newspapers and magazines above the fireplace and a small half circular card table behind the sofa. There are two wall brackets over the fireplace which are worked together; and a wall bracket on the left wall, one left of the library door and one in the entrance hall, which are also worked together. There

are double switches left of the arch up right, and on the downstage side of the door down left, and a single switch on the upstage side of the door down right. A table lamp stands on the sofa table.)

(See the Ground Plan)

(Before the curtain rises the House Lights fade to a complete blackout and the music of "Three Blind Mice" is heard.)

(When the curtain rises the stage is in complete darkness. The music fades giving place to a shrill whistle of the same tune, "Three Blind Mice." A woman's piercing scream is heard then a mixture of male and female voices saying: "My God, what's that?" "Went that way!" "Oh, my God!" Then a police whistle sounds, followed by several other police whistles, all of which fade to silence.)

VOICE ON THE RADIO. ...and according to Scotland Yard, the crime took place at twenty-four Culver Street, Paddington.

(The lights come up, revealing the Hall at Monkswell Manor. It is late afternoon, and almost dark. Snow can be seen falling heavily through the windows up centre. There is a fire burning. A freshly-painted sign board is standing on its side on the stairs against the archway left; it has on it in large letters: Monkswell Manor Guest House.)

The murdered woman was a Mrs. Maureen Lyon. In connection with the murder, the police are anxious to interview a man seen in the vicinity, wearing a dark overcoat, light scarf, and a soft felt hat.

(MOLLIE RALSTON enters through the arch up right. She is a tall, pretty young woman with an ingenuous air, in her twenties. She puts down her handbag and gloves on the armchair centre then crosses to the radio and switches it off during the next speech. She places a small parcel in the desk cupboard.)

Motorists are warned against ice-bound roads. The heavy snow is expected to continue, and throughout the country there will be a certain freezing, particularly at points on the north and northeast coast of Scotland.

MOLLIE. (*calling*) Mrs. Barlow! Mrs. Barlow! (*Receiving no reply she crosses to the armchair centre, picks up her handbag and one glove and then goes out through the arch up right. She removes her overcoat and then returns.*) Brr! It's cold. (*She goes to the wall switch above the door down right and switches on the wall brackets over the fireplace. She moves up to the window, feels the radiator and draws the curtains. Then she moves down to the sofa table and switches on the table lamp. She looks round and notices the large sign board lying on its side on the stairs. She picks it up and places it against the wall left of the window alcove. She steps back, nodding her head.*) It really does look nice – oh! (*She notices that there is no "S" on the sign.*) How stupid of Giles. (*She looks at her watch then at the clock.*) Gosh!

(**MOLLIE** hurries off up the stairs left. **GILES** enters from the front door right. He is a rather arrogant but attractive young man in his twenties. He stamps his feet to shake off the snow, opens the oak chest and puts inside a big paper carrier he has been carrying. He takes off his overcoat, hat and scarf, moves down and throws them on the armchair centre. Then he goes to the fire and warms his hands.)

GILES. (*calling*) Mollie? Mollie? Mollie? Where are you?

(**MOLLIE** enters from the arch left.)

MOLLIE. (*cheerfully*) Doing all the work, you brute. (*She crosses to GILES.*)

GILES. Oh, there you are – leave it all to me. Shall I stoke the Aga?

MOLLIE. Done.

GILES. (*kissing her*) Hullo, sweetheart. Your nose is cold.

MOLLIE. I've just come in. (*She crosses to the fire.*)

GILES. Why? Where have you been? Surely you've not been out in this weather?

MOLLIE. I had to go down to the village for some stuff I'd forgotten. Did you get the chicken netting?

GILES. It wasn't the right kind. (*He sits on the left arm of the armchair centre.*) I went on to another dump but that wasn't any good either. Practically a whole day wasted. My God, I'm half frozen. Car was skidding like anything. The snow's coming down thick. What do you bet we're not snowed up tomorrow?

MOLLIE. Oh dear, I do hope not. (*She crosses to the radiator and feels it.*) If only the pipes don't freeze.

GILES. (*rising and moving up to MOLLIE*) We'll have to keep the central heating well stoked up. (*He feels the radiator.*) H'm, not too good – I wish they'd send the coke along. We've not got any too much.

MOLLIE. (*moving down to the sofa and sitting*) Oh! I do so want everything to go well at first. First impressions are so important.

GILES. (*moving down to right of the sofa*) Is everything ready? Nobody's arrived yet, I suppose?

MOLLIE. No, thank goodness. I think everything's in order. Mrs. Barlow's hooked it early. Afraid of the weather, I suppose.

GILES. What a nuisance these daily women are. That leaves everything on your shoulders.

MOLLIE. *And yours!* This is a partnership.

GILES. (*crossing to the fire*) So long as you don't ask me to cook.

MOLLIE. (*rising*) No, no, that's my department. Anyway, we've got lots of tins in case we are snowed up. (*Crossing to GILES*) Oh, Giles, do you think it's going to be all right?

GILES. Got cold feet, have you? Are you sorry now we didn't sell the place when your aunt left it to you, instead of having this mad idea of running it as a guest house?

MOLLIE. No, I'm not. I love it. And talking of a guest house. Just look at *that!* (*She indicates the sign board in an accusing manner.*)

GILES. (*complacently*) Pretty good, what? (*He crosses to left of the sign board.*)

MOLLIE. It's a disaster! Don't you see? You've left out the "S." Monkwell instead of Monkswell.

GILES. Good Lord, so I did. However did I come to do that? But it doesn't really matter, does it? Monkwell is just as good a name.

MOLLIE. You're in disgrace. (*She crosses to the desk.*) Go and stoke up the central heating.

GILES. Across that icy yard! Ugh! Shall I bank it up for the night now?

MOLLIE. No, you don't do that until ten or eleven o'clock at night.

GILES. How appalling!

MOLLIE. Hurry up. Someone may arrive at any minute now.

GILES. You've got all the rooms worked out?

MOLLIE. Yes. (*She sits at the desk and picks up a paper from it.*) Mrs. Boyle, Front Fourposter Room. Major Metcalf, Blue Room. Miss Casewell, East Room. Mr. Wren, Oak Room.

GILES. (*crossing to right of the sofa table*) I wonder what all these people will be like. Oughtn't we to have got rent in advance?

MOLLIE. Oh no, I don't think so.

GILES. We're rather mugs at this game.

MOLLIE. They bring luggage. If they don't pay we hang on to their luggage. It's quite simple.

GILES. I can't help thinking we ought to have taken a correspondence course in hotel keeping. We're sure to get had in some way. Their luggage might be just bricks wrapped up in newspaper and where should we be then?

MOLLIE. They all wrote from very good addresses.

GILES. That's what servants with forged references do. Some of these people may be criminals hiding from the police. *(He moves up to the sign board and picks it up.)*

MOLLIE. I don't care what they are so long as they pay us seven guineas every week.

GILES. You're such a wonderful woman of business, Mollie.

(GILES exits through the arch up right, carrying the sign board. MOLLIE switches on the radio.)

VOICE ON THE RADIO. And according to Scotland Yard, the crime took place at twenty-four Culver Street, Paddington. The murdered woman was a Mrs. Maureen Lyon. In connection with the murder, the police –

(MOLLIE rises and crosses to the armchair centre.)

– are anxious to interview a man seen in the vicinity, wearing a dark overcoat –

(MOLLIE picks up GILES' overcoat.)

– light scarf –

(MOLLIE picks up his scarf.)

– and a soft felt hat.

(MOLLIE picks up his hat and exits through the arch up right.)

Motorists are warned against ice-bound roads.

(The door bell rings.)

The heavy snow is expected to continue, and throughout the country...

(MOLLIE enters, crosses to the desk, switches off the radio and hurries off through the arch up right.)

MOLLIE. *(off)* How do you do?

CHRISTOPHER. *(off)* Thanks so much.

(CHRISTOPHER WREN enters through the arch up right with a suitcase which he places right of the refectory table. He is a rather wild-looking neurotic young man.)

His hair is long and untidy and he wears a woven artistic tie. He has a confiding, almost childish manner.)

(MOLLIE enters and moves up centre.)

Weather is simply awful. My taxi gave up at your gate. (He crosses and places his hat on the sofa table.) Wouldn't attempt the drive. No sporting instinct. (moving up to MOLLIE) Are you Mrs. Ralston? How delightful! My name's Wren.

MOLLIE. How do you do, Mr. Wren?

CHRISTOPHER. You know you're not at all as I'd pictured you. I've been thinking of you as a retired general's widow, Indian Army. I thought you'd be terrifically grim and Memsahibish, and that the whole place would be simply crammed with Benares brass. Instead, it's heavenly (crossing below the sofa to left of the sofa table) – quite heavenly. Lovely proportions. (pointing at the desk) That's a fake! (pointing at the sofa table) Ah, but this table's genuine. I'm simply going to love this place. (He moves below the armchair centre.) Have you got any wax flowers or birds of Paradise?

MOLLIE. I'm afraid not.

CHRISTOPHER. What a pity! Well, what about a sideboard? A purple plummy mahogany sideboard with great solid carved fruits on it?

MOLLIE. Yes, we have – in the dining-room. (She glances at the door down right.)

CHRISTOPHER. (following her glance) In here? (He moves down right and opens the door.) I must see it.

(CHRISTOPHER exits into the dining-room and MOLLIE follows him. GILES enters through the archway up right. He looks round and examines the suitcase. Hearing voices from the dining-room, GILES exits up right.)

MOLLIE. (off) Do come and warm yourself.

(MOLLIE enters from the dining-room, followed by CHRISTOPHER. MOLLIE moves centre.)

CHRISTOPHER. (*as he enters*) Absolutely perfect. Real bedrock respectability. But why do away with a centre mahogany table? (*looking off right*) Little tables just spoil the effect.

(**GILES** enters up right and stands left of the large armchair right.)

MOLLIE. We thought guests would prefer them – this is my husband.

CHRISTOPHER. (*moving up to GILES and shaking hands with him*) How do you do? Terrible weather, isn't it? Takes one back to Dickens and Scrooge and that irritating Tiny Tim. So bogus. (*He turns towards the fire.*) Of course, Mrs. Ralston, you're absolutely right about the little tables. I was being carried away by my feeling for period. If you had a mahogany dining-table, you'd have to have the right family round it. (*He turns to GILES.*) Stern handsome father with a beard, prolific, faded mother, eleven children of assorted ages, a grim governess, and somebody called "poor Harriet," the poor relation who acts as general dogsbody and is very, very grateful for being given a good home!

GILES. (*disliking him*) I'll take your suitcase upstairs for you. (*He picks up the suitcase. To MOLLIE*) Oak Room, did you say?

MOLLIE. Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. I do hope that it's got a fourposter with little chintz roses?

GILES. It hasn't.

(**GILES** exits left up the stairs with the suitcase.)

CHRISTOPHER. I don't believe your husband is going to like me. (*Moving a few paces towards MOLLIE.*) How long have you been married? Are you very much in love?

MOLLIE. (*coldly*) We've been married just a year. (*moving towards the stairs left*) Perhaps you'd like to go up and see your room?

CHRISTOPHER. Ticked off! (*He moves above the sofa table.*)

But I do so like knowing all about people. I mean, I think people are so madly interesting. Don't you?

MOLLIE. Well, I suppose some are and (*turning to CHRISTOPHER*) some are not.

CHRISTOPHER. No, I don't agree. They're *all* interesting, because you never really know what anyone is like – or what they are really thinking. For instance, *you* don't know what *I'm* thinking about now, do you? (*He smiles as at some secret joke.*)

MOLLIE. Not in the least. (*She moves down to the sofa table and takes a cigarette from the box.*) Cigarette?

CHRISTOPHER. No, thank you. (*moving to right of MOLLIE*) You see? The only people who really know what other people are like are artists – and they don't know why they know it! But if they're portrait painters (*He moves centre.*) it comes out – (*He sits on the right arm of the sofa.*) on the canvas.

MOLLIE. Are you a painter? (*She lights her cigarette.*)

CHRISTOPHER. No, I'm an architect. My parents, you know, baptized me Christopher, in the hope that I would be an architect. Christopher Wren! (*He laughs.*) As good as halfway home. Actually, of course, everyone laughs about it and makes jokes about St Paul's. However – who knows? – I may yet have the last laugh.

(*GILES enters from the archway up left and crosses to the arch up right.*)

Chris Wren's Prefab Nests may yet go down in history!
(*to GILES*) I'm going to like it here. I find your wife *most* sympathetic.

GILES. (*coldly*) Indeed.

CHRISTOPHER. (*turning to look at MOLLIE*) And really very beautiful.

MOLLIE. Oh, don't be absurd.

(*GILES leans on the back of the large armchair.*)

CHRISTOPHER. There, isn't that like an Englishwoman? Compliments always embarrass them. European women take compliments as a matter of course, but Englishwomen have all the feminine spirit crushed out of them by their husbands. (*He turns and looks at GILES.*) There's something very boorish about English husbands.

MOLLIE. (*hastily*) Come up and see your room. (*She crosses to the arch up left.*)

CHRISTOPHER. Shall I?

MOLLIE. (*to GILES*) Could you stoke up the hot water boiler?

(**MOLLIE** and **CHRISTOPHER** exit up the stairs left. **GILES** scowls and crosses to centre. The door bell peals. There is a pause then it peals several times impatiently. **GILES** exits hurriedly up right to the front door. The sound of wind and snow is heard for a moment or two.)

MRS. BOYLE. (*off*) This is Monkswell Manor, I presume?

GILES. (*off*) Yes...

(**MRS. BOYLE** enters through the archway up right, carrying a suitcase, some magazines and her gloves. She is a large, imposing woman in a very bad temper.)

MRS. BOYLE. I am Mrs. Boyle. (*She puts down the suitcase.*)

GILES. I'm Giles Ralston. Come in to the fire, Mrs. Boyle, and get warm.

(**MRS. BOYLE** moves down to the fire.)

Awful weather, isn't it? Is this your only luggage?

MRS. BOYLE. A Major – Metcalf, is it? – is seeing to it.

GILES. I'll leave the door for him.

(**GILES** goes out to the front door.)

MRS. BOYLE. The taxi wouldn't risk coming up the drive.

(**GILES** returns and comes down to left of **MRS. BOYLE**.)

It stopped at the gate. We had to share a taxi from the station – and there was great difficulty in getting *that*. (*accusingly*) Nothing ordered to meet us, it seems.

GILES. I'm so sorry. We didn't know what train you would be coming by, you see, otherwise of course, we'd have seen that someone was – er – standing by.

MRS. BOYLE. All trains should have been met.

GILES. Let me take your coat.

(MRS. BOYLE hands GILES her gloves and magazines. She stands by the fire warming her hands.)

My wife will be here in a moment. I'll just go along and give Metcalf a hand with the bags.

(GILES exits up right to the front door.)

MRS. BOYLE. *(moving up to the arch as GILES goes)* The drive might at least have been cleared of snow. *(after his exit)* Most offhand and casual, I must say. *(She moves down to the fire and looks round her disapprovingly.)*

(MOLLIE hurries in from the stairs left, a little breathless.)

MOLLIE. I'm so sorry I...

MRS. BOYLE. Mrs. Ralston?

MOLLIE. Yes. I... *(She crosses to MRS. BOYLE, half puts out her hand, then draws it back, uncertain of what guest house proprietors are supposed to do.)*

(MRS. BOYLE surveys MOLLIE with displeasure.)

MRS. BOYLE. You're very young.

MOLLIE. Young?

MRS. BOYLE. To be running an establishment of this kind. You can't have had much experience.

MOLLIE. *(backing away)* There has to be a beginning for everything, hasn't there?

MRS. BOYLE. I see. Quite inexperienced. *(She looks round.)*
An old house. I hope you haven't got dry rot. *(She sniffs suspiciously.)*

MOLLIE. *(indignantly)* Certainly not!

MRS. BOYLE. A lot of people don't know they have got dry rot until it's too late to do anything about it.

MOLLIE. The house is in perfect condition.

MRS. BOYLE. H'm – it could do with a coat of paint. You know, you've got worm in this oak.

GILES. (*off*) This way, Major.

(**GILES** and **MAJOR METCALF** enter up right. **MAJOR METCALF** is a middle-aged, square-shouldered man, very military in manner and bearing. **GILES** moves up centre. **MAJOR METCALF** puts down a suitcase he is carrying and moves above the armchair centre; **MOLLIE** moves up to meet him.)

This is my wife.

MAJOR METCALF. (*shaking hands with MOLLIE*) How d'you do? Absolute blizzard outside. Thought at one time we shouldn't make it. (*He sees MRS. BOYLE.*) Oh, I beg your pardon. (*He removes his hat.*)

(**MRS. BOYLE** exits down right.)

If it goes on like this I should say you'll have five or six feet of snow by morning. (*He crosses to the fire.*) Not seen anything like it since I was on leave in nineteen-forty.

GILES. I'll take these up. (*Picking up the cases. To MOLLIE*) Which rooms did you say? Blue Room and the Rose Room.

MOLLIE. No – I put Mr. Wren in the Rose Room. He liked the fourposter so much. So it's Mrs. Boyle in the Oak Room and Major Metcalf in the Blue Room.

GILES. (*authoritatively*) Major! (*He moves left towards the stairs.*)

MAJOR METCALF. (*instinctively the soldier*) Sir!

(**MAJOR METCALF** follows **GILES** and they exit up the stairs left. **MRS. BOYLE** enters down right and moves up to the fireplace.)

