

AGATHA CHRISTIE

**AND THEN THERE
WERE NONE**



Чтение в оригинале (Каро)

Агата Кристи

**And Then There Were None / И
никого не стало. Книга для
чтения на английском языке**

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Роман «И никого не стало» всемирно известной английской писательницы Агаты Кристи (1890–1976) – одно из самых ярких произведений королевы детектива. Черда загадочных убийств держит читателя в напряжении до самого финала, который поражает даже искушенного читателя своей непредсказуемостью. В книге представлен неадаптированный текст на языке оригинала.

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И никого не стало / And Then There Were None Агата Кристи / Agatha Christie

To

*CARLO and MARY This is their book, Dedicated to them with much
affection.*

Комментарии и словарь Л. В. Петровой

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Author's Note

I had written this book because it was so difficult to do that the idea had fascinated me. Ten people had to die without it becoming ridiculous or the murderer being obvious. I wrote the book after a tremendous amount of planning, and I was pleased with what I had made of it. It was clear, straightforward, baffling, and yet had a perfectly reasonable explanation; in fact it had to have an epilogue in order to explain it. It was well received and reviewed, but the person who was really pleased with it was myself, for I knew better than any critic how difficult it had been.

Agatha Christie

Chapter 1

I

In the corner of a first-class smoking carriage, Mr Justice Wargrave, lately retired from the bench, puffed at a cigar and ran an interested eye through the political news in *The Times*.

He laid the paper down and glanced out of the window. They were running now through Somerset. He glanced at his watch—another two hours to go.

He went over in his mind all that had appeared in the papers about Soldier Island. There had been its original purchase by an American millionaire who was crazy about yachting—and an account of the luxurious modern house he had built on this little island off the Devon coast. The unfortunate fact that the new third wife of the American millionaire was a bad sailor had led to the subsequent putting up of the house and island for sale. Various glowing advertisements of it had appeared in the papers. Then came the first bald statement that it had been bought—by a Mr Owen. After that the rumours of the gossip writers had started. Soldier Island had really been bought by Miss Gabrielle Turl, the Hollywood film star! She wanted to spend some months there free from all publicity! *Busy Bee* had hinted delicately that it was to be an abode for Royalty?! *Mr Merryweather* had had it whispered to him that it had been bought for a honeymoon—Young Lord L— had surrendered to Cupid at last! *Jonas* knew for a *fact* that it had been purchased by the Admiralty with a view to carrying out some very hush-hush experiments!

Definitely, Soldier Island was news!

From his pocket Mr Justice Wargrave drew out a letter. The handwriting was practically illegible but words here and there stood out with unexpected clarity. *Dearest Lawrence... such years since I heard anything of you... must come to Soldier Island... the most enchanting place... so much to talk over... old days... communion with nature... bask in sunshine... 12.40 from Paddington... meet you at Oakbridge...* and his correspondent signed herself with a flourish *his ever Constance Culmington*.

Mr Justice Wargrave cast back in his mind to remember when exactly he had last seen Lady Constance Culmington. It must be seven—no, eight years ago. She had then been going to Italy to bask in the sun and be at one with Nature and the *contadini*¹. Later, he had heard, she had proceeded to Syria where she proposed to bask in a yet stronger sun and live at one with Nature and the *bedouin*.

Constance Culmington, he reflected to himself, was exactly the sort of woman who *would* buy an island and surround herself with mystery! Nodding his head in gentle approval of his logic, Mr Justice Wargrave allowed his head to nod...

He slept...

¹ *contadini* – (итал.) крестьяне

II

Vera Claythorne, in a third-class carriage with five other travellers in it, leaned her head back and shut her eyes. How hot it was travelling by train today! It would be nice to get to the sea! Really a great piece of luck getting this job. When you wanted a holiday post it nearly always meant looking after a swarm of children—secretarial holiday posts were much more difficult to get. Even the agency hadn't held out much hope.

And then the letter had come.

I have received your name from the Skilled Women's Agency together with their recommendation. I understand they know 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 12.40 from Paddington and you will be met at Oakbridge station.

I enclose five £1 notes for expenses.

Yours truly,

Una Nancy Owen.'

And at the top was the stamped address, *Soldier Island, Sticklehaven, Devon...*

Soldier Island! Why, there had been nothing else in the papers lately! All sorts of hints and interesting rumours. Though probably they were mostly untrue. But the house had certainly been built by a millionaire and was said to be absolutely the last word in luxury.

Vera Claythorne, tired by a recent strenuous term at school, thought to herself, 'Being a games mistress in a third-class school isn't much of a catch... If only I could get a job at some *decent* school.'

