

ROMAINE. Leonard can be very charming.

SIR WILFRID. Yes, I'm sure he can. He felt, no doubt, it was a kindly action on his part to go and cheer up the old lady.

ROMAINE. I daresay.

SIR WILFRID. You yourself did not object at all to your husband's friendship with this old lady?

ROMAINE. I do not think I objected, no.

SIR WILFRID. You have, of course, perfect trust in your husband, Mrs. Vole. Knowing him as well as you do...

ROMAINE. Yes, I know Leonard very well.

SIR WILFRID. I can't tell you how much I admire your calm and your courage, Mrs. Vole. Knowing as I do how devoted you are to him...

ROMAINE. So you know how devoted I am to him?

SIR WILFRID. Of course.

ROMAINE. But excuse me, I am a foreigner. I do not always know your English terms. But is there not a saying about knowing something of your own knowledge? You do not know that I am devoted to Leonard, of your own knowledge, do you, Sir Wilfrid? *(She smiles.)*

SIR WILFRID. *(slightly disconcerted)* No, no, that is of course true. But your husband told me.

ROMAINE. Leonard told you how devoted I was to him?

SIR WILFRID. Indeed, he spoke of your devotion in the most moving terms.

ROMAINE. Men, I often think, are very stupid.

SIR WILFRID. I beg your pardon?

ROMAINE. It does not matter. Please go on.

SIR WILFRID. *(rising and crossing above the desk to center)* This Miss French was a woman of some considerable wealth. She had no near relations. Like many eccentric elderly ladies she was fond of making wills. She had made several wills in her lifetime. Shortly after meeting your husband she made a fresh will. After some small

bequests she left the whole of her fortune to your husband.

ROMAINE. Yes.

SIR WILFRID. You know that?

ROMAINE. I read it in the paper this evening.

SIR WILFRID. Quite, quite. Before reading it in the paper, you had no idea of the fact? Your husband had no idea of it?

ROMAINE. *(after a pause)* Is that what he told you?

SIR WILFRID. Yes. You don't suggest anything different?

ROMAINE. No. Oh, no. I do not suggest anything.

SIR WILFRID. *(crossing above the desk to right of it and sitting)* There seems to be no doubt that Miss French looked upon your husband rather in the light of a son, or perhaps a very favourite nephew.

ROMAINE. *(with distinct irony)* You think Miss French looked upon Leonard as a son?

SIR WILFRID. *(flustered)* Yes, I think so. Definitely I think so. I think that could be regarded as quite natural, quite normal under the circumstances.

ROMAINE. What hypocrites you are in this country.

*(MAYHEW sits on the chair left of the fireplace.)*

SIR WILFRID. My dear Mrs. Vole!

ROMAINE. I shock you? I am so sorry.

SIR WILFRID. Of course, of course. You have a continental way of looking at these things. But I assure you, dear Mrs. Vole, that is *not* the line to take. It would be most unwise to suggest in any way that Miss French had — er — any — er — feelings for Leonard Vole other than those of a — of a mother or — shall we say — an aunt.

ROMAINE. Oh, by all means let us say an aunt, if you think it best.

SIR WILFRID. One has to think of the effect on the jury of all these things, Mrs. Vole.

ROMAINE. Yes. I also wish to do that. I have been thinking of that a good deal.

SIR WILFRID. Quite so. We must work together. Now we come to the evening of October fourteenth. That is just over a week ago. You remember that evening?

ROMAINE. I remember it very well.

SIR WILFRID. Leonard Vole called on Miss French that evening. The housekeeper, Janet MacKenzie, was out. Mr. Vole played a game of Double Demon with Miss French and finally took leave of her about nine o'clock. He returned home on foot, he tells me, arriving at approximately twenty-five minutes past nine. *(He looks interrogatively at her.)*

*(ROMAINE rises and moves to the fireplace. SIR WILFRID and MAYHEW rise.)*

ROMAINE. *(without expression, thoughtfully)* Twenty-five past nine.

SIR WILFRID. At half past nine the housekeeper returned to the house to get something she had forgotten. Passing the sitting-room door she heard Miss French's voice in conversation with a man. She assumed that the man with Miss French was Leonard Vole, and Inspector Hearne says that it is this statement of hers that has led to your husband's arrest. Mr. Vole, however, tells me that he has an absolute alibi for that time, since he was at home with you at nine-thirty.