MRS. BOYLE. Do you have much servant difficulty here?

MOLLIE. We have quite a good local woman who comes in from the village.

MRS. BOYLE. And what indoor staff?

MOLLIE. No indoor staff. Just us. (*She moves down to left of the armchair centre.*)

MRS. BOYLE. Indeed. I understood this was a guest house in full running order.

MOLLIE. We're only just starting.

MRS. BOYLE. I would have said that a proper staff of servants was essential before opening this kind of establishment. I consider your advertisement was most misleading. May I ask if I am the only guest – with Major Metcalf, that is?

MOLLIE. Oh no, there are several here.

MRS. BOYLE. This weather, too. A blizzard (*She turns to the fire.*) – no less – all very unfortunate.

MOLLIE. But we couldn't very well foresee the weather!

(**CHRISTOPHER WREN** enters quietly from the stairs left and comes up behind **MOLLIE.**)

CHRISTOPHER. (*singing*)

“THE NORTH WIND DOTTH BLOW
AND IT WILL BRING SNOW
AND WHAT WILL THE ROBIN DO THEN, POOR THING?”

I adore nursery rhymes, don't you? Always so tragic and *macabre*. That's why children like them.

MOLLIE. May I introduce, Mr. Wren – Mrs. Boyle.

(**CHRISTOPHER** bows.)

MRS. BOYLE. (*coldly*) How d'you do?

CHRISTOPHER. This is a *very* beautiful house. Don't you think so?

MRS. BOYLE. I have come to the time of life when the amenities of an establishment are more important than its appearance.

(**CHRISTOPHER** backs away up right. **GILES** enters from the stairs left and stands below the arch.)

If I had not believed this was a running concern I should never have come here. I understand it was *fully* equipped with every home comfort.

GILES. There is no obligation for you to remain here if you are not satisfied, Mrs. Boyle.

MRS. BOYLE. (*crossing to right of the sofa*) No, indeed, I should not think of doing so.

GILES. If there has been any misapprehension it would perhaps be better if you went elsewhere. I could ring up for the taxi to return. The roads are not yet blocked.

(**CHRISTOPHER** moves down and sits in the armchair centre.)

We have had so many applications for rooms that we shall be able to fill your place quite easily. In any case we are raising our terms next month.

MRS. BOYLE. I am certainly not going to leave before I have tried what the place is like. You needn't think you can turn me out now.

(**GILES** moves down left.)

Perhaps you will take me up to my bedroom, Mrs. Ralston? (*She moves majestically towards the staircase left.*)

MOLLIE. Certainly, Mrs. Boyle. (*She follows MRS. BOYLE. To GILES, softly, as she passes him*) Darling, you were wonderful...

(**MRS. BOYLE** and **MOLLIE** exit left up the stairs.)

CHRISTOPHER. (*rising; childishly*) I think that's a perfectly horrible woman. I don't like her at all. I'd love to see you turn her out into the snow. Serve her right.

GILES. It's a pleasure I've got to forgo, I'm afraid.

(*The door bell peals.*)

Lord, there's another of them.

(**GILES** goes out to the front door.)

(*off*) Come in – come in.

(**CHRISTOPHER** moves to the sofa and sits. **MISS CASEWELL** enters up right. She is a young woman of a manly type, and carries a case. She has a long dark coat, a light scarf and no hat. **GILES** enters)

MISS CASEWELL. (*in a deep, manly voice*) Afraid my car's bogged about half a mile down the road – ran into a drift.

GILES. Let me take this. (*He takes her case and puts it right of the refectory table.*) Any more stuff in the car?

MISS CASEWELL. (*moving down to the fire*) No, I travel light.

(**GILES** moves above the armchair centre.)

Ha, glad to see you've got a good fire. (*She straddles in front of it in a manly fashion.*)

GILES. Er – Mr. Wren – Miss – ?

MISS CASEWELL. Casewell. (*She nods to CHRISTOPHER.*)

GILES. My wife will be down in a minute.

MISS CASEWELL. No hurry. (*She takes off her overcoat.*) Got to get myself thawed out. Looks as though you're going to be snowed up here. (*taking an evening paper from her overcoat pocket*) Weather forecast says heavy falls expected. Motorists warned, etcetera. Hope you've got plenty of provisions in.

GILES. Oh yes. My wife's an excellent manager. Anyway, we can always eat our hens.

MISS CASEWELL. Before we start eating each other, eh?

(*She laughs stridently and throws the overcoat at GILES, who catches it. She sits in the armchair centre.*)

CHRISTOPHER. (*rising and crossing to the fire*) Any news in the paper – apart from the weather?

MISS CASEWELL. Usual political crisis. Oh yes, and a rather juicy murder!

CHRISTOPHER. A murder? (*turning to MISS CASEWELL*) Oh, I like murder!

MISS CASEWELL. (*handing him the paper*) They seem to think it was a homicidal maniac. Strangled a woman somewhere near Paddington. Sex maniac, I suppose. (*She looks at GILES.*)

(**GILES** crosses to left of the sofa table.)

CHRISTOPHER. Doesn't say much, does it? (*He sits in the small armchair right and reads.*) "The police are anxious to interview a man seen in the vicinity of Culver Street at the time. Medium height, wearing darkish overcoat, lightish scarf and soft felt hat. Police messages to this effect have been broadcast throughout the day."

MISS CASEWELL. Useful description. Fit pretty well anyone, wouldn't it?

CHRISTOPHER. When it says that the police are anxious to interview someone, is that a polite way of hinting that he's the murderer?

MISS CASEWELL. Could be.

GILES. Who was the woman who was murdered?

CHRISTOPHER. Mrs. Lyon. Mrs. Maureen Lyon.

GILES. Young or old?

CHRISTOPHER. It doesn't say. It doesn't seem to have been robbery...

MISS CASEWELL. (*to GILES*) I told you – sex maniac.

(*MOLLIE comes down the stairs and crosses to MISS CASEWELL.*)

GILES. Here's Miss Casewell, Mollie. My wife.

MISS CASEWELL. (*rising*) How d'you do? (*She shakes hands with MOLLIE vigorously.*)

(*GILES picks up her case.*)

MOLLIE. It's an awful night. Would you like to come up to your room? The water's hot if you'd like a bath.

MISS CASEWELL. You're right, I would.

(*MOLLIE and MISS CASEWELL exit to the stairs left. GILES follows them, carrying the case. Left alone, CHRISTOPHER rises and makes an exploration. He opens the door down left, peeps in and then exits. A moment or two later he reappears on the stairs left. He crosses to the arch up right and looks off. He sings "Little Jack Horner" and chuckles to himself, giving the impression of being slightly unhinged mentally. He*

moves behind the refectory table. GILES and MOLLIE enter from the stairs left, talking. CHRISTOPHER hides behind the curtain. MOLLIE moves above the armchair centre and GILES moves to the right end of the refectory table.)

MOLLIE. I must hurry out to the kitchen and get on with things. Major Metcalf is very nice. He won't be difficult. It's Mrs. Boyle really frightens me. We *must* have a nice dinner. I was thinking of opening two tins of minced beef and cereal and a tin of peas, and mashing the potatoes. And there's stewed figs and custard. Do you think that will be all right?

GILES. Oh – I should think so. Not – not very original, perhaps.

CHRISTOPHER. *(coming from behind the curtains and moving between GILES and MOLLIE.)* Do let me help. I adore cooking. Why not an omelette? You've got eggs, haven't you?

MOLLIE. Oh yes, we've got plenty of eggs. We keep lots of fowls. They don't lay as well as they should but we've put down a lot of eggs.

(GILES breaks away left.)

CHRISTOPHER. And if you've got a bottle of cheap, any type wine, you could add it to the – “minced beef and cereals,” did you say? Give it a continental flavour. Show me where the kitchen is and what you've got, and I daresay I shall have an inspiration.

MOLLIE. Come on.

(MOLLIE and CHRISTOPHER exit through the archway right to the kitchen. GILES frowns, ejaculates something uncomplimentary to CHRISTOPHER and crosses to the small armchair down right. He picks up the newspaper and stands reading it with deep attention. He jumps as MOLLIE returns to the room and speaks.)

Isn't he sweet? *(She moves above the sofa table.)* He's put on an apron and he's getting all the things together.

He says leave it all to him and don't come back for half an hour. If our guests want to do the cooking themselves, it will save a lot of trouble.

GILES. Why on earth did you give him the best room?

MOLLIE. I told you, he liked the fourposter.

GILES. He liked the pretty fourposter. Twerp!

MOLLIE. Giles!

GILES. I've got no use for that kind. (*significantly*) You didn't handle his suitcase, I did.

MOLLIE. Had it got bricks in it? (*She crosses to the armchair centre and sits.*)

GILES. It was no weight at all. If you ask me there was *nothing* inside it. He's probably one of those young men who go about bilking hotel keepers.

MOLLIE. I don't believe it. I like him. (*She pauses.*) I think Miss Casewell's rather peculiar, don't you?

GILES. Terrible female – if she *is* a female.

MOLLIE. It seems very hard that all our guests should be either unpleasant or odd. Anyway, I think Major Metcalf's all right, don't you?

GILES. Probably drinks!

MOLLIE. Oh, do you think so?

GILES. No, I don't. I was just feeling rather depressed. Well, at any rate we know the worst now. They've all arrived.

(*The door bell rings.*)

MOLLIE. Who can that be?

GILES. Probably the Culver Street murderer.

MOLLIE. (*rising*) Don't!

(*GILES exits up right to the front door. MOLLIE crosses to the fire.*)

GILES. (*off*) Oh.

(*MR. PARAVICINI staggers in up right, carrying a small bag. He is foreign and dark and elderly with a rather flamboyant moustache. He is a slightly taller edition of*

Hercule Poirot, which may give a wrong impression to the audience. He wears a heavy fur-lined overcoat. He leans on the left side of the arch and puts down the bag. GILES enters.)

PARAVICINI. A thousand pardons. I am – where am I?

GILES. This is Monkswell Manor Guest House.

PARAVICINI. But what stupendous good fortune! Madame!
(He moves down to MOLLIE, takes her hand and kisses it.)

(GILES crosses above the armchair centre.)

What an answer to prayer. A guest house – and a charming hostess. My Rolls Royce, alas, has run into a snowdrift. Blinding snow everywhere. I do not know where I am. Perhaps, I think to myself, I shall freeze to death. And then I take a little bag, I stagger through the snow, I see before me big iron gates. A habitation! I am saved. Twice I fall into the snow as I come up your drive, but at last I arrive and immediately – *(He looks round.)* despair turns to joy. *(changing his manner)* You can let me have a room – yes?

GILES. Oh yes...

MOLLIE. It's rather a small one, I'm afraid.

PARAVICINI. Naturally – naturally – you have other guests.

MOLLIE. We've only just opened this place as a guest house today, and so we're – we're rather new at it.

PARAVICINI. *(leering at MOLLIE)* Charming – charming...

GILES. What about your luggage?

PARAVICINI. That is of no consequence. I have locked the car securely.

GILES. But wouldn't it be better to get it in?

PARAVICINI. No, no. *(He moves up to right of GILES.)* I can assure you on such a night as this, there will be no thieves abroad. And for me, my wants are very simple. I have all I need – here – in this little bag. Yes, all that I need.

MOLLIE. You'd better get thoroughly warm.

(PARAVICINI crosses to the fire.)

I'll see about your room. (She moves to the armchair centre.) I'm afraid it's rather a cold room because it faces north, but all the others are occupied.

PARAVICINI. You have several guests, then?

MOLLIE. There's Mrs. Boyle and Major Metcalf and Miss Casewell and a young man called Christopher Wren – and now – you.

PARAVICINI. Yes – the unexpected guest. The guest that you did not invite. The guest who just arrived – from nowhere – out of the storm. It sounds quite dramatic, does it not? Who am I? You do not know. Where do I come from? You do not know. Me, I am the man of mystery. (He laughs.)

(MOLLIE laughs and looks at GILES, who grins feebly.

PARAVICINI nods his head at MOLLIE in high good humour)

But now, I tell you this. I complete the picture. From now on there will be no more arrivals. And no departures either. By tomorrow – perhaps even already – we are cut off from civilization. No butcher, no baker, no milkman, no postman, no daily papers – nobody and nothing but ourselves. That is admirable – admirable. It could not suit me better. My name, by the way, is Paravicini. (He moves down to the small armchair right.)

MOLLIE. Oh yes. Ours is Ralston.

(GILES moves to left of MOLLIE.)

PARAVICINI. Mr. and Mrs. Ralston? (He nods his head as they agree. He looks round him and moves up to right of MOLLIE.) And this – is Monkswell Manor Guest House, you said? Good. Monkswell Manor Guest House. (He laughs.) Perfect. (He laughs.) Perfect. (He laughs and crosses to the fireplace.)

(MOLLIE looks at GILES and they both look at PARAVICINI uneasily as – the curtain falls.)

Scene II

(Scene – The same. The following afternoon.)

(When the curtain rises it is not snowing, but snow can be seen banked high against the window. MAJOR METCALF is seated on the sofa reading a book, and MRS. BOYLE is sitting in the large armchair right in front of the fire, writing on a pad on her knee.)

MRS. BOYLE. I consider it *most* dishonest not to have told me they were only just starting this place.

MAJOR METCALF. Well, everything's got to have a beginning, you know. Excellent breakfast this morning. Good coffee. Scrambled eggs, home-made marmalade. And all nicely served, too. Little woman does it all herself.

MRS. BOYLE. Amateurs – there should be a proper staff.

MAJOR METCALF. Excellent lunch, too.

MRS. BOYLE. Cornbeef.

MAJOR METCALF. But very well disguised cornbeef. Red wine in it. Mrs. Ralston promised to make a pie for us tonight.

MRS. BOYLE. (*rising and crossing to the radiator*) These radiators are not really hot. I shall speak about it.

MAJOR METCALF. Very comfortable beds, too. At least mine was. Hope yours was, too.

MRS. BOYLE. It was quite adequate. (*She returns to the large armchair right and sits.*) I don't quite see why the best bedroom should have been given to that *very* peculiar young man.

MAJOR METCALF. Got here ahead of us. First come, first served.

MRS. BOYLE. From the advertisement I got *quite* a different impression of what this place would be like. A comfortable writing-room, and a much larger place altogether – with bridge and other amenities.

MAJOR METCALF. Regular old tabbies' delight.

MRS. BOYLE. I beg your pardon.

MAJOR METCALF. Er – I mean, yes, I quite see what you mean.

(CHRISTOPHER enters left from the stairs unnoticed.)

MRS. BOYLE. No, indeed, I shan't stay here long.

CHRISTOPHER. (*laughing*) No. No, I don't suppose you will.

(CHRISTOPHER exits into the library up left.)

MRS. BOYLE. Really that is a very peculiar young man. Unbalanced mentally, I shouldn't wonder.

MAJOR METCALF. Think he's escaped from a lunatic asylum.

MRS. BOYLE. I shouldn't be at all surprised.

(MOLLIE enters through the archway up right.)

MOLLIE. (*calling upstairs*) Giles?

GILES. (*off*) Yes?

MOLLIE. Can you shovel the snow away again from the back door?

GILES. (*off*) Coming.

(MOLLIE disappears through the arch.)

MAJOR METCALF. I'll give you a hand, what? (*He rises and crosses up right to the arch.*) Good exercise. Must have exercise.

(MAJOR METCALF exits. GILES enters from the stairs, crosses and exits up right. MOLLIE returns, carrying a duster and a vacuum cleaner, crosses the hall and runs upstairs. She collides with MISS CASEWELL who is coming down the stairs.)

MOLLIE. Sorry!

MISS CASEWELL. That's all right.

(MOLLIE exits. MISS CASEWELL comes slowly centre.)

MRS. BOYLE. Really! What an incredible young woman. Doesn't she know anything about housework? Carrying a carpet sweeper through the front hall. Aren't there any back stairs?

MISS CASEWELL. (*taking a cigarette from a packet in her handbag*)

Oh yes – nice back stairs. (*She crosses to the fire.*) Very convenient if there was a fire. (*She lights the cigarette.*)

MRS. BOYLE. Then why not use them? Anyway, all the housework should have been done in the morning before lunch.

MISS CASEWELL. I gather our hostess had to cook the lunch.

MRS. BOYLE. All very haphazard and amateurish. There should be a proper staff.

MISS CASEWELL. Not very easy to get nowadays, is it?

MRS. BOYLE. No, indeed, the lower classes seem to have no idea of their responsibilities.

MISS CASEWELL. Poor old lower classes. Got the bit between their teeth, haven't they?

MRS. BOYLE. (*frostily*) I gather you are a Socialist.

MISS CASEWELL. Oh, I wouldn't say that. I'm not a Red – just pale pink. (*She moves to the sofa and sits on the right arm.*) But I don't take much interest in politics – I live abroad.

MRS. BOYLE. I suppose conditions are much easier abroad.

MISS CASEWELL. I don't have to cook and clean – as I gather most people have to do in this country.

MRS. BOYLE. This country has gone sadly downhill. Not what it used to be. I sold my house last year. Everything was too difficult.

MISS CASEWELL. Hotels and guest houses are easier.

MRS. BOYLE. They certainly solve some of one's problems. Are you over in England for long?

MISS CASEWELL. Depends. I've got some business to see to. When it's done – I shall go back.

MRS. BOYLE. To France?

MISS CASEWELL. No.

MRS. BOYLE. Italy?

