

**EMILY.** The world will never improve until we stamp out immodesty.

**VERA.** (*Quietly.*) Quite pathological.

**EMILY.** (*Sharply.*) What did you say?

**VERA.** Nothing.

(**ARMSTRONG** and **LOMBARD** enter from the hall.)

**LOMBARD.** What about the old boy –

**ARMSTRONG.** He looks rather like a tortoise, don't you think so?

**LOMBARD.** All judges look like tortoises. They have that venomous way of darting their heads in and out. Mr. Justice Wargrave is no exception.

**ARMSTRONG.** I hadn't realised he was a judge.

**LOMBARD.** Oh, yes. (*Cheerfully.*) He's probably been responsible for sending more innocent people to their death than anyone in England.

(**WARGRAVE** enters and looks at him. **LOMBARD** turns to **VERA**.)

Hello, you. Do you two know each other? Mr. Armstrong – Miss Claythorne. Armstrong and I have just decided that the old boy –

**VERA.** Yes, I heard you and so did he, I think.

(**WARGRAVE** moves over to **EMILY** who rises as he approaches.)

**EMILY.** Oh, Sir Lawrence.

**WARGRAVE.** Miss Brent, isn't it?

**EMILY.** There's something I want to ask you. Will you come out here?

(*She indicates she wants to talk on the balcony. WARGRAVE nods his assent.*)

**WARGRAVE.** A remarkably fine night!

(**MARSTON** enters from the hall with **BLORE**. They are in conversation.)

**MARSTON.** Absolutely wizard car – a super-charged Sports Varletti Carlotta. You don't see many of them on the road. I can get over a hundred out of her.

(**VERA** *sits.*)

**BLORE.** Did you come from London?

**MARSTON.** Yes, two hundred and eight miles and I did it in a bit over four hours.

(**ARMSTRONG** *turns and looks at him.*)

Too many cars on the road, though, to keep it up. Touched ninety going over Salisbury Plain. Not too bad, eh?

**ARMSTRONG.** I think you passed me on the road.

**MARSTON.** Oh, yes?

**ARMSTRONG.** You nearly drove me into the ditch.

**MARSTON.** (*Unmoved.*) Did I? Sorry.

**ARMSTRONG.** If I'd seen your number, I'd have reported you.

**MARSTON.** But you were footling along in the middle of the road.

**ARMSTRONG.** Footling? Me footling?

(**BLORE** *attempts to relieve the atmosphere.*)

**BLORE.** Oh, well, what about a drink?

**MARSTON.** Good idea.

(*They make to the drinks cabinet.*)

Will you have one, Miss Claythorne?

**VERA.** No, thank you.

(**LOMBARD** *sits beside VERA.*)

**LOMBARD.** Good evening, Mrs. Owen.

**VERA.** Why Mrs. Owen?

**LOMBARD.** You'd make the most attractive wife for any wealthy businessman.

**VERA.** Do you always flirt so outrageously?

**LOMBARD.** Always.

**VERA.** Oh! Well, now we know.

*(She turns away, smiling.)*

**LOMBARD.** Tell me, what's old Miss Brent talking to the Judge about? She tried to buttonhole him upstairs.

**VERA.** I don't know. Funny – she seemed so definite that there wasn't a Mr. Owen.

**LOMBARD.** You don't think that Mrs. Owen – I mean that there isn't – that they aren't –

**VERA.** What, married you mean?

*(ROGERS enters from the dining room. He switches on the lights, draws the curtains and exits to the study. MARSTON moves to VERA.)*

**MARSTON.** Damn shame we don't know each other. I could have given you a lift down.

**VERA.** Yes, that would have been grand.

**MARSTON.** Like to show you what I can do across Salisbury Plain. Tell you what – maybe we can drive back together?

*(WARGRAVE and EMILY enter from the balcony. MACKENZIE enters from the hall and sits.)*

**VERA.** *(Surprised.)* But I –

**MARSTON.** But it seems damn silly. I've got an empty car.

**LOMBARD.** Yes, but she likes the way she's going back and –

*(VERA rises awkwardly and makes to fireplace. MARSTON and LOMBARD scowl at each other.)*

**VERA.** Look! Aren't they sweet? Those ten little china soldiers. Oh, and there's the old nursery rhyme.

**LOMBARD.** What are you talking about? What figures? What nursery rhyme?

*(VERA points at the figures and the rhyme.)*

**VERA.** *(Reading.)* "Ten little soldier boys going out to dine. One choked his little self and then there were nine –"

(**ROGERS** enters from the study. **VERA** continues reading.)

"Nine little soldier boys sat up very late. One overslept himself and then there were eight."