And then, with a cold feeling round her heart, she thought: 'But I'm lucky to have even this. After all, people don't like a Coroner's Inquest², even if the Coroner *did* acquit me of all blame!'

He had even complimented her on her presence of mind and courage, she remembered. For an inquest it couldn't have gone better. And Mrs Hamilton had been kindness itself to her—only Hugo—*but she wouldn't think of Hugo!*

Suddenly, in spite of the heat in the carriage she shivered and wished she wasn't going to the sea. A picture rose clearly before her mind. *Cyril's head, bobbing up and down, swimming to the rock...* Up and down—up and down... And herself, swimming in easy practised strokes after him—cleaving her way through the water but knowing, only too surely, that she wouldn't be in time...

The sea—its deep warm blue—mornings spent lying out on the sands—Hugo—Hugo who had said he loved her...

She must *not* think of Hugo...

She opened her eyes and frowned across at the man opposite her. A tall man with a brown face, light eyes set rather close together and an arrogant, almost cruel mouth.

She thought to herself:

I bet he's been to some interesting parts of the world and seen some interesting things...

² *Coroner's Inquest* – (юр.) расследование, выявление причин смерти. На основании результатов такого расследования может быть отдано распоряжение об аресте подозреваемых.

III

Philip Lombard, summing up the girl opposite in a mere flash of his quick moving eyes thought to himself:

‘Quite attractive—a bit schoolmistressy perhaps.’

A cool customer, he should imagine—and one who could hold her own—in love or war. He’d rather like to take her on...

He frowned. No, cut out all that kind of stuff. This was business. He’d got to keep his mind on the job.

What exactly was up, he wondered? That little Jew had been damned mysterious.

‘Take it or leave it³, Captain Lombard.’

He had said thoughtfully:

‘A hundred guineas, eh?’

He had said it in a casual way as though a hundred guineas was nothing to him. A *hundred guineas* when he was literally down to his last square meal⁴! He had fancied, though, that the little Jew had not been deceived—that was the damnable part about Jews, you couldn’t deceive them about money—they *knew*!

He said in the same casual tone:

‘And you can’t give me any further information?’

Mr Isaac Morris had shaken his little bald head very positively.

‘No, Captain Lombard, the matter rests there⁵. It is understood by my client that your reputation is that of a good man in a tight place⁶. I am empowered to hand you one hundred guineas in return for which you will travel to Sticklehaven, Devon. The nearest station is Oakbridge, you will be met there and motored to Sticklehaven where a motor launch⁷ will convey you to Soldier Island. There you will hold yourself at the disposal of my client.’

Lombard had said abruptly:

‘For how long?’

‘Not longer than a week at most.’

Fingering his small moustache, Captain Lombard said:

‘You understand I can’t undertake anything—illegal?’

He had darted a very sharp glance at the other as he had spoken. There had been a very faint smile on the thick Semitic lips of Mr Morris as he answered gravely:

‘If anything illegal is proposed, you will, of course, be at perfect liberty to withdraw.’

Damn the smooth little brute, he had smiled! It was as though he knew very well that in Lombard’s past actions legality had not always been a *sine qua non*⁸...

Lombard’s own lips parted in a grin.

By Jove, he’d sailed pretty near the wind once or twice⁹! But he’d always got away with it! There wasn’t much he drew the line at really¹⁰...

³ *Take it or leave it.* – (informal) Как хотите / Дело Ваше.

⁴ *square meal* – плотный, обильный прием пищи

⁵ *the matter rests there* – это все, что я могу сказать

⁶ *your reputation is that of a good man in a tight place* – у вас репутация человека, хорошо зарекомендовавшего себя в трудных ситуациях

⁷ *a motor launch* – моторная лодка

⁸ *sine qua non* – (лат.; книж.) обязательное условие; то, без чего нельзя обойтись

⁹ *he’d sailed pretty near the wind once or twice* – он был почти на грани преступления пару раз

¹⁰ *he drew the line at really* – он старался не переступать черту

No, there wasn't much he'd draw the line at. He fancied that he was going to enjoy himself at Soldier Island...

IV

In a non-smoking carriage Miss Emily Brent sat very upright as was her custom. She was sixty-five and she did not approve of lounging. Her father, a Colonel of the old school, had been particular about deportment.

The present generation was shamelessly lax—in their carriage, *and in every other way*...