MISS CASEWELL. No. (*She grins.*)

(MRS. BOYLE looks at her inquiringly but MISS CASEWELL does not respond. MRS. BOYLE starts writing. MISS CASEWELL grins as she looks at her, crosses to the radio, turns it on, at first softly, then increases the volume.)

MRS. BOYLE. (annoyed, as she is writing) Would you mind not having that on quite so loud! I always find the radio rather distracting when one is trying to write letters.

MISS CASEWELL. Do you?

MRS. BOYLE. If you don't particularly want to listen just now...

MISS CASEWELL. It's my favourite music. There's a writing table in there. (She nods towards the library door up left.)

MRS. BOYLE. I know. But it's much warmer here.

MISS CASEWELL. Much warmer, I agree. (She dances to the music.)

(MRS. BOYLE, after a moment's glare, rises and exits into the library up left. MISS CASEWELL grins, moves to the sofa table, and stubs out her cigarette. She moves up stage and picks up a magazine from the refectory table.)

Bloody old bitch. (She moves to the large armchair and sits.)

(CHRISTOPHER enters from the library up left and moves down left.)

CHRISTOPHER. Oh!

MISS CASEWELL. Hullo.

CHRISTOPHER. (gesturing back to the library) Wherever I go that woman seems to hunt me down – and then she glares at me – positively glares.

MISS CASEWELL. (indicating the radio) Turn it down a bit.

(CHRISTOPHER turns the radio down until it is playing quite softly.)

CHRISTOPHER. Is that all right?

MISS CASEWELL. Oh yes, it's served its purpose.

CHRISTOPHER. What purpose?

MISS CASEWELL. Tactics, boy.

(CHRISTOPHER looks puzzled. MISS CASEWELL indicates the library.)

CHRISTOPHER. Oh, you mean *her*.

MISS CASEWELL. She'd pinched the best chair. I've got it now.

CHRISTOPHER. You drove her out. I'm glad. I'm very glad. I don't like her a bit. (*crossing quickly to MISS CASEWELL*) Let's think of things we can do to annoy her, shall we? I wish she'd go away from here.

MISS CASEWELL. In this? Not a hope.

CHRISTOPHER. But when the snow melts.

MISS CASEWELL. Oh, when the snow melts lots of things may have happened.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes – yes – that's true. (*He goes to the window.*) Snow's rather lovely, isn't it? So peaceful – and pure... It makes one forget things.

MISS CASEWELL. It doesn't make me forget.

CHRISTOPHER. How fierce you sound.

MISS CASEWELL. I was thinking.

CHRISTOPHER. What sort of thinking? (*He sits on the window seat.*)

MISS CASEWELL. Ice on a bedroom jug, chilblains, raw and bleeding – one thin ragged blanket – a child shivering with cold and fear.

CHRISTOPHER. My dear, it sounds too, too grim – what is it? A novel?

MISS CASEWELL. You didn't know I was a writer, did you?

CHRISTOPHER. Are you? (*He rises and moves down to her.*)

MISS CASEWELL. Sorry to disappoint you. Actually I'm not. (*She puts the magazine up in front of her face.*)

(CHRISTOPHER looks at her doubtfully, then crosses left, turns up the radio very loud and exits into the drawing-room. The telephone rings. MOLLIE runs down the stairs, duster in hand, and goes to the telephone.)

MOLLIE. (*picking up the receiver*) Yes? (*She turns off the radio.*)
 Yes – this is Monkswell Manor Guest House... What?...
 No, I'm afraid Mr. Ralston can't come to the telephone
 just now. This is Mrs. Ralston speaking. Who...? The
 Berkshire Police?

(**MISS CASEWELL** *lowers her magazine.*)

Oh yes, yes, Superintendent Hogben, I'm afraid that's
 impossible. He'd never get here. We're snowed up.
 Completely snowed up. The roads are impassable...

(**MISS CASEWELL** *rises and crosses to the arch up left.*)

Nothing can get through... Yes... Very well... But
 what... Hullo – hullo... (*She replaces the receiver.*)

(**GILES** *enters up right wearing an overcoat. He removes
 the overcoat and hangs it up in the hall.*)

GILES. Mollie, do you know where there's another spade?

MOLLIE. (*moving up centre*) Giles, the police have just rung
 up.

MISS CASEWELL. Trouble with the police, eh? Serving liquor
 without a licence?

(**MISS CASEWELL** *exits left up the stairs.*)

MOLLIE. They're sending out an inspector or a sergeant or
 something.

GILES. (*moving to right of MOLLIE*) But he'll never get here.

MOLLIE. That's what I told them. But they seemed quite
 confident that he would.

GILES. Nonsense. Even a jeep couldn't get through today.
 Anyway, what's it all about?

MOLLIE. That's what I asked. But he wouldn't say. Just
 said I was to impress on my husband to listen very
 carefully to what Sergeant Trotter, I think it was, had
 to say, and to follow his instructions implicitly. Isn't it
 extraordinary?

GILES. (*moving down to the fire*) What on earth do you think
 we've done?

MOLLIE. (*moving to left of GILES*) Do you think it's those nylons from Gibraltar?

GILES. I did remember to get the wireless licence, didn't I?

MOLLIE. Yes, it's in the kitchen dresser.

GILES. I had rather a near shave with the car the other day but it was entirely the other fellow's fault.

MOLLIE. We must have done something...

GILES. (*kneeling and putting a log on the fire*) Probably something to do with running this place. I expect we've ignored some tinpot regulation of some Ministry or other. You practically can't avoid it, nowadays. (*He rises and faces MOLLIE.*)

MOLLIE. Oh dear, I wish we'd never started this place. We're going to be snowed up for days, and everyone is cross, and we shall go through all our reserve of tins.

GILES. Cheer up, darling, (*He takes MOLLIE in his arms.*) everything's going all right at the moment. I've filled up all the coalscuttles, and brought in the wood, and stoked the Aga and done the hens. I'll go and do the boiler next, and chop some kindling... (*He breaks off.*) You know, Mollie, (*He moves slowly up to right of the refectory table.*) come to think of it, it must be something pretty serious to send a police sergeant trekking out in all this. It must be something really urgent...

(*GILES and MOLLIE look at each other uneasily. MRS. BOYLE enters from the library up left.*)

MRS. BOYLE. (*coming to left of the refectory table*) Ah, there you are, Mr. Ralston. Do you know the central heating in the library is practically stone cold?

GILES. Sorry, Mrs. Boyle, we're a bit short of coke and...

MRS. BOYLE. I am paying seven guineas a week here – seven guineas and I do not want to freeze.

GILES. I'll go and stoke it up.

(*GILES exits by the archway up right. MOLLIE follows him to the arch.*)

MRS. BOYLE. Mrs. Ralston, if you don't mind my saying so, that is a very extraordinary young man you have staying here. His manners – and his ties – and does he ever brush his hair?

MOLLIE. He's an extremely brilliant young architect.

MRS. BOYLE. I beg your pardon?

MOLLIE. Christopher Wren is an architect...

MRS. BOYLE. My dear young woman. I have naturally heard of Sir Christopher Wren. (*She crosses to the fire.*) Of course, he was an architect. He built St Paul's. You young people seem to think that no-one is educated but yourselves.

MOLLIE. I meant *this* Wren. His name is Christopher. His parents called him that because they hoped he'd be an architect. (*She crosses to the sofa table and takes a cigarette from the box.*) And he is – or nearly one – so it turned out all right.

MRS. BOYLE. Humph. Sounds a fishy story to me. (*She sits in the large armchair.*) I should make some inquiries about him if I were you. What do you know of him?

MOLLIE. Just as much as I know about you, Mrs. Boyle – which is that you are both paying us seven guineas a week. (*She lights her cigarette.*) That is really all I need to know, isn't it? And all that concerns me. It doesn't matter to me whether I like my guests, or whether (*meaningly*) I don't.

MRS. BOYLE. You are young and inexperienced and should welcome advice from someone more knowledgeable than yourself. And what about this foreigner?

MOLLIE. What about him?

MRS. BOYLE. You weren't expecting him, were you?

MOLLIE. To turn away a *bona fide* traveller is against the law, Mrs. Boyle. *You* should know that.

MRS. BOYLE. Why do you say that?

MOLLIE. (*moving down centre*) Weren't you a magistrate, sitting on the bench, Mrs. Boyle?

MRS. BOYLE. All I say is that this Paravicini, or whatever he calls himself, seems to me...

(**PARAVICINI** enters softly from the stairs left.)

PARAVICINI. Beware, dear lady. You talk of the devil and here he is. Ha, ha.

(**MRS. BOYLE** jumps.)

MRS. BOYLE. I didn't hear you come in.

(**MOLLIE** moves behind the sofa table.)

PARAVICINI. I came in on tiptoe – like this. (*He demonstrates, moving down centre.*) Nobody ever hears me if I do not want them to. I find that very amusing.

MRS. BOYLE. Indeed?

PARAVICINI. (*sitting in the armchair centre*) Now there was a young lady...

MRS. BOYLE. (*rising*) Well, I must get on with my letters. I'll see if it's a little warmer in the drawing-room.

(**MRS. BOYLE** exits to the drawing-room down left.

MOLLIE follows her to the door.)

PARAVICINI. My charming hostess looks upset. What is it, dear lady? (*He leers at her.*)

MOLLIE. Everything's rather difficult this morning. Because of the snow.

PARAVICINI. Yes. Snow makes things difficult, does it not? (*He rises.*) Or else it makes them easy. (*He moves up to the refectory table and sits.*) Yes – very easy.

MOLLIE. I don't know what you mean.

PARAVICINI. No, there is quite a lot you do not know. I think, for one thing, that you do not know very much about running a guest house.

MOLLIE. (*moving to left of the sofa table and stubbing out her cigarette*) I daresay we don't. But we mean to make a go of it.

PARAVICINI. Bravo – bravo! (*He claps his hands and rises.*)

MOLLIE. I'm not such a very bad cook...

PARAVICINI. (*leering*) You are without doubt an enchanting cook. (*He moves behind the sofa table and takes MOLLIE's hand.*)

(*MOLLIE draws it away and moves below the sofa down centre.*)

May I give you a little word of warning, Mrs. Ralston? (*moving below the sofa*) You and your husband must not be too trusting, you know. Have you references with these guests of yours?

MOLLIE. Is that usual? (*She turns to PARAVICINI.*) I always thought people just – just came?

PARAVICINI. It is advisable to know a little about the people who sleep under your roof. Take, for example, myself. I turn up saying that my car is overturned in a snowdrift. What do you know of me? Nothing at all! I may be a thief, a robber, (*He moves slowly towards MOLLIE.*) a fugitive from justice – a madman – even – a murderer.

MOLLIE. (*backing away*) Oh!

PARAVICINI. You see! And perhaps you know just as little of your other guests.

MOLLIE. Well, as far as Mrs. Boyle goes...

(*MRS. BOYLE enters from the drawing-room. MOLLIE moves up centre to the refectory table.*)

MRS. BOYLE. The drawing-room is far too cold to sit in. I shall write my letters in here. (*She crosses to the large armchair.*)

PARAVICINI. Allow me to poke the fire for you. (*He moves right and does so.*)

(*MAJOR METCALF enters up right through the archway.*)

MAJOR METCALF. (*to MOLLIE; with old-fashioned modesty*) Mrs. Ralston, is your husband about? I'm afraid the pipes of the – er – the downstairs cloakroom are frozen.

MOLLIE. Oh dear. What an awful day. First the police and then the pipes. (*She moves to the arch up right.*)

(**PARAVICINI** drops the poker with a clatter. **MAJOR METCALF** stands as though paralysed.)

MRS. BOYLE. (startled) Police?

MAJOR METCALF. (loudly, as if incredulous) Police, did you say? (He moves to the left end of the refectory table.)

MOLLIE. They rang up. Just now. To say they're sending a sergeant out here. (She looks at the snow.) But I don't think he'll ever get here.

(**GILES** enters from the archway up right with a basket of logs.)

GILES. The ruddy coke's more than half stones. And the price... Hullo, is anything the matter?

MAJOR METCALF. I hear the police are on their way here. Why?

GILES. Oh, that's all right. No-one can get through in this. Why, the drifts must be five feet deep. The roads are all banked up. Nobody will get here today. (He takes the logs to the fireplace.) Excuse me, Mr. Paravicini. May I put these down.

(**PARAVICINI** moves down stage of the fireplace. There are three sharp taps on the window as **SERGEANT TROTTER** presses his face to the pane and peers in. **MOLLIE** gives a cry and points. **GILES** crosses and throws open the window. **SERGEANT TROTTER** is on skis and is a cheerful, commonplace young man with a slight cockney accent.)

TROTTER. Are you Mr. Ralston?

GILES. Yes.

TROTTER. Thank you, sir. Detective Sergeant Trotter. Berkshire Police. Can I get these skis off and stow them somewhere?

GILES. (pointing right) Go round that way to the front door. I'll meet you.

TROTTER. Thank you, sir.

(GILES leaves the window open and exits to the front door up right.)

MRS. BOYLE. I suppose that's what we pay our police force for, nowadays, to go round enjoying themselves at winter sports.

(MOLLIE crosses below the refectory table to the window.)

PARAVICINI. *(moving up to centre of the refectory table; in a fierce whisper to MOLLIE)* Why did you send for the police, Mrs. Ralston?

MOLLIE. But I didn't. *(She shuts the window.)*

(CHRISTOPHER enters from the drawing-room left and comes to left of the sofa. PARAVICINI moves to the right end of the refectory table.)

CHRISTOPHER. Who's that man? Where did he come from? He passed the drawing-room window on skis. All over snow and looking terribly hearty.

MRS. BOYLE. You may believe it or not, but that man is a policeman. A policeman – ski-ing!

(GILES and TROTTER enter from the front door. TROTTER has removed his skis and is carrying them.)

GILES. *(moving right of the arch up right)* Er – this is Detective Sergeant Trotter.

TROTTER. *(moving to left of the large armchair)* Good afternoon.

MRS. BOYLE. You can't be a sergeant. You're too young.

TROTTER. I'm not quite as young as I look, madam.

CHRISTOPHER. But terribly hearty.

GILES. We'll stow your skis away under the stairs.

(GILES and TROTTER exit through the archway up right.)

MAJOR METCALF. Excuse me, Mrs. Ralston, but may I use your telephone?

MOLLIE. Of course, Major Metcalf.

(MAJOR METCALF goes to the telephone and dials.)

CHRISTOPHER. (*sitting at the right end of the sofa*) He's very attractive, don't you think so? I always think that policemen are very attractive.

MRS. BOYLE. No brains. You can see that at a glance.

MAJOR METCALF. (*into the telephone*) Hullo! Hullo!... (*to MOLLIE*) Mrs. Ralston, this telephone is dead – quite dead.

MOLLIE. It was all right about half an hour ago.

MAJOR METCALF. The line's gone with the weight of the snow, I suppose.

CHRISTOPHER. (*laughing hysterically*) So we're quite cut off now. Quite cut off. That's funny, isn't it?

MAJOR METCALF. (*moving to left of the sofa*) I don't see anything to laugh at.

MRS. BOYLE. No, indeed.

CHRISTOPHER. Ah, it's a private joke of my own. Hist, the sleuth is returning.

(*TROTTER enters from the archway up right, followed by GILES. TROTTER moves down centre while GILES crosses to left of the sofa table.*)

TROTTER. (*taking out his notebook*) Now we can get to business, Mr. Ralston. Mrs. Ralston?

(*MOLLIE moves down centre.*)

GILES. Do you want to see us alone? If so, we can go into the library. (*He points towards the library door up left.*)

TROTTER. (*turning his back to the audience*) It's not necessary, sir. It'll save time if everybody's present. If I might sit at this table? (*He moves up to the right end of the refectory table.*)

PARAVICINI. I beg your pardon. (*He moves behind the table to the left end.*)

TROTTER. Thank you. (*He settles himself in a judicial manner centre behind the refectory table.*)

MOLLIE. Oh, do hurry up and tell us. (*She moves up to the right end of the refectory table.*) What have we done?

TROTTER. (*surprised*) Done? Oh, it's nothing of *that* kind, Mrs. Ralston. It's something quite different. It's more a matter of police protection, if you understand me.

MOLLIE. Police protection?

TROTTER. It relates to the death of Mrs. Lyon – Mrs. Maureen Lyon of twenty-four Culver Street, London, West two, who was murdered yesterday, the fifteenth instant. You may have heard or read about the case?

MOLLIE. Yes. I heard it on the wireless. The woman who was strangled?

TROTTER. That's right, madam. (*to GILES*) The first thing I want to know is if you were acquainted with this Mrs. Lyon.

GILES. Never heard of her.

(*MOLLIE shakes her head.*)

TROTTER. You mayn't have known of her under the name of Lyon. Lyon wasn't her real name. She had a police record and her fingerprints were on file so we were able to identify her without difficulty. Her real name was Maureen Stanning. Her husband was a farmer, John Stanning, who resided at Longridge Farm not very far from here.

GILES. Longridge Farm! Wasn't that where those children...?

TROTTER. Yes, the Longridge Farm case.

(*MISS CASEWELL enters from the stairs left.*)

MISS CASEWELL. Three children... (*She crosses to the armchair down right and sits.*)

(*Everyone watches her.*)

TROTTER. That's right, miss. The Corrigans. Two boys and a girl. Brought before the court as in need of care and protection. A home was found for them with Mr. and Mrs. Stanning at Longridge Farm. One of the children subsequently died as the result of criminal neglect and persistent ill-treatment. Case made a bit of a sensation at the time.