*(There is a pause. ROMAINE does not speak although SIR WILFRID looks at her.)*

That is so, is it not? He was with you at nine-thirty?

*(SIR WILFRID and MAYHEW look at ROMAINE.)*

ROMAINE. That is what Leonard says? That he was home with me at nine-thirty?

SIR WILFRID. *(sharply)* Isn't it true?

*(There is a long silence.)*

ROMAINE. *(moving to the chair left of the desk; presently)* But of course. *(She sits.)*

SIR WILFRID. *(sighs with relief and resumes his seat right of the desk)* Possibly the police have already questioned you on that point?

ROMAINE. Oh yes, they came to see me yesterday evening.

SIR WILFRID. And you said... ?

ROMAINE. *(as though repeating something that she has learned by rote)* I said Leonard came in at nine twenty-five that night and did not go out again.

MAYHEW. *(a little uneasily)* You said... ? Oh! *(he sits on the chair left of the fireplace)*

ROMAINE. That was right, was it not?

SIR WILFRID. What do you mean by that, Mrs. Vole?

ROMAINE. *(sweetly)* That is what Leonard wants me to say, is it not?

SIR WILFRID. It's the truth. You said so just now.

ROMAINE. I have to understand – to be sure. If I say yes, it is so, Leonard was with me in the flat at nine-thirty – will they acquit him?

*(SIR WILFRID and MAYHEW are puzzled by ROMAINE's manner.)*

Will they let him go?

MAYHEW. *(rising and crossing to left of her)* If you are both speaking the truth then they will – er – have to acquit him.

ROMAINE. But when I said – that – to the police, I do not think they believed me. *(She is not distressed; instead she seems faintly satisfied.)*

SIR WILFRID. What makes you think they did not believe you?

ROMAINE. *(with sudden malice)* Perhaps I did not say it very well?

may be wrong.

MAYHEW. I wonder.

SIR WILFRID. But if so who was the man Janet MacKenzie heard talking to Miss French at nine-thirty? Seems to me there are two answers to that.

MAYHEW. The answers being... ?

SIR WILFRID. First that she made the whole thing up, when she saw that the police weren't satisfied about its being a burglary.

MAYHEW. (*shocked*) Surely she wouldn't do a thing like that?

SIR WILFRID. (*crossing to center*) Well, what did she hear, then? Don't tell me it was a burglar chatting amicably with Miss French (*He takes his handkerchief from his pocket.*) before he coshed her on the head, you old clown.

(*He coshes MAYHEW with the handkerchief.*)

MAYHEW. That certainly seems unlikely.

SIR WILFRID. I don't think that that rather grim old woman would stick at making up a thing like that. I don't think she'd stick at anything, you know. No – (*significantly*) I don't think – she'd stick – at – anything.

MAYHEW. (*horrified*) Good Lord! Do you mean... ?

CARTER. (*enters and closes the door behind him*) Excuse me, Sir Wilfrid. A young woman is asking to see you. She says it has to do with the case of Leonard Vole.

SIR WILFRID. (*unimpressed*) Mental?

CARTER. Oh, no, Sir Wilfrid. I can always recognize that type.

SIR WILFRID. (*moving above the desk and picking up the teacups*) What sort of a young woman? (*he crosses to center*)

CARTER. (*taking the cups from SIR WILFRID*) Rather a common young woman, sir, with a free way of talking.

SIR WILFRID. And what does she want?

CARTER. (*quoting somewhat distastefully*) She says she "knows something that might do the prisoner a bit of good."

SIR WILFRID. (*with a sigh*) Highly unlikely. Bring her in.

(*CARTER exits, taking the cups with him.*)

What do you think, John?

MAYHEW. Oh well, we can't afford to leave any stone unturned.

(*CARTER enters and USHERS in a WOMAN. She appears to be aged almost thirty-five and is flamboyantly but cheaply dressed. Blonde hair falls over one side of her face. She is violently and crudely made up. She carries a shabby handbag. MAYHEW rises.*)

CARTER. The young lady.

