

**ARMSTRONG.** I'm at a loss to understand the matter. The name meant nothing to me - what was it? Close? Close? I really don't remember having a patient of that name - or its being connected with a death in any way. The thing's a complete mystery to me. Of course, it's a long time ago. *(Pause.)* It might possibly be one of my operation cases in hospital. They come too late, so many of these people. Then, when the patient dies, it's always the surgeon's fault.

**LOMBARD.** And then it's better to take up nerve cases and give up surgery. Some, of course, give up drink.

**ARMSTRONG.** I protest. You've no right to insinuate such things. I never touch alcohol.

**LOMBARD.** My dear fellow, I never suggested you did. Anyway, Mr. Unknown is the only one who knows all the facts.

*Start* **(WARGRAVE turns to VERA.)**

**WARGRAVE.** Miss Claythorne?

*(She starts. She has been sitting, staring in front of her. She speaks without feeling.)*

**VERA.** I was nursery governess to Peter Hamilton. We were in Cornwall for the summer. He was forbidden to swim out far. One day, when my attention was distracted, he started off - as soon as I saw what happened I swam after him. I couldn't get there in time -

**WARGRAVE.** Was there an inquest?

**VERA.** Yes, I was exonerated by the Coroner. His mother didn't blame me either.

**WARGRAVE.** Thank you. Miss Brent?

**EMILY.** I have nothing to say.

**WARGRAVE.** Nothing?

**EMILY.** Nothing.

**WARGRAVE.** You reserve your defence?

**EMILY.** *(Sharply.)* There is no question of defence. I have always acted according to the dictates of my conscience.

**LOMBARD.** What a law-abiding lot we seem to be! Myself excepted –

**WARGRAVE.** We are waiting for your story, Captain Lombard.

**LOMBARD.** I haven't got a story.

**WARGRAVE.** (*Sharply.*) What do you mean?

(**LOMBARD** grins; apparently enjoying himself.)

**LOMBARD.** I'm sorry to disappoint all of you. It's just that I plead guilty. It's perfectly true. I left those natives alone in the bush. Matter of self-preservation.

(*His words cause a sensation. VERA looks at him unbelievably.*)

**MACKENZIE.** (*Sternly.*) You abandoned your men?

**LOMBARD.** (*Coolly.*) Not quite the act of a proper gentleman, I'm afraid. But after all, self-preservation's a man's first duty. And natives don't mind dying, you know. They don't feel about it as Europeans do –

(*There is a pause. LOMBARD looks around at everyone with amusement. WARGRAVE clears throat disapprovingly.*)

**WARGRAVE.** Our inquiry rests there. Now, Rogers, who else is there on this island besides ourselves and you and your wife?

**ROGERS.** Nobody, sir. Nobody at all.

**WARGRAVE.** You're sure of that?

**ROGERS.** Quite sure, sir.

**WARGRAVE.** Thank you.

(**ROGERS** turns to go.)

Don't go, Rogers. I am not yet clear as to the purpose of our unknown host in getting us to assemble here. But in my opinion he's not sane in the accepted sense of the word. He may be dangerous. In my opinion, it would

be well for us to leave this place as soon as possible. I suggest that we leave here tonight.

*(There is general agreement from the group.)*

**ROGERS.** I beg your pardon, sir, but there's no boat on the island.

**WARGRAVE.** No boat at all?

**ROGERS.** No, sir.

**WARGRAVE.** Why don't you telephone to the mainland?

**ROGERS.** There's no telephone. Fred Narracott, he comes over every morning, sir. He brings the milk and the bread and the post and the papers, and takes the orders.

*(MARSTON picks up his drink, raising his voice.)*

**MARSTON.** A bit unsporting, what? Ought to ferret out the mystery before we go. Whole thing's like a detective story. Positively thrilling.

**WARGRAVE.** *(Acidly.)* At my time of life, I have no desire for thrills.

**MARSTON.** The legal life's narrowing. I'm all for crime.

*(He raises his glass.)*

Here's to it.

*(He drinks it off with a gulp then suddenly chokes and gasps. He convulses violently and falls, the glass drops from his hand.)*

*ARMSTRONG runs over to him and feels his pulse.)*

**ARMSTRONG.** My God, he's dead!

*(The others can hardly take it in. ARMSTRONG sniffs the glass then nods.)*

**MACKENZIE.** Dead? D'you mean the fellow just choked and died?

**ARMSTRONG.** You can call it choking if you like. He died of asphyxiation, right enough.

**MACKENZIE.** Never knew a man could die like that – just of a choking fit.

**EMILY.** In the middle of life we are in death.

**ARMSTRONG.** A man doesn't die of a mere choking fit, General MacKenzie. Marston's death isn't what we call a natural death.

**VERA.** Was there something in the whiskey?

**ARMSTRONG.** Yes. By the smell of it, cyanide. Probably potassium cyanide. Acts pretty well instantaneously.

**LOMBARD.** Then he must have put the stuff in the glass himself.

**BLORE.** Suicide, eh? That's a rum go.

**VERA.** You'd never think he'd commit suicide. He was so alive. He was enjoying himself.

*(EMILY picks up the remains of a soldier.)*

**EMILY.** Oh! Look – here's one of the little soldiers off the mantelpiece – broken.

*(She holds it up.)*

End