

*(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.)*

START

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.*)

STOP