

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.)*

BARAVICINI. 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