Enveloped in an aura of righteousness and unyielding principles, Miss Brent sat in her crowded third-class carriage and triumphed over its discomfort and its heat. Everyone made such a fuss over things nowadays! They wanted injections before they had teeth pulled—they took drugs if they couldn't sleep—they wanted easy chairs and cushions and the girls allowed their figures to slop about anyhow and lay about half naked on the beaches in summer.

Miss Brent's lips set closely. She would like to make an example of certain people.

She remembered last year's summer holiday. This year, however, it would be quite different. Soldier Island...

Mentally she re-read the letter which she had already read so many times.

'Dear Miss Brent,

I do hope you remember me? We were together at Belhaven 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 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—quite free—as my guest. Would early in August suit you? Perhaps the 8th.

Yours sincerely,

U.N.O—

What was the name? The signature was rather difficult to read. Emily Brent thought impatiently: 'So many people write their signatures quite illegibly.'

She let her mind run back over the people at Belhaven. She had been there two summers running. There had been that nice middle-aged woman—Miss—Miss—now what *was* her name?—her father had been a Canon. And there had been a Mrs Olton—Ormen—No, surely it was *Oliver*! Yes,—*Oliver*.

Soldier Island! There had been things in the paper about Soldier Island—something about a film star—or was it an American millionaire?

Of course often those places went very cheap—*islands* didn't suit everybody. They thought the idea was romantic but when they came to live there they realised the disadvantages and were only too glad to sell.

Emily Brent thought to herself: *'I shall be getting a free holiday at any rate.'*

With her income so much reduced and so many dividends not being paid, that was indeed something to take into consideration. If only she could remember a little more about Mrs—or was it Miss—*Oliver*?

V

General Macarthur looked out of the carriage window. The train was just coming into Exeter, where he had to change. Damnably, these slow branch line trains! This place, Soldier Island, was really no distance at all as the crow flies¹¹.

He hadn't got it clear who this fellow Owen was. A friend of Spoof Leggard's, apparently—and of Johnnie Dyer's.

'—One or two of your old cronies are coming—would like to have a talk over old times.'

Well, he'd enjoy a chat about old times. He'd had a fancy lately that fellows were rather fighting shy of him. All owing to that damned rumour! By God, it was pretty hard—nearly thirty years ago now! Armitage had talked, he supposed. Damned young pup! What did *he* know about it? Oh, well, no good brooding about these things! One fancied things sometimes—fancied a fellow was looking at you queerly.

This Soldier Island, now, he'd be interested to see it. A lot of gossip flying about. Looked as though there might be something in the rumour that the Admiralty or the War Office or the Air Force had got hold of it...

Young Elmer Robson, the American millionaire, had actually built the place. Spent thousands on it, so it was said. Every mortal luxury...

Exeter! And an hour to wait! And he didn't want to wait. He wanted to get on...

¹¹ *as the crow flies* – по прямой линии, напрямик

VI

Dr Armstrong was driving his Morris across Salisbury Plain. He was very tired... Success had its penalties. There had been a time when he had sat in his consulting room in Harley Street, correctly apparelled, surrounded with the most up to date appliances and the most luxurious furnishings and waited—waited through the empty days for his venture to succeed or fail...

Well, it had succeeded! He'd been lucky! Lucky *and* skilful of course. He was a good man at his job—but that wasn't enough for success. You had to have luck as well. And he'd had it! An accurate diagnosis, a couple of grateful women patients—women with money and position—and word had got about. 'You ought to try Armstrong—*quite* a young man—but *so* clever—Pam had been to all sorts of people for *years* and he put his finger on the trouble at once!' The ball had started rolling.

And now Dr Armstrong had definitely arrived. His days were full. He had little leisure. And so, on this August morning, he was glad that he was leaving London and going to be for some days on an island off the Devon coast. Not that it was exactly a holiday. The letter he had received had been rather vague in its terms, but there was nothing vague about the accompanying cheque. A whacking fee¹². These Owens must be rolling in money. Some little difficulty, it seemed, a husband who was worried about his wife's health and wanted a report on it without her being alarmed. She wouldn't hear of seeing a doctor. Her nerves—Nerves! The doctor's eyebrows went up. These women and their nerves! Well, it was good for business after all. Half the women who consulted him had nothing the matter with them but boredom, but they wouldn't thank you for telling them so! And one could usually find something.

'A slightly uncommon condition of the (some long word) nothing at all serious—but it needs just putting right. A simple treatment.'

Well, medicine was mostly faith-healing when it came to it. And he had a good manner—he could inspire hope and belief.

Lucky that he'd managed to pull himself together in time after that business ten—no, fifteen years ago. It had been a near thing, that!¹³ He'd been going to pieces. The shock had pulled him together. He'd cut out drink altogether. By Jove, it had been a near thing, though...

