

(**WARGRAVE** takes the letter from **MARSTON** and looks around the room in his court manner.)

Start — **WARGRAVE.** I am obliged to you, Mr. Marston. You have drawn my attention to a curious and suggestive point. I think the time has come for all of us to pool our information. It would be well for everybody to come forward with all the information they have regarding our unknown host. We are all his guests. I think it would be profitable if each one of us were to explain exactly how that came about.

(*There is a pause.*)

EMILY. There's something very peculiar about all this. I received a letter with a signature that was not very easy to read. It purported to be from a woman whom I had met at a certain summer resort two or three years ago. I took the name to be Ogden. I am quite certain that I have never met or become friendly with anyone of the name of Owen.

WARGRAVE. Have you got that letter, Miss Brent?

EMILY. Yes. I will fetch it for you.

(*EMILY exits to the hall.*)

WARGRAVE. Miss Claythorne?

VERA. I never actually met Mrs. Owen. I wanted a holiday post and I applied to a secretarial agency. Miss Grenfell's in London. I was offered this post and accepted.

WARGRAVE. And you were never interviewed by your prospective employer?

VERA. No. This is the letter.

(*VERA hands it to him and WARGRAVE reads.*)

WARGRAVE. "Soldier Island, Sticklehaven, Devon. I have received your name from Miss Grenfell's Agency. I understand she knows you personally. I shall be glad to pay you the salary you ask, and shall expect you to take up your duties on August 8th. The train is the 12:10

from Paddington and you will be met at Oakbridge Station. I enclose five pounds for expenses. Yours truly,
Una Nancy Owen”

(**MARSTON** *makes to the balcony.*)

Mr. Marston?

MARSTON. Don't actually know the Owens. Got a wire from a pal of mine, Badger Berkeley. Told me to roll up here. Surprised me a bit because I had an idea the old horse had gone to Norway. I haven't got the wire.

WARGRAVE. Thank you. Doctor Armstrong?

ARMSTRONG. In the circumstances, I think I may admit that my visit here was professional. Mr. Owen wrote me that he was worried about his wife's health – her nerves, to be precise. He wanted a report without her being alarmed. He therefore suggested that my visit should be regarded as that of an ordinary guest.

WARGRAVE. You had no previous acquaintance with the family?

ARMSTRONG. No.

WARGRAVE. But you had no hesitation in obeying the summons?

ARMSTRONG. A colleague of mine was mentioned and a very handsome fee was suggested. I was due for a holiday, anyway.

(**EMILY** *re-enters and hands a letter to WARGRAVE, who reads.*)

WARGRAVE. “Dear Miss Brent: I do hope you remember me. We were together at Bell Haven Guest House in August some years ago and we seemed to have so much in common. I am starting a guest house of my own on an island off the coast of Devon. I think there is really an opening for a place where there is good plain English cooking, and a nice old-fashioned type of person. None of this nudity and gramophones half the night. I shall be very glad if you could see your way to spending your summer holiday on Soldier Island – as

my guest, of course. I suggest August 8th, 12:40 from Paddington to Oakbridge. Yours sincerely, U.N." Hmm. Yes, the signature is slightly ambiguous.

(**LOMBARD** *speaks quietly to VERA.*)

LOMBARD. I like the nudity touch!

(**WARGRAVE** *takes a letter from his pocket.*)

WARGRAVE. Here is my own decoy letter. From an old friend of mine, Lady Constance Culmington. She writes in her usual vague, incoherent way, urges me to join her here and refers to her host and hostess in the vaguest of terms.

(**ARMSTRONG, MARSTON** *and* **MACKENZIE** *look at the letter. LOMBARD* *stares at BLORE.*)

LOMBARD. (*Excitedly.*) Look here, I've just thought of something -

WARGRAVE. In a minute.

LOMBARD. But I -

WARGRAVE. We will take one thing at a time, if you don't mind, Captain Lombard. General MacKenzie?

(**BLORE** *sits. MACKENZIE* *pulls at his moustache.*)

MACKENZIE. Got a letter - from this fellow Owen - thought I must have met him sometime at the Club - mentioned some old cronies of mine who were to be here - hoped I'd excuse informal invitation. Haven't kept the letter, I'm afraid.

WARGRAVE. And you, Captain Lombard?

LOMBARD. Same sort of thing. Invitation mentioning mutual friends. I haven't kept the letter either.

(*There is a pause. WARGRAVE* *turns his attention to BLORE; he looks at him for some time. When he speaks, his voice is silky and dangerous.*)

WARGRAVE. Just now we had a somewhat disturbing experience. An apparently disembodied voice spoke to us all by name, uttering certain definite accusations against us. We will deal with those accusations presently. At the moment I am interested in a minor point. Amongst the names received was that of William Henry Blore. But as far as we know, there is no one named Blore amongst us. The name of Davis was not mentioned. What have you to say about that, Mr. Davis?

BLORE. Cat's out of the bag, it seems. I suppose I'd better admit my name isn't Davis.

WARGRAVE. You are William Henry Blore?

BLORE. That's right.

LOMBARD. I will add something to that. Not only are you here under a false name, Mr. Blore, but in addition I've noticed this evening that you're a first-class liar. You claim to have come from Natal, South Africa. I know South Africa and Natal well, and I'm prepared to swear that you've never set foot there in your life.

(They all turn to BLORE.)

BLORE. You gentlemen have got me wrong. I'm an ex - C.I.D. man.

LOMBARD. Oh, a copper!

BLORE. I've got my credentials and I can prove it. I run a detective agency in Plymouth. I was put onto this job.

WARGRAVE. By whom?

BLORE. Why, Mr. Owen. Sent a very nice money order for expenses, and said I was to join the house party, posing as a guest. He also sent a list of all your names and said I was to keep an eye on you all.

WARGRAVE. Any reason given?

BLORE. Said Mrs. Owen had got some valuable jewels. *(Pause.)* Mrs. Owen, my foot! I don't believe there's any such person.

(WARGRAVE looks down at the letters.)

WARGRAVE. Your conclusions are, I think, justified. Ulick Norman Owen, Una Nancy Owen. Each time, that is to say. U.N. Owen. Or, by a slight stretch of fancy, Unknown.

VERA. But it's fantastic! Mad!

WARGRAVE. Oh, yes, I've no doubt in my own mind that we have been invited here by a madman – probably a dangerous homicidal lunatic.

(There is an appalled silence.)

ROGERS. Oh, my gawd!

WARGRAVE. Whoever it is who has enticed us here, that person has taken the trouble to find out a great deal about us. *(Pause.)* A very great deal. And out of his knowledge concerning us, he has made certain definite accusations.

(Everybody speaks at once.)

BLORE. It's all very well to make accusations.

MACKENZIE. A pack of damn lies! Slander!

VERA. It's iniquitous! Wicked!

ROGERS. A lie – a wicked lie – we never did, neither of us –

MARSTON. Don't know what the damned fool was getting at –

(WARGRAVE raises a hand for silence.)

WARGRAVE. I wish to say this. Our unknown friend accuses me of the murder of one Edward Seton. I remember Seton perfectly well. He came up before me for trial in June, 1930. He was charged with the murder of an elderly woman. He was very ably defended and made a good impression on the jury in the witness box. Nevertheless, on the evidence he was certainly guilty. I summed up accordingly and the jury brought in a verdict of guilty. In passing sentence of death, I fully concurred with this verdict. The appeal was lodged on the grounds of misdirection. The appeal was dismissed and the man was duly executed. *(Pause.)* I wish to say

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