MOLLIE. (*very much shaken*) It was horrible.

TROTTER. The Stannings were sentenced to terms of imprisonment. Stanning died in prison. Mrs. Stanning served her sentence and was duly released. Yesterday, as I say, she was found strangled at twenty-four Culver Street.

MOLLIE. Who did it?

TROTTER. I'm coming to that, madam. A notebook was picked up near the scene of the crime. In that notebook was written two addresses. One was twenty-four Culver Street. The other (*he pauses*) was Monkswell Manor.

GILES. What?

TROTTER. Yes, sir.

(During the next speech PARAVICINI moves slowly left to the stairs and leans on the upstage side of the arch.)

That's why Superintendent Hogben, on receiving this information from Scotland Yard, thought it imperative for me to come out here and find out if you knew of any connection between this house, or anyone in this house, and the Longridge Farm case.

GILES. (*moving to the left end of the refectory table*) There's nothing – absolutely nothing. It must be a coincidence.

TROTTER. Superintendent Hogben doesn't think it is a coincidence, sir.

(MAJOR METCALF turns and looks at TROTTER. During the next speeches he takes out his pipe and fills it.)

He'd have come himself if it had been in any way possible. Under the weather conditions, and as I can ski, he sent me with instructions to get full particulars of everyone in the house, to report back to him by phone, and to take what measures I thought fit to ensure the safety of the household.

GILES. Safety? What danger does he think we're in? Good Lord, he's not suggesting that somebody is going to be killed here.

TROTTER. I don't want to frighten any of the ladies – but frankly, yes, that is the idea.

GILES. But – why?

TROTTER. That's what I'm here to find out.

GILES. But the whole thing's crazy!

TROTTER. Yes, sir. It's because it's crazy that it's dangerous.

MRS. BOYLE. Nonsense!

MISS CASEWELL. I must say it seems a bit far-fetched.

CHRISTOPHER. I think it's wonderful. (*He turns and looks at MAJOR METCALF.*)

(*MAJOR METCALF lights his pipe.*)

MOLLIE. Is there something that you haven't told us, Sergeant?

TROTTER. Yes, Mrs. Ralston. Below the two addresses was written "Three Blind Mice." And on the dead woman's body was a paper with "This is the First" written on it, and below the words, a drawing of three little mice and a bar of music. The music was the tune of the nursery rhyme *Three Blind Mice*. You know how it goes. (*He sings*) "Three Blind Mice..."

MOLLIE. (*singing*)

"THREE BLIND MICE,
SEE HOW THEY RUN,
THEY ALL RAN AFTER THE FARMER'S WIFE..."

Oh, it's horrible.

GILES. There were three children and one died?

TROTTER. Yes, the youngest, a boy of eleven.

GILES. What happened to the other two?

TROTTER. The girl was adopted by someone. We haven't been able to trace her present whereabouts. The elder boy would now be about twenty-two. Deserted from the Army and has not been heard of since. According

to the Army psychologist, was definitely schizophrenic.
(*explaining*) A bit queer in the head, that's to say.

MOLLIE. They think that it was he who killed Mrs. Lyon – Mrs. Stanning? (*She moves down to the armchair centre.*)

TROTTER. Yes.

MOLLIE. And that he's a homicidal maniac (*she sits*) and that he will turn up here and try to kill someone – but why?

TROTTER. That's what I've got to find out from you. As the Superintendent sees it, there must be some connection. (*to GILES*) Now you state, sir, that you yourself have never had any connection with the Longridge Farm case?

GILES. No.

TROTTER. And the same goes for you, madam?

MOLLIE. (*not at ease*) I – no – I mean – no connection.

TROTTER. What about servants?

(*MRS. BOYLE registers disapproval.*)

MOLLIE. We haven't got any servants. (*She rises and moves up right to the arch.*) That reminds me. Would you mind, Sergeant Trotter, if I went to the kitchen? I'll be there if you want me.

TROTTER. That's quite all right, Mrs. Ralston.

(*MOLLIE exits by the archway up right. GILES crosses up right to the arch, but he is stopped as TROTTER speaks.*)

Now can I have all your names, please?

MRS. BOYLE. This is quite ridiculous. We are merely staying in a kind of hotel. We only arrived yesterday. We've nothing to do with this place.

TROTTER. You'd planned to come here in advance, though. You'd booked your rooms here ahead.

MRS. BOYLE. Well, yes. All except Mr—? (*She looks at PARAVICINI.*)

PARAVICINI. Paravicini. (*He moves to the left end of the refectory table.*) My car overturned in a snowdrift.

TROTTER. I see. What I'm getting at is that anyone who's been following you around might know very well that you were coming here. Now, there's just one thing I want to know and I want to know it quick. Which one of you is it that has some connection with that business at Longridge Farm?

(There is a dead silence.)

You're not being very sensible, you know. One of you is in danger – deadly danger. I've got to know which one that is.

(There is another silence.)

All right, I'll ask you one by one. *(to PARAVICINI)* You, first, since you seem to have arrived here more or less by accident, Mr. Pari—?

PARAVICINI. Para – Paravicini. But, my dear Inspector, I know nothing, but nothing of what you have been talking about. I am a stranger in this country. I know nothing of these local affairs of bygone years.

TROTTER. *(rising and moving down to left of MRS. BOYLE)* Mrs—?

MRS. BOYLE. Boyle. I don't see – really I consider it an impertinence... Why on earth should *I* have anything to do with such – this distressing business?

(MAJOR METCALF looks sharply at her.)

TROTTER. *(looking at MISS CASEWELL)* Miss—?

MISS CASEWELL. *(slowly)* Casewell. Leslie Casewell. I never heard of Longridge Farm, and I know nothing about it.

TROTTER. *(moving to right of the sofa; to MAJOR METCALF)* You, sir?

MAJOR METCALF. Metcalf – Major. Read about the case in the papers at the time. I was stationed at Edinburgh then. No personal knowledge.

TROTTER. *(to CHRISTOPHER)* And you?

CHRISTOPHER. Christopher Wren. I was a mere child at the time. I don't remember even hearing about it.

TROTTER. (*moving behind the sofa table*) And that's all you have to say – any of you?

(*There is a silence.*)

(*moving centre*) Well, if one of you gets murdered, you'll have yourself to blame. Now then, Mr. Ralston, can I have a look round the house?

(*TROTTER exits up right with GILES. PARAVICINI sits at the window seat.*)

CHRISTOPHER. (*rising*) My dears, how melodramatic. He's very attractive, isn't he? (*He moves up to the refectory table.*) I do admire the police. So stern and hardboiled. Quite a thrill, this whole business. *Three Blind Mice.* How does the tune go? (*He whistles or hums it.*)

MRS. BOYLE. Really, Mr. Wren!

CHRISTOPHER. Don't you like it? (*He moves to left of MRS. BOYLE.*) But it's a signature tune – the signature of the murderer. Just fancy what a kick he must be getting out of it.

MRS. BOYLE. Melodramatic rubbish. I don't believe a word of it.

CHRISTOPHER. (*stalking behind her*) But just wait, Mrs. Boyle. Till I creep up behind you, and you feel my hands on your throat.

MRS. BOYLE. Stop... (*She rises.*)

MAJOR METCALF. That'll do, Christopher. It's a poor joke, anyway. In fact, it's not a joke at all.

CHRISTOPHER. Oh, but it is! (*He moves above the armchair centre.*) That's just what it is. A madman's joke. That's just what makes it so deliciously *macabre*. (*He moves up right to the archway, looks round and giggles.*) If you could just see your faces!

(*CHRISTOPHER exits through the archway.*)

MRS. BOYLE. (*moving up right to the arch*) A singularly ill-mannered and neurotic young man.

(**MOLLIE** enters from the dining-room down right and stands by the door.)

MOLLIE. Where's Giles?

MISS CASEWELL. Taking our policeman on a conducted tour of the house.

MRS. BOYLE. (*moving down to the large armchair*) Your friend, the architect, has been behaving in a most abnormal manner.

MAJOR METCALF. Young fellows seem nervy nowadays. Daresay he'll grow out of it.

MRS. BOYLE. (*sitting*) Nerves? I've no patience with people who say they have nerves. I haven't any nerves.

(**MISS CASEWELL** rises and crosses to the stairs left.)

MAJOR METCALF. No? Perhaps that's just as well for you, Mrs. Boyle.

MRS. BOYLE. What do you mean?

MAJOR METCALF. (*moving to left of the armchair centre*) I think you were actually one of the magistrates on the Bench at the time. In fact, you were responsible for sending those three children to Longridge Farm.

MRS. BOYLE. Really, Major Metcalf. I can hardly be held responsible. We had reports from welfare workers. The farm people seemed very nice and were most anxious to have the children. It seemed most satisfactory. Eggs and fresh milk and a healthy out-of-doors life.

MAJOR METCALF. Kicks, blows, starvation, and a thoroughly vicious couple.

MRS. BOYLE. But how was I to know? They were very civilly spoken.

MOLLIE. Yes, I was right. (*She moves up centre and stares at MRS. BOYLE.*) It was you...

(**MAJOR METCALF** looks sharply at **MOLLIE.**)

MRS. BOYLE. One tries to do a public duty and all one gets is abuse.

(PARAVICINI laughs heartily.)

PARAVICINI. You must forgive me, but indeed I find all this most amusing. I enjoy myself greatly.

(Still laughing, PARAVICINI exits down left to the drawing-room. MOLLIE moves to right of the sofa.)

MRS. BOYLE. I never did like that man!

MISS CASEWELL. *(moving to left of the sofa table)* Where did he come from last night? *(She takes a cigarette from the box.)*

MOLLIE. I don't know.

MISS CASEWELL. Looks a bit of a spiv to me. Makes his face up, too. Rouge and powder. Disgusting. He must be quite old, too. *(She lights the cigarette.)*

MOLLIE. And yet he skips about as though he were quite young.

MAJOR METCALF. You'll be wanting more wood. I'll get it.

(MAJOR METCALF exits up right.)

MOLLIE. It's almost dark and yet it's only four in the afternoon. I'll turn the lights on. *(She moves down right and switches on the wall brackets over the fireplace.)* That's better.

(There is a pause. MRS. BOYLE glances uncomfortably first at MOLLIE and then at MISS CASEWELL, who are both watching her.)

MRS. BOYLE. *(assembling her writing things)* Now where did I leave my pen? *(She rises and crosses left.)*

(MRS. BOYLE exits up left to the library. There is the sound of a piano being played from the drawing-room – the tune of "Three Blind Mice" picked out with one finger.)

MOLLIE. *(moving up to the window to close the curtains)* What a horrid little tune that is.

MISS CASEWELL. Don't you like it? Reminds you of your childhood perhaps – an unhappy childhood?

MOLLIE. I was very happy as a child. (*She moves round to centre of the refectory table.*)

MISS CASEWELL. You were lucky.

MOLLIE. Weren't you happy?

MISS CASEWELL. (*crossing to the fire*) No.

MOLLIE. I'm sorry.

MISS CASEWELL. But all that's a long time ago. One gets over things.

MOLLIE. I suppose so.

MISS CASEWELL. Or doesn't one? Damned hard to say.

MOLLIE. They say that what happened when you're a child matters more than anything else.

MISS CASEWELL. They say – they say. Who says?

MOLLIE. Psychologists.

MISS CASEWELL. All humbug. Just a damned lot of nonsense. I've no use for psychologists and psychiatrists.

MOLLIE. (*moving down below the sofa*) I've never really had much to do with them.

MISS CASEWELL. A good thing for you you haven't. It's all a lot of hooey – the whole thing. Life's what you make of it. Go straight ahead – don't look back.

MOLLIE. One can't always help looking back.

MISS CASEWELL. Nonsense. It's a question of will power.

MOLLIE. Perhaps.

MISS CASEWELL. (*forcefully*) I know. (*She moves down centre.*)

MOLLIE. I expect you're right... (*She sighs.*) But sometimes things happen – to make you remember...

MISS CASEWELL. Don't give in. Turn your back on them.

MOLLIE. Is that really the right way? I wonder. Perhaps that's all wrong. Perhaps one ought really to – face them.

MISS CASEWELL. Depends what you're talking about.

MOLLIE. *(with a slight laugh)* Sometimes, I hardly know what I am talking about. *(She sits on the sofa.)*

MISS CASEWELL. *(moving to MOLLIE)* Nothing from the past is going to affect me – except in the way I want it to.

(GILES and TROTTER enter from the stairs left.)

TROTTER. Well, everything's all right upstairs. *(He looks at the open dining-room door, crosses and exits into the dining-room. He reappears in the archway up right.)*

(MISS CASEWELL exits into the dining-room, leaving the door open. MOLLIE rises and begins to tidy up, rearranging the cushions, then moves up to the curtains.

GILES moves up to left of MOLLIE. TROTTER crosses down left.)

(Opening the door down left) What's in here, drawing-room?

(The sound of the piano is heard much louder while the door is open. TROTTER exits into the drawing-room and shuts the door. Presently he reappears at the door up left.)

MRS. BOYLE. *(off)* Would you mind shutting that door. This place is full of draughts.

TROTTER. Sorry, madam, but I've got to get the lay of the land.

(TROTTER closes the door and exits up the stairs.

MOLLIE moves above the armchair centre.)

GILES. *(coming down to left of MOLLIE)* Mollie, what's all this...?

(TROTTER reappears down the stairs.)

TROTTER. Well, that completes the tour. Nothing suspicious. I think I'll make my report now to Superintendent Hogben. *(He goes to the telephone.)*

MOLLIE. *(moving to left of the refectory table)* But you can't telephone. The line's dead...

TROTTER. *(swinging round sharply)* What? *(He picks up the receiver.)* Since when?

MOLLIE. Major Metcalf tried it just after you arrived.

TROTTER. But it was all right earlier. Superintendent Hogben got through all right.

MOLLIE. Oh yes. I suppose, since then, the lines are down with the snow.

TROTTER. I wonder. It may have been *cut*. (*He puts the receiver down and turns to them.*)

GILES. Cut? But who could cut it?

TROTTER. Mr. Ralston... Just how much do you know about these people who are staying in your guest house?

GILES. I – we – we don't really know anything about them.

TROTTER. Ah. (*He moves above the sofa table.*)

GILES. (*moving to right of TROTTER*) Mrs. Boyle wrote from a Bournemouth hotel, Major Metcalf from an address in – where was it?

MOLLIE. Leamington. (*She moves to left of TROTTER.*)

GILES. Wren wrote from Hampstead and the Casewell woman from a private hotel in Kensington. Paravicini, as we've told you, turned up out of the blue last night. Still, I suppose they've all got ration books – that sort of thing.

TROTTER. I shall go into all that, of course. But there's not much reliance to be placed on that sort of evidence.

MOLLIE. But even if this – this maniac is trying to get here and kill us all – or one of us, we're quite safe now. Because of the snow. No-one can get here till it melts.

TROTTER. Unless he's here already.

GILES. Here already?

TROTTER. Why not, Mr. Ralston? All these people arrived here yesterday evening. Some hours after the murder of Mrs. Stanning. Plenty of time to get here.

GILES. But except for Mr. Paravicini, they'd all booked beforehand.

TROTTER. Well, why not? These crimes were planned.

GILES. Crimes? There's only been one crime. In Culver Street. Why are you sure there will be another here?

TROTTER. That it will happen here, no – I hope to prevent that. That it will be attempted, yes.

GILES. (*crossing to the fire*) I can't believe it. It's so fantastic.

TROTTER. It isn't fantastic. It's just facts.

MOLLIE. You've got a description of what this – man looked like in London?

TROTTER. Medium height, indeterminate build, darkish overcoat, soft felt hat, face hidden by a muffler. Spoke in a whisper. (*He crosses to left of the armchair centre. He pauses.*) There are three darkish overcoats hanging up in the hall now. One of them is yours, Mr. Ralston... There are three lightish felt hats...

(*GILES starts to move towards the arch up right but he stops when MOLLIE speaks.*)

MOLLIE. I still can't believe it.

TROTTER. You see? It's this telephone wire that worries me. If it's been cut... (*He crosses to the phone, bends down and studies the wire.*)

MOLLIE. I must go and get on with the vegetables.

(*MOLLIE exits through the archway up right. GILES picks up MOLLIE's glove from the armchair centre and holds it absently, smoothing it out. He extracts a London bus ticket from the glove – stares at it – then after MOLLIE – then back to the ticket.*)

TROTTER. Is there an extension?

(*GILES frowns at the bus ticket, and does not answer.*)

GILES. I beg your pardon. Did you say something?

TROTTER. Yes, Mr. Ralston, I said "Is there an extension?" (*He crosses to centre.*)

GILES. Yes, up in our bedroom.

TROTTER. Go and try it up there for me, will you?

(*GILES exits to the stairs, carrying the glove and bus ticket and looking dazed. TROTTER continues to trace the wire to the window. He pulls back the curtain and opens the window, trying to follow the wire. He crosses*

to the arch up right, goes out and returns with a torch. He moves to the window, jumps out and bends down, looking, then disappears out of sight. It is practically dark. MRS. BOYLE enters from the library up left, shivers and notices the open window.)

