

THE MOUSETRAP

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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 leans 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...