**BLORE.** "Eight little soldier boys travelling in Devon. One got left behind and then there were seven –"

(*Very slowly and clearly a VOICE is heard off.*)

**VOICE.** Ladies and Gentlemen, silence, please!

(*Everybody stops talking and stares round at each other. As each name is mentioned that person reacts by a sudden movement or gesture.*)

You are charged with these indictments: that you did respectively and at diverse times commit the following: Edward Armstrong, that you did cause the death of Louisa Mary Clees. William Henry Blore, that you brought about the death of James Stephen Landor. Emily Caroline Brent, that you were responsible for the death of Beatrice Taylor. Vera Elizabeth Claythorne, that you killed Peter Ogilvie Hamilton.

(**VERA** sits.)

Philip Lombard, that you were guilty of the deaths of twenty-one men, members of an East African tribe. John Gordon MacKenzie, that you sent your wife's lover, Arthur Richmond, to his death.

(**MACKENZIE** sits.)

Anthony James Marston, that you were guilty of the murder of John and Lucy Combes. Thomas Rogers and Ethel Rogers, that you brought about the death of Jennifer Brady. Lawrence John Wargrave, that you were guilty of the murder of Edward Seton. Prisoners at the bar, have you anything to say in your defence?

(*There is a momentary paralysed silence, then a scream is heard outside the dining room door. LOMBARD springs across the room.*)

*Indignant murmurs breaks out as people recover from the initial shock. The dining room door opens to show MRS. ROGERS in a fallen heap. MARSTON springs across to LOMBARD. They pick up MRS. ROGERS and carry her in. ARMSTRONG looks her over.)*

**ARMSTRONG.** It's nothing much. She's fainted, that's all. She'll be round in a minute. Get some brandy.

**BLORE.** Rogers, get some brandy.

*(ROGERS, shaking all over, exits to the dining room.)*

**VERA.** Who was that speaking? It sounded –

*(MACKENZIE pulls at his moustache nervously, his hands shaking.)*

**MACKENZIE.** What's going on here? What kind of practical joke was that? –

*(BLORE wipes his face with a handkerchief. WARGRAVE stands thoughtfully stroking his chin, his eyes peering suspiciously from one to the other.)*

**LOMBARD.** Where the devil did that voice come from?

*(They stare all round. LOMBARD exits into the study.)*

Here we are.

**VOICE.** You are charged with these indictments –

**VERA.** Turn it off! Turn it off! It's horrible!

*(LOMBARD switches it off. MRS. ROGERS groans.)*

**ARMSTRONG.** A disgraceful and heartless practical joke.

**WARGRAVE.** *(Significantly.)* So you think it's a joke, do you?

**ARMSTRONG.** What else could it be?

**WARGRAVE.** At the moment I'm not prepared to give an opinion.

(**ROGERS** enters from the dining room with brandy and a glass on a tray. He puts it down then goes to **MRS. ROGERS**.)

**MARSTON**. Who the devil turned it on, though? And set it going?

**WARGRAVE**. We must enquire into that.

(**WARGRAVE** looks significantly at **ROGERS**. **LOMBARD** enters from the study with gramophone record in his hands. **MRS. ROGERS** begins to move and twist.)

**MRS. ROGERS**. Oh, dear me! Oh, dear me!

(*The others move nearer. **ROGERS** turns to **ARMSTRONG**.*)

**ROGERS**. Allow me, sir. If I speak to her – Ethel – Ethel. It's all right. All right, do you hear? Pull yourself together.

(***MRS. ROGERS** begins to gasp and moan. She tries to pull herself up; her frightened eyes stare round the room.*)

**ARMSTRONG**. You'll be all right now, Mrs. Rogers. Just a nasty turn.

**MRS. ROGERS**. Did I faint, sir?

**ARMSTRONG**. Yes.

**MRS. ROGERS**. It was the voice – the awful voice – like a judgment –

(***ROGERS** shifts anxiously. **MRS. ROGERS** eyelids flutter as if she might collapse again.*)

**ARMSTRONG**. Where's the brandy?

(*They draw back a little. **BLORE** pours out a brandy and gives the glass to **ARMSTRONG**.*)

Drink this, Mrs. Rogers.

(*She sips a little, revives and sits up again.*)

**MRS. ROGERS**. I'm all right now. I just – gave me a turn.

**ROGERS.** (*Quickly.*) Of course it did. Gave me a turn too.  
Wicked lies it was. I'd like to know –

(**ROGERS** stops as **WARGRAVE** deliberately  
clears his throat.)