MRS. BOYLE. *(moving to the window)* Who's left this window open? *(She shuts the window and closes the curtain, then moves to the fire and puts another log on it. She crosses to the radio and turns it on. She moves up to the refectory table, picks up a magazine and looks at it.)*

(There is a music programme on the radio. MRS. BOYLE frowns, moves to the radio and tunes into a different programme)

VOICE ON THE RADIO. ...to understand what I may term as the mechanics of fear, you have to study the precise effect produced on the human mind. Imagine, for instance, that you are alone in a room. It is late in the afternoon. A door opens softly behind you...

(The door down right opens. The tune of "Three Blind Mice" is heard whistled. MRS. BOYLE turns with a start)

MRS. BOYLE. *(with relief)* Oh, it's you. I can't find any programme worth listening to. *(She moves to the radio and tunes in to the music programme.)*

(A hand shows through the open doorway and clicks the light switch. The lights suddenly go out)

Here – what are you doing? Why did you turn out the light?

(The radio is at full volume, and through it are heard gurgles and a scuffle. MRS. BOYLE's body falls. MOLLIE enters by the archway up right and stands perplexed.)

MOLLIE. Why is it all dark? What a noise!

(She switches on the lights at the switch up right and crosses to the radio to turn it down. Then she sees MRS. BOYLE lying strangled in front of the sofa and screams as – the curtain quickly falls.)

ACT TWO

(Scene – The same. Ten minutes later.)

(When the curtain rises MRS. BOYLE's body has been removed and everyone is assembled in the room. TROTTER is in charge and is sitting on the upstage side of the refectory table. MOLLIE is standing at the right end of the refectory table. The others are all sitting; MAJOR METCALF in the large armchair right, CHRISTOPHER in the desk chair, GILES on the stairs left, MISS CASEWELL at the right end of the sofa, and PARAVICINI at the left end.)

TROTTER. Now, Mrs. Ralston, try and think – *think...*

MOLLIE. *(at breaking point)* I can't think. My head's numbed.

TROTTER. Mrs. Boyle had only just been killed when you got to her. You came from the kitchen. Are you sure you didn't see or hear anybody as you came along the hallway?

MOLLIE. No – no, I don't think so. Just the radio blaring out in here. I couldn't think who'd turned it on so loud. I wouldn't hear anything else with that, would I?

TROTTER. That was clearly the murderer's idea – or *(meaningly)* murderess.

MOLLIE. How could I hear anything else?

TROTTER. You might have done. If the murderer had left the Hall that way *(He points left.)* he might have heard you coming from the kitchen. He might have slipped up the back stairs – or into the dining-room...

MOLLIE. I think – I'm not sure – I heard a door creak – and shut – just as I came out of the kitchen.

TROTTER. Which door?

MOLLIE. I don't know.

TROTTER. Think, Mrs. Ralston – try and *think*. Upstairs?
Downstairs? Close at hand? Right? Left?

MOLLIE. (*tearful*) I don't know, I tell you. I'm not even sure
I heard anything. (*She moves down to the armchair centre
and sits.*)

GILES. (*rising and moving to left of the refectory table; angrily*)
Can't you stop bullying her? Can't you see she's all in?

TROTTER. (*sharply*) We're investigating a murder, Mr.
Ralston. Up to now, nobody has taken this thing
seriously. Mrs. Boyle didn't. She held out on me with
information. You all held out on me. Well, Mrs. Boyle
is dead. Unless we get to the bottom of this – and
quickly, mind – there may be another death.

GILES. Another? Nonsense. Why?

TROTTER. (*gravely*) Because there were *three* little blind
mice.

GILES. A death for each of them? But there would have to
be some connection – I mean another connection –
with the Longridge Farm business.

TROTTER. Yes, there would have to be that.

GILES. But why another death *here?*

TROTTER. Because there were only two addresses in the
notebook we found. Now, at twenty-four Culver Street
there was only one possible victim. She's dead. But
here at Monkswell Manor there is a wider field. (*He
looks round the circle meaningly.*)

MISS CASEWELL. Nonsense. Surely it would be a most
unlikely coincidence that there should be *two* people
brought here by chance, both of them with a share in
the Longridge Farm case?

TROTTER. Given certain circumstances, it wouldn't be so
much of a coincidence. Think it out, Miss Casewell.
(*He rises.*) Now I want to get down quite clearly where
everyone was when Mrs. Boyle was killed. I've already
got Mrs. Ralston's statement. You were in the kitchen
preparing vegetables. You came out of the kitchen,
along the passage, through the swing door into the

hall and in here. (*He points to the archway right.*) The radio was blaring, but the light was switched off, and the hall was dark. You switched the light on, saw Mrs. Boyle, and screamed.

MOLLIE. Yes. I screamed and screamed. And at last – people came.

TROTTER. (*moving down to left of MOLLIE*) Yes. As you say, people came – a lot of people from different directions – all arriving more or less at once. (*He pauses, moves down centre and turns his back to the audience.*) Now then, when I got out of that window (*He points.*) to trace the telephone wire, you, Mr. Ralston, went upstairs to the room you and Mrs. Ralston occupy, to try the extension telephone. (*moving up centre*) Where were you when Mrs. Ralston screamed?

GILES. I was still up in the bedroom. The extension telephone was dead, too. I looked out of the window to see if I could see any sign of the wires being cut there, but I couldn't. Just after I closed the window again, I heard Mollie scream and I rushed down.

TROTTER. (*leaning on the refectory table*) Those simple actions took you rather a long time, didn't they, Mr. Ralston?

GILES. I don't think so. (*He moves away to the stairs.*)

TROTTER. I should say you definitely – took your time over them.

GILES. I was thinking about something.

TROTTER. Very well. Now then, Mr. Wren, I'll have your account of where you were.

CHRISTOPHER. (*rising and moving to left of TROTTER*) I'd been in the kitchen, seeing if there was anything I could do to help Mrs. Ralston. I adore cooking. After that I went upstairs to my bedroom.

TROTTER. Why?

CHRISTOPHER. It's quite a natural thing to go to one's bedroom, don't you think? I mean – one does want to be alone *sometimes*.

TROTTER. You went to your bedroom because you wanted to be alone?

CHRISTOPHER. And I wanted to brush my hair – and – er – tidy up.

TROTTER. (*looking hard at CHRISTOPHER's dishevelled hair*) You wanted to brush your hair?

CHRISTOPHER. Anyway, that's where I was! (*GILES moves down left to the door.*)

TROTTER. And you heard Mrs. Ralston scream?

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

TROTTER. And you came down?

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

TROTTER. Curious that you and Mr. Ralston didn't meet on the stairs.

(*CHRISTOPHER and GILES look at each other.*)

CHRISTOPHER. I came down by the back stairs. They're nearer to my room.

TROTTER. Did you go to your room by the back stairs, or did you come through here?

CHRISTOPHER. I went up by the back stairs, too. (*He moves to the desk chair and sits.*)

TROTTER. I see. (*He moves to right of the sofa table.*) Mr. Paravicini?

PARAVICINI. I have told you. (*He rises and moves to left of the sofa.*) I was playing the piano in the drawing-room – through there, Inspector. (*He gestures left*)

TROTTER. I'm not an Inspector – just a Sergeant, Mr. Paravicini. Did anybody hear you playing the piano?

PARAVICINI. (*smiling*) I do not expect so. I was playing very, very softly – with one finger – so.

MOLLIE. You were playing *Three Blind Mice*.

TROTTER. (*sharply*) Is that so?

PARAVICINI. Yes. It is a very catchy little tune. It is – how shall I say? – a haunting little tune? Don't you all agree?

MOLLIE. I think it's horrible.

PARAVICINI. And yet – it runs in people's head. Someone was whistling it, too.

TROTTER. Whistling it? Where?

PARAVICINI. I am not sure. Perhaps in the front hall – perhaps on the stairs – perhaps even upstairs in a bedroom.

TROTTER. Who was whistling *Three Blind Mice*?

(There is no answer.)

Are you making this up, Mr. Paravicini?

PARAVICINI. No, no, Inspector – I beg your pardon – Sergeant, I would not do a thing like that.

TROTTER. Well, go on, you were playing the piano.

PARAVICINI. *(holding out a finger)* With one finger – so... And then I hear the radio – playing very loud – someone is shouting on it. It offended my ears. And after that – suddenly – I hear Mrs. Ralston scream. *(He sits at the left end of the sofa.)*

TROTTER. *(moving up to centre of the refectory table; gesturing with his fingers.)* Mr. Ralston upstairs. Mr. Wren upstairs. Mr. Paravicini in drawing-room. Miss Casewell?

MISS CASEWELL. I was writing letters in the library.

TROTTER. Could you hear what was going on in here?

MISS CASEWELL. No, I didn't hear anything until Mrs. Ralston screamed.

TROTTER. And what did you do then?

MISS CASEWELL. I came in here.

TROTTER. At once.

MISS CASEWELL. I – think so.

TROTTER. You say you were writing letters when you heard Mrs. Ralston scream?

MISS CASEWELL. Yes.

TROTTER. And got up from the writing table hurriedly and came in here?

MISS CASEWELL. Yes.

TROTTER. And yet there doesn't seem to be any unfinished letter on the writing desk in the library.

MISS CASEWELL. (*rising*) I brought it with me. (*She opens her handbag, takes out a letter, moves up to left of TROTTER and hands it to him.*)

TROTTER. (*looking at it and handing it back*) Dearest Jessie – h'm – a friend of yours, or a relation?

MISS CASEWELL. That's none of your damned business. (*She turns away.*)

TROTTER. Perhaps not. (*He moves round the right end of the refectory table to behind it centre.*) You know if I were to hear someone screaming blue murder when I was writing a letter, I don't believe I'd take the time to pick up my unfinished letter, fold it and put it in my handbag before going to see what was the matter.

MISS CASEWELL. You wouldn't? How interesting. (*She moves up the stairs and sits on the stool.*)

TROTTER. (*moving to left of MAJOR METCALF*) Now, Major Metcalf, what about you? You say you were in the cellar. Why?

MAJOR METCALF. (*pleasantly*) Looking around. Just looking around. I looked into that cupboard place under the stairs near the kitchen. Lot of junk and sports tackle. And I noticed there was another door inside it, and I opened it and saw a flight of steps. I was curious and I went down. Nice cellars you've got.

MOLLIE. Glad you like them.

MAJOR METCALF. Not at all. Crypt of an old monastery, I should say. Probably why this place is called "Monkswell."

TROTTER. We're not engaged in antiquarian research, Major Metcalf. We're investigating a murder. Mrs. Ralston has told us that she heard a door shut with a faint creak. (*He moves to right of the sofa.*) That particular door shuts with a creak. It could be, you know, that

after killing Mrs. Boyle, the murderer heard Mrs. Ralston (*moving to left of the armchair centre*) coming from the kitchen and slipped into the cupboard pulling the door to after him.

MAJOR METCALF. A lot of things could be.

(**MOLLIE** rises, moves down to the small armchair and sits. There is a pause.)

CHRISTOPHER. (*rising*) There would be fingerprints on the inside of the cupboard.

MAJOR METCALF. Mine are there all right. But most criminals are careful to wear gloves, aren't they?

TROTTER. It's usual. But all criminals slip up sooner or later.

PARAVICINI. I wonder, Sergeant, if that's really true?

GILES. (*moving to left of TROTTER*) Look here, aren't we wasting time? There's one person who...

TROTTER. Please, Mr. Ralston, I'm in charge of this investigation.

GILES. Oh, very well, but...

(**GILES** exits by the door down left.)

TROTTER. (*calling authoritatively*) Mr. Ralston!

(**GILES** re-enters grudgingly and stands by the door.)

Thank you. (*moving behind the refectory table*) We've got to establish opportunity, you know, as well as motive. And now let me tell you this – you *all* had opportunity.

(*There are several murmured protests.*)

(*He holds up his hand.*) There are two staircases – anyone could go up by one and come down by the other. Anyone could go down to the cellars by the door near the kitchen and come up by a flight of steps that leads up through a trap-door to the foot of the stairs over there. (*He points off right.*) The vital fact was that everyone of you was *alone* at the time the murder was committed.

GILES. But look here, Sergeant, you speak as though we were all under suspicion. That's absurd!

TROTTER. In a murder case, everyone is under suspicion.

GILES. But you know pretty well who killed that woman in Culver Street. You think it's the eldest of those three children at the farm. A mentally abnormal young man who is now twenty-three years of age. Well, damn it all, there's only one person here who fits the bill. (*He points to CHRISTOPHER and moves slightly towards him.*)

CHRISTOPHER. It's not true – it's not true! You're all against me. Everyone's always been against me. You're going to frame me for a murder. It's persecution, (*crossing to left of MAJOR METCALF*) that's what it is – persecution.

(*GILES follows him but pauses at the left end of the refectory table.*)

MAJOR METCALF. (*rising; kindly*) Steady, lad, steady. (*He pats CHRISTOPHER on the shoulder, then he takes out his pipe.*)

MOLLIE. (*rising and moving up to left of CHRISTOPHER*) It's all right, Chris. Nobody's against you. (*to TROTTER*) Tell him it's all right.

TROTTER. (*looking at GILES; stolidly*) We don't frame people.

MOLLIE. (*to TROTTER*) Tell him you're not going to arrest him.

TROTTER. (*moving to left of MOLLIE; stolidly*) I'm not arresting anyone. To do that, I've got to have evidence. I haven't got any evidence – yet.

(*CHRISTOPHER moves to the fire.*)

GILES. I think you're crazy, Mollie. (*Moving up centre. To TROTTER*) And you, too! There's just one person who fits the bill and, if only as a safety measure, he ought to be put under arrest. It's only fair to the rest of us.

MOLLIE. Wait, Giles, wait. Sergeant Trotter, can I – can I speak to you a minute?

TROTTER. Certainly, Mrs. Ralston. Will the rest of you go into the dining-room, please.

(The others rise and move down right to the door: first MISS CASEWELL, then MR. PARAVICINI, protesting, followed by CHRISTOPHER and MAJOR METCALF, who pauses to light his pipe. MAJOR METCALF becomes aware of being stared at. They all exit)

GILES. I'm staying.

MOLLIE. No, Giles, you, too, please.

GILES. *(furious)* I'm staying. I don't know what's come over you, Mollie.

MOLLIE. Please.

(GILES exits after the others down right, leaving the door open. MOLLIE shuts it. TROTTER moves to the arch up right.)

TROTTER. Yes, Mrs. Ralston, *(moving above the armchair centre)* what is it you want to say to me?

MOLLIE. *(moving up to left of TROTTER)* Sergeant Trotter, you think that this – *(she moves below the sofa)* this crazy killer must be the – eldest of those three boys at the Farm – but you don't know that, do you?

TROTTER. We don't actually know a thing. All we've got so far is that the woman who joined with her husband in ill-treating and starving those children, has been killed, and that the woman magistrate who was responsible for placing them there has been killed. *(He moves down to right of the sofa.)* The telephone wire that links me with police headquarters has been cut...

MOLLIE. You don't even know that. It may have been just the snow.

TROTTER. No, Mrs. Ralston, the line was deliberately cut. It was cut just outside by the front door. I found the place.

MOLLIE. *(shaken)* I see.

TROTTER. Sit down, Mrs. Ralston.

MOLLIE. *(sitting on the sofa)* But, all the same, you don't know...

TROTTER. (*moving in a circle left above the sofa and then right below it*) I'm going by probability. It all points one way; mental instability, childish mentality, desertion from the Army and the psychiatrist's report.

MOLLIE. Oh I know, and therefore it all seems to point to Christopher. But I don't believe it is Christopher. There must be other possibilities.

TROTTER. (*right of the sofa; turning to her*) Such as?

MOLLIE. (*hesitating*) Well – hadn't those children any relations at all?

TROTTER. The mother was a drunk. She died soon after the children were taken away from her.

MOLLIE. What about their father?

TROTTER. He was an Army sergeant, serving abroad. If he's alive, he's probably discharged from the Army by now.

MOLLIE. You don't know where he is now?

TROTTER. We've no information. To trace him may take some time, but I can assure you, Mrs. Ralston, that the police take every eventuality into account.

MOLLIE. But you don't know where he may be at this minute, and if the son is mentally unstable, the father may have been unstable, too.

TROTTER. Well, it's a possibility.

MOLLIE. If he came home, after being a prisoner with the Japs, perhaps, and having suffered terribly – if he came home and found his wife dead and that his children had gone through some terrible experience, and one of them had died through it, he might go off his head a bit and want – revenge!

TROTTER. That's only surmise.

MOLLIE. But it's possible?

TROTTER. Oh yes, Mrs. Ralston, it's quite possible.

MOLLIE. So the murderer may be middle-aged, or even old. (*She pauses.*) When I said the police had rung up, Major Metcalf was frightfully upset. He really was. I saw his face.

TROTTER. (*considering*) Major Metcalf? (*He moves to the armchair centre and sits.*)

MOLLIE. Middle-aged. A soldier. He seems quite nice and perfectly normal – but it mightn't show, might it?

TROTTER. No, often it doesn't show at all.

MOLLIE. (*rising and moving to left of TROTTER*) So, it's not only Christopher who's a suspect. There's Major Metcalf as well.

TROTTER. Any other suggestions?

MOLLIE. Well, Mr. Paravicini did drop the poker when I said the police had rung up.

TROTTER. Mr. Paravicini. (*He appears to consider.*)

MOLLIE. I know he seems quite old – and foreign and everything, but he mightn't really be as old as he looks. He moves like a much younger man, and he's definitely got make-up on his face. Miss Casewell noticed it, too. He might be – oh, I know it sounds very melodramatic – but he might be *disguised*.

