

*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. Twerpl.

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 Calver 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*