**WARGRAVE.** Who was it put that record on the gramophone?  
Was it you, Rogers?

**ROGERS.** I was just obeying orders, sir, that's all.

**WARGRAVE.** Whose orders?

**ROGERS.** Mr. Owen's.

**WARGRAVE.** Let me get this quite clear. Mr. Owen's orders  
were – what exactly?

**ROGERS.** I was to put a record on the gramophone in the  
study. I'd find the records in the drawer in there. I was  
to start with that one, sir. I thought it was just to give  
you all some music.

**WARGRAVE.** (*Sceptically.*) A very remarkable story.

**ROGERS.** (*Hysterically.*) It's the truth, sir. Before Heaven,  
it's the truth. I didn't know what it was – not for a  
moment. It had a name on it. I thought it was just a  
piece of music.

(**WARGRAVE** looks toward **LOMBARD**, who  
examines the record.)

**WARGRAVE.** Is there a title?

**LOMBARD.** (*Grinning.*) A title? Yes, sir. It's entitled "Swan  
Song."

(*It amuses him, but the others react  
nervously.*)

**MACKENZIE.** The whole thing is preposterous –  
preposterous! Slinging accusations about like this.  
Something must be done about it. This fellow Owen,  
whoever he is –

**EMILY.** That's just it. Who is he?

**WARGRAVE.** (*Authoritatively.*) That is exactly what we  
must go into very carefully. I should suggest that you  
get your wife to bed, Rogers. Then come back here.

**ROGERS.** Yes, sir.

**ARMSTRONG.** I'll give you a hand.

**VERA.** Will she be all right, Doctor?

**ARMSTRONG.** Yes, quite all right.

*(ARMSTRONG and ROGERS help MRS. ROGERS up and take her out to the hall. MARSTON turns to WARGRAVE.)*

**MARSTON.** Don't know about you, sir, but I feel I need another drink.

**WARGRAVE.** I agree.

**MARSTON.** I'll get them.

**MACKENZIE.** *(Muttering.)* Preposterous – that's what it is – preposterous.

**MARSTON.** Whiskey for you, Sir Lawrence?

**EMILY.** I should like a glass of water, please.

**VERA.** Yes, I'll get it. I'll have a little whiskey too.

*(VERA takes a glass of water to EMILY. They sip their drinks, eyeing each other warily. ARMSTRONG enters from the hall.)*

**ARMSTRONG.** She'll be all right. I've given her a sedative.

**BLORE.** Now, then, Doctor, you'll want a drink after all this.

**ARMSTRONG.** No, thank you. I never touch it.

**BLORE.** Oh, so you said. You have this one, General?

*(BLORE takes a drink to MACKENZIE. MARSTON and LOMBARD refill their glasses. ROGERS enters from the hall. Everyone focuses attention on him. WARGRAVE takes charge.)*

**WARGRAVE.** Now, then, Rogers, we must get to the bottom of this. Tell us what you know about Mr. Owen.

**ROGERS.** He owns this place, sir.

**WARGRAVE.** I am aware of that fact. What I want you to tell me is what you yourself know about the man.

**ROGERS.** I can't say, sir. You see, I've never seen him.

*(There is a stir of interest.)*

**MACKENZIE.** What d'you mean, you've never seen him?

**ROGERS.** We've only been here just under a week, sir, my wife and I. We were engaged by letter through a registry office. The Regina, in Plymouth.

**BLORE.** That's a high-class firm. We can check on that.

**WARGRAVE.** Have you got the letter?

**ROGERS.** The letter engaging us? Yes, sir.

*(ROGERS hunts for it. After a moment he hands it to WARGRAVE who looks over it.)*

**WARGRAVE.** Go on with your story.

**ROGERS.** We arrived here like the letter said, on the 4th. Everything was in order, plenty of food in stock and everything very nice. Just needed dusting and that.

**WARGRAVE.** What next?

**ROGERS.** Nothing, sir. That is, we got orders to prepare the rooms for a house party – eight. Then yesterday, by the morning post, I received another letter saying Mr. and Mrs. Owen might be detained and, if so, we was to do the best we could, and it gave the instructions about dinner and putting on the gramophone record. Here it is, sir.

*(ROGERS hands over letter.)*

**WARGRAVE.** Hmm. Headed Ritz Hotel and typewritten.

*(BLORE takes the letter.)*

**BLORE.** Coronation machine Number Five. Quite new. No defects. Ensign paper – most common make. We shan't get much out of this. We might try it for fingerprints, but it's been handled too much.

**LOMBARD.** Quite the little detective.

*(WARGRAVE turns and looks at him sharply. BLORE's manner has completely changed, so has his voice. MARSTON takes the letter.)*

**MARSTON.** Got some fancy Christian names, hasn't he? Ulick Norman Owen. Quite a mouthful.