TROTTER. You're very anxious, aren't you, that it shouldn't be young Mr. Wren?

MOLLIE. (*moving to the fire*) He seems so – helpless, somehow. (*turning to TROTTER*) And so unhappy.

TROTTER. Mrs. Ralston, let me tell you something. I've had *all* possibilities in mind ever since the beginning. The boy Georgie, the father – and someone else. There was a sister, you remember.

MOLLIE. Oh – the sister?

TROTTER. (*rising and moving to MOLLIE*) It could have been a woman who killed Maureen Lyon. A woman. (*moving centre*) The muffler pulled up and the man's felt hat pulled well down, and the killer whispered, you know. It's the voice that gives the sex away. (*He moves above the sofa table.*) Yes, it might have been a woman.

MOLLIE. Miss Casewell?

TROTTER. (*moving to the stairs*) She looks a bit old for the part. (*He moves up the stairs, opens the library door, looks in, then shuts the door.*) Oh yes, Mrs. Ralston, there's a very wide field. (*He comes down the stairs.*) There's yourself, for instance.

MOLLIE. Me?

TROTTER. You're about the right age.

(*MOLLIE is about to protest.*)

(*checking her*) No, no. Whatever you tell me about yourself, I've got no means of checking it at this moment, remember. And then there's your husband.

MOLLIE. Giles, how ridiculous!

TROTTER. (*crossing slowly to left of MOLLIE*) He and Christopher Wren are much of an age. Say, your husband looks older than his years, and Christopher Wren looks younger. Actual age is very hard to tell. How much do you know about your husband, Mrs. Ralston?

MOLLIE. How much do I know about Giles? Oh, don't be silly.

TROTTER. You've been married – how long?

MOLLIE. Just a year.

TROTTER. And you met him – where?

MOLLIE. At a dance in London. We went in a party.

TROTTER. Did you meet his people?

MOLLIE. He hasn't any people. They're all dead.

TROTTER. (*significantly*) They're all dead?

MOLLIE. Yes – but, oh you make it sound all wrong. His father was a barrister and his mother died when he was a baby.

TROTTER. You're only telling me what *he* told you.

MOLLIE. Yes – but... (*She turns away.*)

TROTTER. You don't know it of your own knowledge.

MOLLIE. (*turning back quickly*) It's outrageous that...

TROTTER. You'd be surprised, Mrs. Ralston, if you knew how many cases rather like yours we get. Especially since the war. Homes broken up and families dead. Fellow says he's been in the Air Force, or just finished his Army training. Parents killed – no relations. There aren't any backgrounds nowadays and young people settle their own affairs – they meet and marry. It's parents and relatives who used to make the enquiries before they consented to an engagement. That's all done away with. Girl just marries her man. Sometimes she doesn't find out for a year or two that he's an absconding bank clerk, or an Army deserter or something equally undesirable. How long had you known Giles Ralston when you married him?

MOLLIE. Just three weeks. But...

TROTTER. And you don't know anything about him?

MOLLIE. That's not true. I know everything about him! I know exactly the sort of person he is. He's *Giles*. (*turning to the fire*) And it's absolutely absurd to suggest that he's some horrible crazy homicidal maniac. Why, he wasn't even in London yesterday when the murder took place.

TROTTER. Where was he? Here?

MOLLIE. He went across country to a sale to get some wire netting for our chickens.

TROTTER. Bring it back with him? (*He crosses to the desk.*)

MOLLIE. No, it turned out to be the wrong kind.

TROTTER. Only thirty miles from London, aren't you? Oh, you got an ABC? (*He picks up the ABC and reads it.*) Only an hour by train – a little longer by car.

MOLLIE. (*stamping her foot with temper*) I tell you Giles wasn't in London.

TROTTER. Just a minute, Mrs. Ralston. (*He crosses to the front hall, and comes back carrying a darkish overcoat. Moving to left of MOLLIE.*) This your husband's coat?

(*MOLLIE looks at the coat*)

MOLLIE. (*suspiciously*) Yes.

(**TROTTER** takes out a folded evening paper from the pocket.)

TROTTER. *Evening News.* Yesterday's. Sold on the streets about three-thirty yesterday afternoon.

MOLLIE. I don't believe it!

TROTTER. Don't you? (*He moves up right to the arch with the coat.*) Don't you?

(**TROTTER** exits through the archway up right with the overcoat. **MOLLIE** sits in the small armchair down right, staring at the evening paper. The door down right slowly opens. **CHRISTOPHER** peeps in through the door, sees that **MOLLIE** is alone and enters.)

CHRISTOPHER. Mollie!

(**MOLLIE** jumps up and hides the newspaper under the cushion in the armchair centre.)

MOLLIE. Oh, you startled me! (*She moves left of the armchair centre.*)

CHRISTOPHER. Where is he? (*moving to right of MOLLIE*)
Where has he gone?

MOLLIE. Who?

CHRISTOPHER. The sergeant.

MOLLIE. Oh, he went out that way.

CHRISTOPHER. If only I could get away. Somehow – some way. Is there anywhere I could hide – in the house?

MOLLIE. Hide?

CHRISTOPHER. Yes – from *him*.

MOLLIE. Why?

CHRISTOPHER. But, darling, they're all so frightfully against me. They're going to say I committed these murders – particularly your husband. (*He moves to right of the sofa.*)

MOLLIE. Never mind him. (*She moves a step to right of CHRISTOPHER.*) Listen, Christopher, you can't go on – running away from things – all your life.

CHRISTOPHER. Why do you say that?

MOLLIE. Well, it's true, isn't it?

CHRISTOPHER. (*hopelessly*) Oh yes, it's quite true. (*He sits at the left end of the sofa.*)

MOLLIE. (*sitting at the right end of the sofa; affectionately*)
You've got to grow up some time, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER. I wish I hadn't.

MOLLIE. Your name isn't really Christopher Wren, is it?

CHRISTOPHER. No.

MOLLIE. And you're not really training to be an architect?

CHRISTOPHER. No.

MOLLIE. Why did you...?

CHRISTOPHER. Call myself Christopher Wren? It just amused me. And then they used to laugh at me at school and call me little Christopher Robin. Robin – Wren – association of ideas. It was hell being at school.

MOLLIE. What's your real name?

CHRISTOPHER. We needn't go into that. I ran away whilst I was doing my Army service. It was all so beastly – I hated it.

(*MOLLIE has a sudden wave of unease, which CHRISTOPHER notices. She rises and moves to right of the sofa.*)

(*rising and moving down left*) Yes, I'm just like the unknown murderer.

(*MOLLIE moves up to left of the refectory table, and turns away from him.*)

I told you I was the one the specification fitted. You see, my mother – my mother... (*He moves up to left of the sofa table.*)

MOLLIE. Yes, your mother?

CHRISTOPHER. Everything would be all right if she hadn't died. She would have taken care of me – and looked after me...

MOLLIE. You can't go on being looked after all your life. Things happen to you. And you've got to bear them – you've got to go on just as usual.

CHRISTOPHER. One can't do that.

MOLLIE. Yes, one can.

CHRISTOPHER. You mean – you have? *(He moves up to left of MOLLIE.)*

MOLLIE. *(facing CHRISTOPHER)* Yes.

CHRISTOPHER. What was it? Something very bad?

MOLLIE. Something I've never forgotten.

CHRISTOPHER. Was it to do with Giles?

MOLLIE. No, it was long before I met Giles.

CHRISTOPHER. You must have been very young. Almost a child.

MOLLIE. Perhaps that's why it was so – awful. It was horrible – horrible... I try to put it out of my mind. I try never to think about it.

CHRISTOPHER. So – you're running away, too. Running away from things – instead of facing them?

MOLLIE. Yes – perhaps, in a way, I am.

(There is a silence.)

Considering that I never saw you until yesterday, we seem to know each other rather well.

CHRISTOPHER. Yes, it's odd, isn't it?

MOLLIE. I don't know. I suppose there's a sort of – sympathy between us.

CHRISTOPHER. Anyway, you think I ought to stick it out.

MOLLIE. Well, frankly, what else can you do?

CHRISTOPHER. I might pinch the sergeant's skis. I can ski quite well.

MOLLIE. That would be frightfully stupid. It would be almost like admitting you're guilty.

CHRISTOPHER. Sergeant Trotter thinks I'm guilty.

MOLLIE. No, he doesn't. At least – I don't know what he thinks.

(She moves down to the armchair centre, pulls out the evening paper from under the cushion and stares at it. Suddenly, with passion) I hate him – I hate him – I hate him...

CHRISTOPHER. *(startled)* Who?

MOLLIE. Sergeant Trotter. He puts things into your head. Things that aren't true, that can't possibly be true.

CHRISTOPHER. What is all this?

MOLLIE. I don't believe it – I won't believe it...

CHRISTOPHER. What won't you believe? *(He moves slowly to MOLLIE, puts his hands on her shoulders and turns her round to face him.)* Come on – out with it!

MOLLIE. *(showing the paper)* You see that?

CHRISTOPHER. Yes.

MOLLIE. What is it? Yesterday's evening paper – a London paper. And it was in Giles' pocket. But Giles didn't go to London yesterday.

CHRISTOPHER. Well, if he was here all day...

MOLLIE. But he wasn't. He went off in the car to look for chicken wire, but he couldn't find any.

CHRISTOPHER. Well, that's all right. *(moving left centre)* Probably he did go up to London after all.

MOLLIE. Then why shouldn't he tell me he did? Why pretend he'd been driving all round the countryside?

CHRISTOPHER. Perhaps, with the news of this murder...

MOLLIE. He didn't know about the murder. Or did he? Did he? *(She moves to the fire.)*

CHRISTOPHER. Good Lord, Mollie. Surely you don't think – the Sergeant doesn't think...

(During the next speech MOLLIE crosses slowly up stage to left of the sofa. CHRISTOPHER silently drops the paper on the sofa.)

MOLLIE. I don't know what the Sergeant thinks. And he can make you think things about people. You ask yourself questions and you begin to doubt. You feel that somebody you love and know well might be – a stranger. (*whispering*) That's what happens in a nightmare. You're somewhere in the middle of friends and then you suddenly look at their faces and they're not your friends any longer – they're different people – just pretending. Perhaps you can't trust anybody – perhaps everybody's a stranger. (*She puts her hands to her face.*)

(**CHRISTOPHER** moves to the left end of the sofa, kneels on it and takes her hands away from her face. **GILES** enters from the dining-room down right, but stops when he sees them. **MOLLIE** backs away, and **CHRISTOPHER** sits on the sofa.)

GILES. (*at the door*) I seem to be interrupting something.

MOLLIE. No, we were – just talking. I must go to the kitchen – there's the pie and potatoes – and I must do – do the spinach. (*She moves right above the armchair centre.*)

CHRISTOPHER. (*rising and moving centre*) I'll come and give you a hand.

GILES. (*moving up to the fire*) No, you won't.

MOLLIE. Giles.

GILES. *Tête-à-têtes* aren't very healthy things at present. You keep out of the kitchen and keep away from my wife.

CHRISTOPHER. But really, look here...

GILES. (*furious*) You keep away from my wife, Wren. She's not going to be the next victim.

CHRISTOPHER. So that's what you think about me.

GILES. I've already said so, haven't I? There's a killer loose in this house – and it seems to me you fit the bill.

CHRISTOPHER. I'm not the only one to fit the bill.

GILES. I don't see who else does.

CHRISTOPHER. How blind you are – or do you just pretend to be blind?

GILES. I tell you I'm worrying about my wife's safety.

CHRISTOPHER. So am I. I'm not going to leave you here alone with her. *(He moves up to left of MOLLIE.)*

GILES. *(moving up to right of MOLLIE)* What the hell...?

MOLLIE. Please go, Chris.

CHRISTOPHER. I'm not going.

MOLLIE. Please go, Christopher. Please. I mean it...

CHRISTOPHER. *(moving right)* I shan't be far away.

(Unwillingly CHRISTOPHER exits through the arch up right. MOLLIE crosses to the desk chair, and GILES follows her.)

GILES. What is all this? Mollie, you must be crazy. Perfectly prepared to shut yourself up in the kitchen with a homicidal maniac.

MOLLIE. He isn't.

GILES. You've only got to look at him to see he's barmy.

MOLLIE. He isn't. He's just unhappy. I tell you, Giles, he isn't dangerous. I'd know if he was dangerous. And anyway, I can look after myself.

GILES. That's what Mrs. Boyle said!

MOLLIE. Oh, Giles – don't. *(She moves down left.)*

GILES. *(moving down to right of MOLLIE)* Look here, what is there between you and that wretched boy?

MOLLIE. What do you mean by between us? I'm sorry for him – that's all.

GILES. Perhaps you'd met him before. Perhaps you suggested to him to come here and that you'd both pretend to meet for the first time. All cooked up between you, was it?

MOLLIE. Giles, have you gone out of your mind? How dare you suggest these things?

GILES. *(moving up to centre of the refectory table)* Rather odd, isn't it, that he should come and stay at an out-of-the-way place like this?

MOLLIE. No odder than that Miss Casewell and Major Metcalf and Mrs. Boyle should.

GILES. I read once in a paper that these homicidal cases were able to attract women. Looks as though it were true. (*He moves down centre.*) Where did you first know him? How long has this been going on?

MOLLIE. You're being absolutely ridiculous. (*She moves right slightly.*) I never set eyes on Christopher Wren until he arrived yesterday.

GILES. That's what you say. Perhaps you've been running up to London to meet him on the sly.

MOLLIE. You know perfectly well that I haven't been up to London for weeks.

GILES. (*in a peculiar tone*) You haven't been up to London for weeks. Is – that – so?

MOLLIE. What on earth do you mean? It's quite true.

GILES. Is it? Then what's this? (*He takes out MOLLIE's glove from his pocket and draws out of it the bus ticket.*)

(**MOLLIE** starts.)

This is one of the gloves you were wearing yesterday. You dropped it. I picked it up this afternoon when I was talking to Sergeant Trotter. You see what's inside it – a London bus ticket!

MOLLIE. (*looking guilty*) Oh – that...

GILES. (*turning away right centre*) So it seems that you didn't only go to the village yesterday, you went to London as well.

MOLLIE. All right, I went to...

GILES. Whilst I was safely away racing round the countryside.

MOLLIE. (*with emphasis*) Whilst you were racing round the countryside...

GILES. Come on now – admit it. You went to London.

MOLLIE. All right. (*She moves centre below the sofa.*) I went to London. So did you!

GILES. What?

MOLLIE. So did you. You brought back an evening paper.

(She picks up the paper from the sofa.)

GILES. Where did you get hold of that?

MOLLIE. It was in your overcoat pocket.

GILES. Anyone could have put it in there.

MOLLIE. Did they? No, you were in London.

GILES. All right. Yes, I was in London. I didn't go to meet a woman there.

MOLLIE. *(in horror; whispering)* Didn't you – are you sure you didn't?

GILES. Eh? What d'you mean? *(He comes nearer to her.)*

(MOLLIE recoils, backing away down left.)

MOLLIE. Go away. Don't come near me.

GILES. *(following her)* What's the matter?

MOLLIE. Don't touch me.

GILES. Did you go to London yesterday to meet Christopher Wren?

MOLLIE. Don't be a fool. Of course I didn't.

GILES. Then why did you go?

(MOLLIE changes her manner. She smiles in a dreamy fashion.)

MOLLIE. I – shan't tell you that. Perhaps – now – I've forgotten why I went... *(She crosses towards the archway up right.)*

GILES. *(moving to left of MOLLIE)* Mollie, what's come over you? You're different all of a sudden. I feel as though I don't know you any more.

MOLLIE. Perhaps you never did know me. We've been married how long – a year? But you don't really know anything about me. What I'd done or thought or felt or suffered before you knew me.

GILES. Mollie, you're crazy...

MOLLIE. All right then, I'm crazy! Why not? Perhaps it's fun to be crazy!

GILES. (*angrily*) What the hell are you...?

(**MR. PARAVICINI** enters from the archway up right. He moves between them.)

PARAVICINI. Now, now. I do hope you young people are not both saying a little more than you mean. One is so apt to in these lovers' quarrels.

GILES. "Lovers' quarrels!" That's good. (*He moves to left of the refectory table.*)

PARAVICINI. (*moving down to the small armchair right*) Quite so. Quite so. I know just how you feel. I have been through all this myself when I was a younger man. *Jeunesse - jeunesse* - as the poet says. Not been married long, I imagine?

GILES. (*crossing to the fire*) It's no business of yours, Mr. Paravicini...

PARAVICINI. (*moving down centre*) No, no, no business at all. But I just came in to say that the Sergeant cannot find his skis and I'm afraid he is very annoyed.

MOLLIE. (*moving to right of the sofa table*) Christopher!

GILES. What's that?

PARAVICINI. (*moving to face GILES*) He wants to know if you have by any chance moved them, Mr. Ralston.

GILES. No, of course not.

(**SERGEANT TROTTER** enters from the archway up right looking red and annoyed.)

TROTTER. Mr. Ralston - Mrs. Ralston, have you removed my skis from the cupboard back there where we put them?

GILES. Certainly not.

TROTTER. Somebody's taken them.

PARAVICINI. (*moving to right of TROTTER*) What made you happen to look for them?

TROTTER. The snow is still lying. I need help here, reinforcements. I was going to ski over to the police station at Market Hampton to report on the situation.

PARAVICINI. And now you can't – dear, dear... Somebody's seen to it that you certainly shan't do that. But there could be another reason, couldn't there?

