

CARTER. (*repressively*) The tea, Greta.

GRETA. Asked to communicate with the police as he might be able to give them useful information.

CARTER. (*raising his voice*) Tea!

GRETA. (*crossing to the door and turning*) It was only last...

(CARTER glowers at GRETA.)

The tea, Mr. Carter.

(GRETA, abashed but unsatisfied, exits.)

CARTER. (*continues his arrangement of the papers, muttering to himself*) These girls. Sensational – inaccurate! Don't know what the Temple's coming to.

(*He examines a typewritten document, makes an angry sound, picks up a pen and makes a correction.*)

GRETA. (*Enters. Announcing:*) Mr. Mayhew.

(MR. MAYHEW and LEONARD VOLE enter. MAYHEW is a typical middle-aged solicitor, shrewd and rather dry and precise in manner. LEONARD is a likeable, friendly young man, about twenty-seven. He is looking faintly worried. MAYHEW carries a briefcase.)

MAYHEW. (*giving his hat to GRETA*) Sit down, Mr. Vole. (*he crosses and stands above the desk*) Good afternoon, Carter. (*He puts his briefcase on the desk.*)

(GRETA takes LEONARD's hat and hangs both on the pegs above the door. She then exits, staring at LEONARD over her shoulder.)

CARTER. Good afternoon, Mr. Mayhew. Sir Wilfrid shouldn't be long, sir. Though you never can tell with Mr. Justice Banter. I'll go straight over to the Robing Room and tell him that you're here – (*He hesitates.*) with...

(*He crosses below the desk to right of LEONARD.*)

MAYHEW. With Mr. Leonard Vole. Thank you, Carter. I'm afraid our appointment was at rather short notice. But in this case time is – er – rather urgent.

(CARTER crosses to the door.)

How's the lumbago?

CARTER. (*turning*) I only feel it when the wind is in the East. Thank you for remembering, Mr. Mayhew.

(CARTER exits hurriedly.)

(MAYHEW sits left of the desk. LEONARD prowls uneasily.)

MAYHEW. Sit down, Mr. Vole.

LEONARD. Thanks – I'd rather walk about. I – this sort of thing makes you feel a bit jumpy. (*he crosses down left*)

MAYHEW. Yes, yes, very probably...

GRETA. (*Enters. She speaks to MAYHEW, but stares with fascinated interest at LEONARD.*) Would you care for a cup of tea, Mr. Mayhew? I've just made it.

LEONARD. (*appreciatively*) Thanks. I don't mind if –

MAYHEW. (*interrupting; decisively*) No, thank you.

(GRETA turns to exit.)

LEONARD. (*to GRETA*) Sorry. (*He smiles at her.*)

(GRETA smiles at LEONARD and exits. There is a pause.)

(*He crosses up right abruptly and with a rather likeable air of bewilderment.*)

What I mean is, I can't believe it's me this is happening to. I keep thinking – perhaps it's all a dream and I'll wake up presently.

MAYHEW. Yes, I suppose one might feel like that.

LEONARD. (*moving to right of the desk*) What I mean is – well, it seems so silly.

MAYHEW. (*sharply*) Silly, Mr. Vole?

LEONARD. Well, yes. I mean I've always been a friendly sort of chap – get on with people and all that. I mean, I'm not the sort of fellow that does – well, anything violent. (*He pauses.*) But I suppose it will be – all right, won't it? I mean you don't get convicted for things you haven't done in this country, do you?

MAYHEW. Our English judicial system is, in my opinion, the finest in the world.

LEONARD. (*Is not much comforted. Crossing above the desk to left.*) Of course there was that case of – what was his name – Adolf Beck. I read about it only the other day. After he'd been in prison for years, they found out it was another chap called Smith. They gave him a free pardon then. That's a thing that seems odd to me – giving you a "pardon" for something you haven't done.

MAYHEW. It is the necessary legal term.

LEONARD. (*bringing the chair from left of the fireplace and setting it center*) Well, it doesn't seem right to me.

MAYHEW. The important thing was that Beck was set at liberty.

LEONARD. Yes, it was all right for him. But if it had been murder now – (*He sits astride the chair center.*) if it had been murder it would have been too late. He would have been hanged.

MAYHEW. (*dry but kindly*) Now, Mr. Vole, there is really no need to take a – er – morbid point of view.

LEONARD. (*rather pathetically*) I'm sorry, sir. But you see, in a way, I'm rather getting the wind up.

MAYHEW. Well, try and keep calm. Sir Wilfrid Robarts will be here presently and I want you to tell your story to him exactly as you told it to me.

LEONARD. Yes, sir.

MAYHEW. But meantime perhaps we might fill out a little more of the detail – er – background. You are at present, I understand, out of a job?

LEONARD. (*embarrassed*) Yes, but I've got a few pounds put by. It's not much, but if you can see your way...

MAYHEW, (*upset*) Oh, I'm not thinking of – er – legal fees. It's just the – er – pictures I'm trying to get clear. Your surroundings and – er – circumstance! How long have you been unemployed?

LEONARD. (*answers everything readily, with an engaging friendliness*) About a couple of months.

MAYHEW. What were you doing before that?

LEONARD. I was in a motor servicing firm – kind of mechanic, that's what I was.

MAYHEW. How long had you worked there?

LEONARD. Oh, about three months.

MAYHEW. (*sharply*) Were you discharged?

LEONARD. No, I quit. Had words with the Foreman. Proper old b – (*He breaks off.*) That is, he was a mean sort of chap, always picking on you.

MAYHEW. Hm! And before that?

LEONARD. I worked in a petrol station, but things got a bit awkward and I left.

MAYHEW. Awkward? In what way?

LEONARD. (*embarrassed*) Well – the boss's daughter – she was only a kid, but she took a – well, a sort of fancy to me – and there was nothing there shouldn't have been between us, but the old man got a bit fed up and said I'd better go. He was quite nice about it and gave me a good chit. (*He rises and suddenly grins.*) Before that, I was selling egg beaters on commission. (*He replaces the chair left of the fireplace.*)

MAYHEW. Indeed.

LEONARD. (*crossing and standing above the desk, boyishly*) And a rotten job they were, too. I could have invented a better egg heater myself. (*catching MAYHEW's mood*) You're thinking I'm a bit of a drifter, sir. It's true in a way – but I'm not really like that. Doing my army service unsettled me a bit – that and being abroad. I was in Germany. It was fine there. That's where I met my wife. She's an actress. Since I've come back to this