(*CARTER exits.*)

WOMAN. (*looking sharply from SIR WILFRID to MAYHEW*) Here, what's this? Two o' yer? I'm not talking to two of yer. (*She turns to go.*)

SIR WILFRID. This is Mr. Mayhew. He is Leonard Vole's solicitor. I am Sir Wilfrid Robarts, Counsel for the Defence.

WOMAN. (*peering at SIR WILFRID*) So you are, dear. Didn't recognize you without your wig. Lovely you all look in them wigs.

(*MAYHEW gives SIR WILFRID a nudge, then stands above the desk.*)

Havin' a bit of a confab, are you? Well, maybe I can help you if you make it worth my while.

SIR WILFRID. You know, Miss – er...

WOMAN. (*crossing and sitting left of the desk*) No need for names. If I did give you a name, it mightn't be the right one, might it?

SIR WILFRID. (*standing center*) As you please. You realize you are in duty-bound to come forward to give any evidence that may be in your possession.

WOMAN. Aw, come off it! I didn't say I knew anything, did I? I've got something. That's more to the point.

MAYHEW. What is it you have got, madam?

WOMAN. Aye – aye! I was in court today. I watched that – that trollop give her evidence. So high and mighty about it too. She's a wicked one. A Jezebel, that's what she is.

SIR WILFRID. Quite so. But as to this special information you have...

WOMAN. (*cunningly*) Ah, but what's in it for me? It's valuable, what I've got. A hundred quid, that's what I want.

MAYHEW. I'm afraid we could not countenance anything of that character, but perhaps if you tell us a little more about what you have to offer...

WOMAN. You don't buy unless you get a butcher's, is that it?

SIR WILFRID. A butcher's?

WOMAN. A butcher's 'ook – look.

SIR WILFRID. Oh, yes – yes.

WOMAN. I've got the goods on her all right. (*She opens her handbag.*) It's letters, that's what it is. Letters.

SIR WILFRID. Letters written by Romaine Vole to the prisoner?

WOMAN. (*laughing coarsely*) To the prisoner? Don't make me laugh. Poor ruddy prisoner, he's been took in by her all right. (*she winks*) I've got something to *sell*, dear, and don't you forget it.

MAYHEW. (*smoothly*) If you will let us see these letters, we shall be able to advise you as to how pertinent they are.

WOMAN. Putting it in your own language, aren't you? Well, as I say, I don't expect you to buy without seeing. But fair's fair. If those letters will do the trick, if they'll get the boy off, and put that foreign bitch where she belongs, well, it's a hundred quid for me. Right?

MAYHEW. (*taking his wallet from his pocket and extracting ten*

*pounds*) If these letters contain information that is useful to the defence – to help your expenses in coming here – I am prepared to offer you ten pounds.

WOMAN. (*almost screaming*) Ten bloody quid for letters like these. Think again.

SIR WILFRID. (*crossing to MAYHEW and taking the wallet from him*) If you have a letter there that will help to prove my client's innocence, twenty pounds would I think not be an unreasonable sum for your expenses.

(*he crosses to right of the desk, takes ten pounds from the wallet, returns the empty wallet to MAYHEW, and takes the first ten pounds from him.*)

WOMAN. Fifty quid and it's a bargain. That's if you're satisfied with the letters.

SIR WILFRID. Twenty pounds. (*he puts the notes on the desk*)

(*The WOMAN watches him and wets her lips. It is too much for her.*)

WOMAN. All right, blast you. 'Ere, take 'em. Quite a packet of 'em. (*she takes the letters from her handbag*) The top one's the one will do the trick. (*she puts the letters on the desk, then goes to pick up the money*)

(*SIR WILFRID is too quick for the WOMAN and picks up the money. The WOMAN quickly retrieves the letters.*)

SIR WILFRID. Just a moment. I suppose this is her handwriting?

WOMAN. It's her handwriting all right. She wrote 'em. It's all fair and square.

SIR WILFRID. We have only your word for that.

MAYHEW. Just a moment. I have a letter from Mrs. Vole – not here, but at my office.

SIR WILFRID. Well, madam, it looks as though we'll have to trust you – (*he hands her the notes*) for the moment. (*he takes the letters from her, smooths them out and begins to read*)

(*The WOMAN slowly counts the notes, carefully watching*