TROTTER. Yes, what?

PARAVICINI. Somebody may want to get away.

GILES. (*moving to right of MOLLIE; to her*) What did you mean when you said "Christopher" just now?

MOLLIE. Nothing.

PARAVICINI. (*chuckling*) So our young architect has hooked it, has he? Very, very interesting.

TROTTER. Is this true, Mrs. Ralston? (*He moves to centre of the refectory table*)

(**CHRISTOPHER** enters from the stairs left and comes to left of the sofa.)

MOLLIE. (*moving slightly left*) Oh, thank goodness. You haven't gone, after all.

TROTTER. (*crossing to right of CHRISTOPHER*) Did you take my skis, Mr. Wren?

CHRISTOPHER. (*surprised*) Your skis, Sergeant? No, why should I?

TROTTER. Mrs. Ralston seemed to think... (*He looks at MOLLIE.*)

MOLLIE. Mr. Wren is very fond of ski-ing. I thought he might have taken them just to – get a little exercise.

GILES. Exercise? (*He moves up to centre of the refectory table.*)

TROTTER. Now, listen, you people. This is a serious matter. Somebody has removed my only chance of communication with the outside world. I want everybody here – at once.

PARAVICINI. I think Miss Casewell has gone upstairs.

MOLLIE. I'll get her.

(**MOLLIE** exits up the stairs. **TROTTER** moves to left of the arch up left.)

PARAVICINI. (*moving down right*) I left Major Metcalf in the dining-room. (*He opens the door down right and looks in.*) Major Metcalf! He's not there now.

GILES. I'll try and find him.

(*GILES exits up right. MOLLIE and MISS CASEWELL enter from the stairs. MOLLIE moves to right of the refectory table and MISS CASEWELL to left of it. MAJOR METCALF enters up left from the library.*)

MAJOR METCALF. Hullo, wanting me?

TROTTER. It's a question of my skis.

MAJOR METCALF. Skis? (*He moves to left of the sofa.*)

PARAVICINI. (*moving to the archway up right and calling*) Mr Ralston!

(*GILES enters up right and stands below the arch. PARAVICINI returns and sits in the small armchair down right.*)

TROTTER. Did either of you two remove a pair of skis from the cupboard near the kitchen door?

MISS CASEWELL. Good Lord, no. Why should I?

MAJOR METCALF. And *I* didn't touch 'em.

TROTTER. Nevertheless they are gone. (*to MISS CASEWELL*) Which way did you go to your room?

MISS CASEWELL. By the back stairs.

TROTTER. Then you passed the cupboard door.

MISS CASEWELL. If you say so – I've no idea where your skis are.

TROTTER. (*to MAJOR METCALF*) You were actually *in* that cupboard today.

MAJOR METCALF. Yes, I was.

TROTTER. At the time Mrs. Boyle was killed.

MAJOR METCALF. At the time Mrs. Boyle was killed I'd gone down to the cellar.

TROTTER. Were the skis in the cupboard when you passed through?

MAJOR METCALF. I haven't the least idea.

TROTTER. Didn't you see them there?

MAJOR METCALF. Can't remember.

TROTTER. You must remember if those skis were there then?

MAJOR METCALF. No good shouting at me, young fellow. I wasn't thinking about any damned skis. I was interested in the cellars. *(He moves to the sofa and sits.)* Architecture of this place is very interesting. I opened the other door and I went on down. So I can't tell you whether the skis were there or not.

TROTTER. *(moving down to left of the sofa)* You realize that you, yourself, had an excellent opportunity of taking them?

MAJOR METCALF. Yes, yes, I grant you that. If I wanted to, that is.

TROTTER. The question is, where are they now?

MAJOR METCALF. Ought to be able to find them if we all set to. Not a case of "Hunt the Thimble." Whacking great things, skis. Supposing we all set to. *(He rises and crosses right towards the door.)*

TROTTER. Not quite so fast, Major Metcalf. That may be, you know, what we are meant to do.

MAJOR METCALF. Eh, I don't get you?

TROTTER. I'm in the position now where I've got to put myself in the place of a crazy cunning brain. I've got to ask myself what he wants us to do and what he, himself, is planning to do next.

I've got to try and keep just one step ahead of him. Because, if I don't, there's going to be another death.

MISS CASEWELL. You still don't believe that?

TROTTER. Yes, Miss Casewell. I do. Three blind mice. Two mice cancelled out – a third mouse still to be dealt with. *(moving down centre, with his back to the audience)* There are six of you here listening to me. One of you's a killer!

(There is a pause. They are all affected and look uneasily at one another.)

One of you's a killer. *(He moves to the fire.)* I don't know which yet, but I shall. And another of you is the killer's prospective victim. That's the person I'm speaking to. *(He crosses to MOLLIE.)* Mrs. Boyle held out on me – Mrs. Boyle is dead. *(He moves up centre.)* You – whoever you are – are holding out on me. Well – don't. Because you're in danger. Nobody who's killed twice is going to hesitate to kill a third time. *(He moves to right of MAJOR METCALF.)* And as it is, I don't know which of you it is who needs protection.

(There is a pause.)

(Crossing down centre and turning his back to the audience) Come on, now, anybody here who has anything, however slight, to reproach themselves for in that bygone business, had better come out with it.

(There is a pause.)

All right – you won't. I'll get the killer – I've no doubt of that – but it may be too late for one of you. *(He moves up to centre of the refectory table.)* And I'll tell you another thing. The killer's enjoying this. Yes, he's enjoying himself a good deal...

(There is a pause.)

(He moves round the right end of the refectory table to behind it. He opens the right curtain, looks out and then sits at the right end of the window seat.) All right – you can go.

(MAJOR METCALF exits into the dining-room down right. CHRISTOPHER exits up the stairs left. MISS CASEWELL crosses to the fire and leans on the mantelpiece. GILES moves centre and MOLLIE follows; GILES stops and turns right. MOLLIE turns her back on him and moves behind the armchair centre. PARAVICINI rises and moves to right of MOLLIE.)

PARAVICINI. Talking of chicken, dear lady, have you ever tried chicken's livers served on toast that has been thickly smeared with *foie gras*, with a very thin rasher of bacon just touched with a *soupeçon* of fresh mustard? I will come with you to the kitchen and we will see what we can concoct together. A charming occupation.

(**PARAVICINI** takes **MOLLIE**'s right arm and starts to move up right.)

GILES. (taking **MOLLIE**'s left arm) I'm helping my wife, Paravicini.

(**MOLLIE** throws off **GILES**' arm.)

PARAVICINI. Your husband is afraid for you. Quite natural under the circumstances. He doesn't fancy your being alone with me.

(**MOLLIE** throws off **PARAVICINI**'s arm.)

It is my sadistic tendencies he fears – not my dishonourable ones. (*He leers.*) Alas, what an inconvenience the husband always is. (*He kisses her fingers.*) *A riverderla...*

MOLLIE. I'm sure Giles doesn't think...

PARAVICINI. He is very wise. Take no chances. (*He moves down to right of the armchair centre.*) Can I prove to you or to him or to our dogged Sergeant that I am *not* a homicidal maniac? So difficult to prove a negative. And suppose that instead I am really... (*He hums the tune of "Three Blind Mice."*)

MOLLIE. Oh don't. (*She moves to the back of the armchair centre.*)

PARAVICINI. But such a gay little tune? Don't you think? She cut off their tails with a carving knife – snick, snick, snick – delicious. Just what a child would adore. Cruel little things, children. (*leaning forward*) Some of them never grow up.

(**MOLLIE** gives a frightened cry.)

GILES. (*moving to right of the refectory table*) Stop frightening my wife at once.

MOLLIE. It's silly of me. But you see – I found her. Her face was all purple. I can't forget it...

PARAVICINI. I know. It's difficult to forget things, isn't it. You aren't really the forgetting kind.

MOLLIE. (*incoherently*) I must go – the food – dinner – prepare the spinach – and the potatoes all going to pieces – please, Giles.

(**GILES** and **MOLLIE** exit through the archway up right. **PARAVICINI** leans on the left side of the arch and looks after them, grinning. **MISS CASEWELL** stands by the fireplace, lost in thought.)

TROTTER. (*rising and crossing to left of PARAVICINI*) What did you say to the lady to upset her, sir?

PARAVICINI. Me, Sergeant? Oh, just a little innocent fun. I've always been fond of a little joke.

TROTTER. There's nice fun – and there's fun that's not so nice.

PARAVICINI. (*moving down centre*) Now I do wonder what you mean by that, Sergeant?

TROTTER. I've been doing a little wondering about you, sir.

PARAVICINI. Indeed?

TROTTER. I've been wondering about that car of yours, and how it happened to overturn in a snowdrift (*He pauses and draws the right curtain.*) so conveniently.

PARAVICINI. Inconveniently, you mean, don't you, Sergeant?

TROTTER. (*moving down to right of PARAVICINI*) That rather depends on the way you're looking at it. Just where were you bound for, by the way, when you had this – accident?

PARAVICINI. Oh – I was on my way to see a friend.

TROTTER. In this neighbourhood?

PARAVICINI. Not so very far from here.

TROTTER. And what was the name and address of this friend?

PARAVICINI. Now really, Sergeant Trotter, does that matter now? I mean, it has nothing to do with this predicament, has it? *(He sits at the left end of the sofa.)*

TROTTER. We always like the fullest information. What did you say this friend's name was?

PARAVICINI. I didn't say. *(He takes a cigar from a case in his pocket.)*

TROTTER. No, you didn't say. And it seems you're not going to say. *(He sits on the right arm of the sofa.)* Now that's very interesting.

PARAVICINI. But there might be – so many reasons. An *amour* – discretion. These jealous husbands. *(He pierces the cigar.)*

TROTTER. Rather old to be running round with the ladies at your time of life, aren't you?

PARAVICINI. My dear Sergeant, I am not, perhaps, quite so old as I look.

TROTTER. That's just what I've been thinking, sir.

PARAVICINI. What? *(He lights the cigar.)*

TROTTER. That you may not be as old as you – try to look. There's a lot of people trying to look younger than they are. If somebody goes about trying to look older – well, it does make one ask oneself why.

PARAVICINI. Having asked questions of so many people – you ask questions of yourself as well? Isn't that overdoing things?

TROTTER. I might get an answer from myself – I don't get many from you.

PARAVICINI. Well, well – try again – that is, if you have any more questions to ask.

TROTTER. One or two. Where were you coming from last night?

PARAVICINI. That is simple – from London.

TROTTER. What address in London?

PARAVICINI. I always stay at the Ritz Hotel.

TROTTER. Very nice, too, I'm sure. What is your permanent address?

PARAVICINI. I dislike permanency.

TROTTER. What's your business or profession?

PARAVICINI. I play the markets.

TROTTER. Stockbroker?

PARAVICINI. No, no, you misunderstand me.

TROTTER. Enjoying this little game, aren't you? Sure of yourself, too. But I shouldn't be too sure. You're mixed up in a murder case, and don't you forget it. Murder isn't just fun and games.

PARAVICINI. Not even this murder? *(He gives a little giggle, and looks sideways at TROTTER.)* Dear me, you're very serious, Sergeant Trotter. I always have thought policemen have no sense of humour. *(He rises and moves to left of the sofa.)* Is the inquisition over – for the moment?

TROTTER. For the moment – yes.

PARAVICINI. Thank you so much. I shall go and look for your skis in the drawing-room. Just in case someone has hidden them in the grand piano.

(PARAVICINI exits down left. TROTTER looks after him, frowning, moves down to the door and opens it.)

MISS CASEWELL *crosses quietly towards the stairs left.*

TROTTER *shuts the door.)*

TROTTER. *(without turning his head)* Just a minute, please.

MISS CASEWELL. *(pausing at the stairs)* Were you speaking to me?

TROTTER. Yes. *(crossing to the armchair centre)* Perhaps you'd come and sit down. *(He arranges the armchair for her.)*

(MISS CASEWELL looks at him warily and crosses below the sofa.)

MISS CASEWELL. Well, what do you want?

TROTTER. You may have heard some of the questions I was asking Mr. Paravicini?

MISS CASEWELL. I heard them.

TROTTER. (*moving to the right end of the sofa*) I'd like to have a little information from you.

MISS CASEWELL. (*moving to the armchair centre and sitting*) What do you want to know?

TROTTER. Full name, please.

MISS CASEWELL. Leslie Margaret (*she pauses*) Katherine Casewell.

TROTTER. (*with just a nuance of something different*) Katherine...

MISS CASEWELL. I spell it with a "K."

TROTTER. Quite so. Address?

MISS CASEWELL. Villa Mariposa, Pine d'or, Majorca.

TROTTER. That's in Italy?

MISS CASEWELL. It's an island – a Spanish island.

TROTTER. I see. And your address in England?

MISS CASEWELL. Care of Morgan's Bank, Leadenhall Street.

TROTTER. No other English address?

MISS CASEWELL. No.

TROTTER. How long have you been in England?

MISS CASEWELL. A week.

TROTTER. And you have been staying since your arrival...?

MISS CASEWELL. At the Ledbury Hotel, Knightsbridge.

TROTTER. (*sitting at the right end of the sofa*) What brought you to Monkswell Manor, Miss Casewell?

MISS CASEWELL. I wanted somewhere quiet – in the country.

TROTTER. How long did you – or do you – propose to remain here? (*He starts twirling his hair with his right hand.*)

MISS CASEWELL. Until I have finished what I came here to do. (*She notices the twirling.*)

(TROTTER looks up startled by a force in her words. She stares at him.)

TROTTER. And what was that?

(There is a pause.)

And what was that? (He stops twirling his hair.)

MISS CASEWELL. (with a puzzled frown) Eh?

TROTTER. What was it you came here to do?

MISS CASEWELL. I beg your pardon. I was thinking of something else.

TROTTER. (rising and moving to left of MISS CASEWELL) You haven't answered my question.

MISS CASEWELL. I really don't see, you know, why I should. It's a matter that concerns me alone. A strictly private affair.

TROTTER. All the same, Miss Casewell...

MISS CASEWELL. (rising and moving to the fire) No, I don't think we'll argue about it.

TROTTER. (following her) Would you mind telling me your age?

MISS CASEWELL. Not in the least. It's on my passport. I am twenty-four.

TROTTER. Twenty-four?

MISS CASEWELL. You were thinking I look older. That is quite true.

TROTTER. Is there anyone in this country who can – vouch for you?

MISS CASEWELL. My bank will reassure you as to my financial position. I can also refer you to a solicitor – a very discreet man. I am not in a position to offer you a social reference. I have lived most of my life abroad.

TROTTER. In Majorca?

MISS CASEWELL. In Majorca – and other places.

TROTTER. Were you born abroad?

MISS CASEWELL. No, I left England when I was thirteen.

(There is a pause, with a feeling of tension in it.)

TROTTER. You know, Miss Casewell, I can't quite make you out. *(He backs away left slightly.)*

MISS CASEWELL. Does it matter?

TROTTER. I don't know. *(He sits in the armchair centre.)* What are you doing here?

MISS CASEWELL. It seems to worry you.

TROTTER. It does worry me... *(He stares at her.)* You went abroad when you were thirteen?

MISS CASEWELL. Twelve – thirteen – thereabouts.

TROTTER. Was your name Casewell then?

MISS CASEWELL. It's my name now.

TROTTER. What was your name then? Come on – tell me.

MISS CASEWELL. What are you trying to prove? *(She loses her calm.)*

TROTTER. I want to know what your name was when you left England?

MISS CASEWELL. It's a long time ago. I've forgotten.

TROTTER. There are things one doesn't forget.

MISS CASEWELL. Possibly.

TROTTER. Unhappiness – despair...

MISS CASEWELL. I daresay...

TROTTER. What's your real name?

MISS CASEWELL. I told you – Leslie Margaret Katherine Casewell. *(She sits in the small armchair down right.)*

TROTTER. *(rising)* Katherine...? *(He stands over her.)* What the hell are you doing here?

MISS CASEWELL. I... Oh God... *(She rises, moves centre, and drops on the sofa. She cries, rocking herself to and fro.)* I wish to God I'd never come here.

(TROTTER, startled, moves to right of the sofa.)

CHRISTOPHER *enters from the door down left)*

CHRISTOPHER. *(coming to left of the sofa)* I always thought the police weren't allowed to give people the third degree.

TROTTER. I have merely been interrogating Miss Casewell.

CHRISTOPHER. You seem to have upset her. (*to MISS CASEWELL*) What did he do?

MISS CASEWELL. No, it's nothing. It's just – all this – murder – it's so horrible. (*She rises and faces TROTTER.*) It came over me suddenly. I'll go up to my room.

(*MISS CASEWELL exits up the stairs left.*)

TROTTER. (*moving to the stairs and looking up after her*) It's impossible... I can't believe it...

CHRISTOPHER. (*moving up and leaning over the desk chair*) What can't you believe? Six impossible things before breakfast like the Red Queen.

TROTTER. Oh yes. It's rather like that.

CHRISTOPHER. Dear me – you look as though you'd seen a ghost.

TROTTER. (*resuming his usual manner*) I've seen something I ought to have seen before. (*He moves centre.*) Blind as a bat, I've been. But I think now we may be able to get somewhere.

CHRISTOPHER. (*impertinently*) The police have a clue.

TROTTER. (*moving right of the sofa table; with a hint of menace*) Yes, Mr. Wren – at last the police *have* a clue. I want everyone assembled in here again. Do you know where they are?