With a devastating ear-splitting blast on the horn an enormous Super-Sports Dalmain car rushed past him at eighty miles an hour. Dr Armstrong nearly went into the hedge. One of these young fools who tore round the country. He hated them. That had been a near shave, too.¹⁴ Damned young fool!

¹² *A whacking fee.* – (разг.) Приличное (большое) вознаграждение.

¹³ *It had been a near thing, that!* – Это была опасная ситуация!

¹⁴ *That had been a near shave, too.* – Это тоже была опасная ситуация.

VII

Tony Marston, roaring down into Mere, thought to himself:

‘The amount of cars crawling about the roads is frightful. Always something blocking your way. *And* they will drive in the middle of the road! Pretty hopeless driving in England, anyway... Not like France where you really *could* let out¹⁵...’

Should he stop here for a drink, or push on? Heaps of time! Only another hundred miles and a bit to go. He’d have a gin and ginger beer. Fizzing hot day!

This island place ought to be rather good fun—if the weather lasted. Who *were* these Owens, he wondered? Rich and stinking, probably. Badger was rather good at nosing people like that out. Of course, he *had* to, poor old chap, with no money of his own...

Hope they’d do one well in drinks. Never knew with these fellows who’d made their money and weren’t born to it. Pity that story about Gabrielle Turl having bought Soldier Island wasn’t true. He’d like to have been in with that film star crowd.

Oh, well, he supposed there’d be a few girls there...

Coming out of the hotel, he stretched himself, yawned, looked up at the blue sky and climbed into the Dalmain.

Several young women looked at him admiringly—his six feet of well-proportioned body, his crisp hair, tanned face, and intensely blue eyes.

He let in the clutch with a roar and leapt up the narrow street. Old men and errand boys jumped for safety. The latter looked after the car admiringly.

Anthony Marston proceeded on his triumphal progress.

¹⁵ *let out* – дать себе волю

VIII

Mr Blore was in the slow train from Plymouth. There was only one other person in his carriage, an elderly seafaring gentleman with a bleary eye. At the present moment he had dropped off to sleep.

Mr Blore was writing carefully in a little notebook.

'That's the lot,' he muttered to himself. 'Emily Brent, Vera Claythorne, Dr Armstrong, Anthony Marston, old Justice Wargrave, Philip Lombard, General Macarthur, CMG, DSO, Manservant and wife: Mr and Mrs Rogers.'

He closed the notebook and put it back in his pocket. He glanced over at the corner and the slumbering man.

'Had one over the eight,' diagnosed Mr Blore accurately.

He went over things carefully and conscientiously in his mind.

'Job ought to be easy enough,' he ruminated. 'Don't see how I can slip up on it. Hope I look all right.'

He stood up and scrutinised himself anxiously in the glass. The face reflected there was of a slightly military cast with a moustache. There was very little expression in it. The eyes were grey and set rather close together.

'Might be a Major,' said Mr Blore. 'No, I forgot. There's that old military gent. He'd spot me at once.'

'South Africa,' said Mr Blore, 'that's my line! None of these people have anything to do with South Africa, and I've just been reading that travel folder so I can talk about it all right.'

Fortunately there were all sorts and types of colonials. As a man of means from South Africa, Mr Blore felt that he could enter into any society unchallenged.

Soldier Island. He remembered Soldier Island as a boy... Smelly sort of rock covered with gulls—stood about a mile from the coast. It had got its name from its resemblance to a man's head.

Funny idea to go and build a house on it! Awful in bad weather! But millionaires were full of whims!

The old man in the corner woke up and said:

'You can't never tell at sea—never!'

Mr Blore said soothingly, 'That's right. You can't.'

The old man hiccupped twice and said plaintively:

'There's a squall coming.'

Mr Blore said:

'No, no, mate, it's a lovely day.'

The old man said angrily:

'There's a squall ahead. I can *smell* it.'

'Maybe you're right,' said Mr Blore pacifically.

The train stopped at a station and the old fellow rose unsteadily.

'Thish where I get out.' He fumbled with the window. Mr Blore helped him.

The old man stood in the doorway. He raised a solemn hand and blinked his bleary eyes.

'Watch and pray,' he said. 'Watch and pray. The day of judgment is at hand.'

He collapsed through the doorway on to the platform. From a recumbent position he looked up at Mr Blore and said with immense dignity:

'I'm talking to *you*, young man. The day of judgment is very close at hand.'

Subsiding on to his seat Mr Blore thought to himself: He's nearer the day of judgment than I am!