CHRISTOPHER. (*moving to left of TROTTER*) Giles and Mollie are in the kitchen. I have been helping Major Metcalf to look for your skis. We've looked in the most entertaining places – but all to no avail. I don't know where Paravicini is.

TROTTER. I'll get him. (*He moves down left to the door.*) You get the others.

(*CHRISTOPHER exits up right.*)

(*opening the door*) Mr. Paravicini. (*moving below the sofa*) Mr. Paravicini. (*returning to the door and shouting*) Paravicini! (*He moves up to centre of the refectory table.*)

(PARAVICINI enters gaily down left.)

PARAVICINI. Yes, Sergeant? (He moves to the desk chair.) What can I do for you? Little Bo Policeman has lost his skis and doesn't know where to find them. Leave them alone, and they'll come home, dragging a murderer behind them. (He moves down left.)

(MAJOR METCALF enters through the arch up right. GILES and MOLLIE enter up right, with CHRISTOPHER.)

MAJOR METCALF. What is all this? (He moves down to the fire.)

TROTTER. Sit down, Major, Mrs. Ralston...

(No-one sits. MOLLIE moves above the armchair centre, GILES moves to right of the refectory table and CHRISTOPHER stands between them)

MOLLIE. Must I come now? It's very inconvenient.

TROTTER. There are more important things than meals, Mrs. Ralston. Mrs. Boyle, for instance, won't want another meal.

MAJOR METCALF. That's a very tactless way of putting things, Sergeant.

TROTTER. I'm sorry, but I want co-operation and I intend to get it. Mr. Ralston, will you go and ask Miss Casewell to come down again? She went up in her room. Tell her it will only be for a few minutes.

(GILES exits to the stairs left.)

MOLLIE. (moving to right of the refectory table) Have your skis been found, Sergeant?

TROTTER. No, Mrs. Ralston, but I may say I have a very shrewd suspicion of who took them, and of why they were taken. I won't say any more at the present moment.

PARAVICINI. Please don't. (He moves up to the desk chair.) I always think explanations should be kept to the very end. That exciting last chapter, you know.

TROTTER. (reprovingly) This isn't a game, sir.

CHRISTOPHER. Isn't it? Now there I think you are wrong. I think it is a game – to somebody.

PARAVICINI. You think the murderer is enjoying himself. Maybe – maybe. (*He sits in the desk chair.*)

(*GILES and MISS CASEWELL, now quite composed, enter from the stairs left.*)

MISS CASEWELL. What is happening?

TROTTER. Sit down, Miss Casewell, Mrs. Ralston...

(*MISS CASEWELL sits on the right arm of the sofa, MOLLIE moves down and sits in the armchair centre. GILES remains standing at the bottom of the stairs.*)

(*officially*) Will you all pay attention, please? (*He sits centre on the refectory table.*) You may remember that after the murder of Mrs. Boyle, I took statements from you all. Those statements related to your positions at the time the murder was committed. These statements were as follows: (*He consults his notebook.*) Mrs. Ralston in the kitchen, Mr. Paravicini playing the piano in the drawing-room, Mr. Ralston in his bedroom. Mr. Wren ditto. Miss Casewell in the library. Major Metcalf (*he pauses and looks at MAJOR METCALF*) in the cellar.

MAJOR METCALF. Correct.

TROTTER. Those were the statements you made. I had no means of checking these statements. They may be true – they may not. To put it quite clearly, five of those statements are true, but one is false – which one? (*He pauses while he looks from one to the other.*) Five of you were speaking the truth, one of you was lying. I have a plan that may help me to discover the liar. And if I discover that one of you lied to me – then I know who the murderer is.

MISS CASEWELL. Not necessarily. Someone may have lied – for some other reason.

TROTTER. I rather doubt that.

GILES. But what's the idea? You've just said you had no means of checking these statements.

TROTTER. No, but supposing everyone was to go through these actions a second time.

PARAVICINI. (*sighing*) Ah, that old chestnut. Reconstruction of the crime.

GILES. That's a foreign idea.

TROTTER. Not a reconstruction of the *crime*, Mr. Paravicini. A reconstruction of the movements of apparently innocent persons.

MAJOR METCALF. And what do you expect to learn from that?

TROTTER. You will forgive me if I don't make that clear just at the moment.

GILES. You want – a repeat performance?

TROTTER. Yes, Mr. Ralston, I do.

MOLLIE. It's a trap.

TROTTER. What do you mean, it's a trap?

MOLLIE. It is a trap. I know it is.

TROTTER. I only want people to do exactly what they did before.

CHRISTOPHER. (*also suspicious*) But I don't see – I simply can't see – what you can possibly hope to find out by just making people do the things they did before. I think it's just nonsense.

TROTTER. Do you, Mr. Wren?

MOLLIE. Well, you can count me out. I'm too busy in the kitchen. (*She rises and moves up right.*)

TROTTER. I can't count anybody out. (*He rises and looks round at them.*) One might almost believe that you're *all* guilty by the looks of you. Why are you all so unwilling?

GILES. Of course, what you say goes, Sergeant. We'll all co-operate. Eh, Mollie?

MOLLIE. (*unwilling*) Very well.

GILES. Wren?

(**CHRISTOPHER** *nods.*)

Miss Casewell?

MISS CASEWELL. Yes.

GILES. Paravicini?

PARAVICINI. (*throwing up his hands*) Oh yes, I consent.

GILES. Metcalf?

MAJOR METCALF. (*slowly*) Yes.

GILES. Are we all to do exactly what we did before?

TROTTER. The same actions will be performed, yes.

PARAVICINI. (*rising*) Then I will return to the piano in the drawing-room. Once again I will pick out with one finger the signature tune of a murderer. (*He sings, gesturing with his finger.*) Tum, dum, dum – dum dum dum... (*He moves down left.*)

TROTTER. (*moving down centre*) Not quite so fast, Mr. Paravicini. (*to MOLLIE*) Do you play the piano, Mrs. Ralston?

MOLLIE. Yes, I do.

TROTTER. And you know the tune of *Three Blind Mice*?

MOLLIE. Don't we all know it?

TROTTER. Then you could pick it out on the piano with one finger just as Mr. Paravicini did.

(*MOLLIE nods.*)

Good. Please go into the drawing-room, sit at the piano, and be ready to play when I give you the signal.

(*MOLLIE crosses left below the sofa.*)

PARAVICINI. But, Sergeant, I understood that we were each to repeat our former roles.

TROTTER. The same actions will be performed, *but not necessarily by the same people*. Thank you, Mrs. Ralston.

(*PARAVICINI opens the door down left. MOLLIE exits.*)

GILES. I don't see the point.

TROTTER. (*moving up to centre of the refectory table*) There is a point. It is a means of checking up on the original statements, and maybe *one* statement in particular. Now then, will you all pay attention, please. I will

assign each of you your new stations. Mr. Wren, will you kindly go to the kitchen. Just keep an eye on Mrs. Ralston's dinner for her. You're very fond of cooking, I believe.

(CHRISTOPHER *exits up right.*)

Mr. Paravicini, will you go up to Mr. Wren's room. By the back stairs is the most convenient way. Major Metcalf, will you go up to Mr. Ralston's room and examine the telephone there. Miss Casewell, would you mind going down to the cellars? Mr. Wren will show you the way. Unfortunately, I need someone to reproduce my own actions. I am sorry to ask it of you, Mr. Ralston, but would you go out by that window and follow the telephone wire round to near the front door. Rather a chilly job – but you're probably the toughest person here.

MAJOR METCALF. And what are you going to do?

TROTTER. (*crossing to the radio and switching it on and off*) I am enacting the part of Mrs. Boyle.

MAJOR METCALF. Taking a bit of a risk, aren't you?

TROTTER. (*reeling against the desk*) You will all stay in your places and remain there until you hear me call you.

(MISS CASEWELL *rises and exits up right. GILES moves behind the refectory table and opens the right curtain, MAJOR METCALF exits up left. TROTTER nods to PARAVICINI to leave.*)

PARAVICINI. (*shrugging his shoulders*) Parlour games!

(PARAVICINI *exits up right.*)

GILES. No objection to my wearing a coat?

TROTTER. I should advise it, sir.

(GILES *fetches his overcoat from the front hall, puts it on and returns to the window. TROTTER moves centre below the refectory table and writes in his notebook.*)

Take my torch, sir. It's behind the curtain.

(GILES climbs out through the window and exits. TROTTER crosses to the library door up left and exits. After a short pause he re-enters, switches off the library light, goes up to the window, shuts it and closes the curtain. He crosses to the fire and sinks into the large armchair. After a pause he rises and goes to the door down left.)

(calling) Mrs. Ralston, count twenty and then begin to play.

(TROTTER shuts the door down left, moves to the stairs and looks off. "Three Blind Mice" is heard being played on the piano. After a pause, he moves down right and switches off the right wall brackets, then moves up right and switches off the left wall brackets. He moves quickly down to the table lamp and switches it on, then crosses down left to the door.)

(calling) Mrs. Ralston! Mrs. Ralston!

(MOLLIE enters down left and moves below the sofa.)

MOLLIE. Yes, what is it?

(TROTTER shuts the door down left and leans against the downstage side of the door reveal.)

You're looking very pleased with yourself. Have you got what you wanted?

TROTTER. I've got exactly what I wanted.

MOLLIE. You know who the murderer is?

TROTTER. Yes, I know.

MOLLIE. Which of them?

TROTTER. You ought to know, Mrs. Ralston.

MOLLIE. I?

TROTTER. Yes, you've been extraordinarily foolish, you know. You've run a very good chance of being killed by holding out on me. As a result, you've been in serious danger more than once.

MOLLIE. I don't know what you mean.

TROTTER. (*moving slowly above the sofa table to right of the sofa; still quite natural and friendly*) Come now, Mrs. Ralston. We policemen aren't quite so dumb as you think. All along I've realized that you had first-hand knowledge of the Longridge Farm affair. You knew Mrs. Boyle was the magistrate concerned. In fact, you knew all about it. Why didn't you speak up and say so?

MOLLIE. (*very much affected*) I don't understand. I wanted to forget – forget. (*She sits at the left end of the sofa.*)

TROTTER. Your maiden name was Waring?

MOLLIE. Yes.

TROTTER. Miss Waring. You taught school – in the school where those children went.

MOLLIE. Yes.

TROTTER. It's true, isn't it, that Jimmy, the child who died, managed to get a letter posted to you? (*He sits at the right end of the sofa.*) The letter begged for help – help from his kind young teacher. You never answered that letter.

MOLLIE. I couldn't. I never got it.

TROTTER. You just – didn't bother.

MOLLIE. That's not true. I was ill. I went down with pneumonia that very day. The letter was put aside with others. It was weeks afterwards that I found it with a lot of other letters. And by then that poor child was dead... (*Her eyes close.*) Dead – dead... Waiting for me to do something – hoping – gradually losing hope... Oh, it's haunted me ever since... If only I hadn't been ill – if only I'd known... Oh, it's monstrous that such things should happen.

TROTTER. (*his voice suddenly thick*) Yes, it's monstrous. (*He takes a revolver out of his pocket.*)

MOLLIE. I thought the police didn't carry revolvers... (*She suddenly sees TROTTER's face, and gasps in horror.*)

TROTTER. The police don't... I'm not a policeman, Mrs. Ralston. You thought I was a policeman because I rang up from a call box and said I was speaking from police headquarters and that Sergeant Trotter was on his way. I cut the telephone wires before I came to the front door. You know who I am, Mrs. Ralston? I'm Georgie – I'm Jimmy's brother, Georgie.

MOLLIE. Oh. *(She looks round her wildly.)*

TROTTER. *(rising)* You'd better not scream, Mrs. Ralston – because if you do I shall fire this revolver... I'd like to talk to you a little. *(He turns away.)* I said I'd like to talk to you a little. Jimmy died. *(His manner becomes very simple and childlike.)* That nasty cruel woman killed him. They put her in prison. Prison wasn't bad enough for her. I said I'd kill her one day... I did, too. In the fog. It was great fun. I hope Jimmy knows. "I'll kill them all when I've grown up." That's what I said to myself. Because grown-ups can do anything they like. *(gaily)* I'm going to kill you in a minute.

MOLLIE. You'd better not. *(She tries very hard to be persuasive.)* You'll never get safely away, you know.

TROTTER. *(pettishly)* Someone's hidden my skis! I can't find them. But it doesn't matter. I don't really mind if I get away or not. I'm tired. It's all been such fun. Watching you all. And pretending to be a policeman.

MOLLIE. That revolver will make a lot of noise.

TROTTER. It will rather. Much better to do it the usual way, and take you by the neck. *(He slowly approaches her, whistling "Three Blind Mice.")* The last little mouse in the trap. *(He drops the revolver on the sofa, and leans over her with his left hand on her mouth and his right hand on her neck.)*

(MISS CASEWELL and MAJOR METCALF appear in the arch up right.)

MISS CASEWELL. Georgie, Georgie, you know me, don't you? Don't you remember the farm, Georgie? The

animals, that fat old pig, and the day the bull chased us across the field. And the dogs. *(She crosses to left of the sofa table.)*

TROTTER. Dogs?

MISS CASEWELL. Yes, Spot and Plain.

TROTTER. Kathy?

MISS CASEWELL. Yes, Kathy – you remember me now, don't you?

TROTTER. Kathy, it is you. What are you doing here? *(He rises and moves to right of the sofa table.)*

MISS CASEWELL. I came to England to find you. I didn't recognize you until you twirled your hair the way you always used to do.

(TROTTER twirls his hair.)

Yes, you always did it. Georgie, come with me. *(firmly)*
You're coming with me.

TROTTER. Where are we going?

MISS CASEWELL. *(gently, as if to a child)* It's all right, Georgie. I'm taking you somewhere where they will look after you, and see that you won't do any more harm.

(MISS CASEWELL exits up the stairs, leading TROTTER by the hand. MAJOR METCALF switches on the lights, crosses to the stairs, and looks up.)

MAJOR METCALF. *(calling)* Ralston! Ralston!

(MAJOR METCALF exits up the stairs. GILES enters from the arch up right. He rushes over to MOLLIE on the sofa, sits and takes her in his arms, placing the revolver on the sofa table.)

GILES. Mollie, Mollie, are you all right? Darling, darling.

MOLLIE. Oh, Giles.

GILES. Whoever would have dreamt it was Trotter?

MOLLIE. He's mad, quite mad.

GILES. Yes, but you...

MOLLIE. I was mixed up in it all, I taught in the school. It wasn't my fault – but he thought I could have saved that child.

GILES. You should have told me.

MOLLIE. I wanted to forget.

(MAJOR METCALF enters from the stairs and comes to centre.)

MAJOR METCALF. Everything's under control. He will be unconscious soon with a sedative – his sister's looking after him. Poor fellow's as mad as a hatter, of course. I've had my suspicions of him all along.

MOLLIE. You did? Didn't you believe he was a policeman?

MAJOR METCALF. I knew he wasn't a policeman. You see, Mrs. Ralston, I'm a policeman.

MOLLIE. You?

MAJOR METCALF. As soon as we got hold of that notebook with "Monkswell Manor" written in it, we saw it was vital to have someone on the spot. When it was put to him, Major Metcalf agreed to let me take his place. I couldn't understand it when Trotter turned up. *(He sees the revolver on the sofa table and picks it up.)*

MOLLIE. And Casewell is his sister?

MAJOR METCALF. Yes, it seems she recognized him just before this last business. Didn't know what to do, but fortunately came to me about it, just in time. Well, it's started to thaw, help should be here pretty soon. *(moving up to the arch right)* Oh, by the way, Mrs. Ralston, I'll remove those skis. I hid them on top of the four-poster.

(MAJOR METCALF exits up right.)

MOLLIE. And I thought it was Paravicini.

GILES. I gather they'll examine that car of his rather carefully. I shouldn't be surprised if they found a thousand or so Swiss watches in the spare wheel. Yes, that's his line of business, nasty little bit of goods. Mollie, I believe you thought I was...

MOLLIE. Giles, what were you doing in London yesterday?

GILES. Darling, I was buying you an anniversary present.
We've been married just a year today.

MOLLIE. Oh. That's what I went to London for, and I didn't want you to know.

GILES. No.

(MOLLIE rises, goes to the desk cupboard, and takes out the parcel. GILES rises and goes to right of the sofa table.)

MOLLIE. *(handing him the parcel)* They're cigars. I do hope they're all right.

GILES. *(unwrapping the parcel)* Oh, darling, how sweet of you. They're splendid.

MOLLIE. You will smoke them?

GILES. *(heroically)* I'll smoke them.

MOLLIE. What's my present?

GILES. Oh yes, I forgot all about your present. *(He rushes up to the chest in the entrance hall, takes out the hat-box and returns. Proudly)* It's a hat.

MOLLIE. *(taken aback)* A hat? But I practically never wear one.

GILES. Just for best.

MOLLIE. *(lifting out the hat)* Oh, how lovely, darling.

GILES. Put it on.

MOLLIE. Later, when my hair's done properly.

GILES. It is all right, isn't it? The girl in the shop said it was the last thing in hats.

(MOLLIE puts the hat on. GILES moves below the desk. MAJOR METCALF rushes in up right.)

MAJOR METCALF. Mrs. Ralston! Mrs. Ralston! There's a terrible smell of burning coming from the kitchen.

(MOLLIE rushes up right towards the kitchen.)

MOLLIE. *(wailing)* Oh, my pie!

(quick curtain)