But there, as it happens, he was wrong...

Chapter 2

I

Outside Oakbridge station a little group of people stood in momentary uncertainty. Behind them stood porters with suitcases. One of these called, 'Jim!'

The driver of one of the taxis stepped forward.

'You'm for Soldier Island, maybe?' he asked in a soft Devon voice. Four voices gave assent—and then immediately afterwards gave quick surreptitious glances at each other.

The driver said, addressing his remarks to Mr Justice Wargrave as the senior member of the party:

'There are two taxis here, sir. One of them must wait till the slow train from Exeter gets in—a matter of five minutes—there's one gentleman coming by that. Perhaps one of you wouldn't mind waiting? You'd be more comfortable that way.'

Vera Claythorne, her own secretarial position clear in her mind, spoke at once.

'I'll wait,' she said, 'if you will go on?' She looked at the other three, her glance and voice had that slight suggestion of command in it that comes from having occupied a position of authority. She might have been directing which tennis sets the girls were to play in.

Miss Brent said stiffly, 'Thank you,' bent her head and entered one of the taxis, the door of which the driver was holding open.

Mr Justice Wargrave followed her.

Captain Lombard said:

'I'll wait with Miss—'

'Claythorne,' said Vera.

'My name is Lombard, Philip Lombard.'

The porters were piling luggage on the taxi. Inside, Mr Justice Wargrave said with due legal caution:

'Beautiful weather we are having.'

Miss Brent said:

'Yes, indeed.'

A very distinguished old gentleman, she thought to herself. Quite unlike the usual type of man in seaside guest houses. Evidently Mrs or Miss Oliver had good connections...

Mr Justice Wargrave inquired:

'Do you know this part of the world well?'

'I have been to Cornwall and to Torquay, but this is my first visit to this part of Devon.'

The judge said:

'I also am unacquainted with this part of the world.'

The taxi drove off.

The driver of the second taxi said:

'Like to sit inside while you're waiting?'

Vera said decisively:

'Not at all.'

Captain Lombard smiled. He said:

'That sunny wall looks more attractive. Unless you'd rather go inside the station?'

'No, indeed. It's so delightful to get out of that stuffy train.'

He answered:

'Yes, travelling by train *is* rather trying in this weather.'

Vera said conventionally:

‘I do hope it lasts—the weather, I mean. Our English summers are so treacherous.’

With a slight lack of originality Lombard asked:

‘Do you know this part of the world well?’

‘No, I’ve never been here before.’ She added quickly, conscientiously determined to make her position clear at once, ‘I haven’t even seen my employer yet.’

‘Your employer?’

‘Yes, I’m Mrs Owen’s secretary.’

‘Oh, I see.’ Just imperceptibly his manner changed. It was slightly more assured—easier in tone. He said: ‘Isn’t that rather unusual?’

Vera laughed.

‘Oh, no, I don’t think so. Her own secretary was suddenly taken ill and she wired to an agency for a substitute and they sent me.’

‘So that was it. And suppose you don’t like the post when you’ve got there?’

Vera laughed again.

‘Oh, it’s only temporary—a holiday post. I’ve got a permanent job at a girls’ school. As a matter of fact, I’m frightfully thrilled at the prospect of seeing Soldier Island.

There’s been such a lot about it in the papers. Is it really very fascinating?’

Lombard said:

‘I don’t know. I haven’t seen it.’

‘Oh, really? The Owens are frightfully keen on it, I suppose. What are they like? Do tell me.’

Lombard thought: Awkward, this—am I supposed to have met them or not? He said quickly:

‘There’s a wasp crawling up your arm. No—keep quite still.’ He made a convincing pounce. ‘There. It’s gone!’

Oh, thank you. There are a lot of wasps about this summer.’

‘Yes, I suppose it’s the heat. Who are we waiting for, do you know?’

‘I haven’t the least idea.’

The loud drawn-out scream of an approaching train was heard. Lombard said:

‘That will be the train now.’

It was a tall soldierly old man who appeared at the exit from the platform. His grey hair was clipped close and he had a neatly trimmed white moustache.

His porter, staggering slightly under the weight of the solid leather suitcase, indicated Vera and Lombard.

Vera came forward in a competent manner. She said:

‘I am Mrs Owen’s secretary. There is a car here waiting.’ She added, ‘This is Mr Lombard.’

The faded blue eyes, shrewd in spite of their age, sized up Lombard. For a moment a judgment showed in them—

had there been any one to read it.

‘Good-looking fellow. Something just a little wrong about him...’

The three of them got into the waiting taxi. They drove through the sleepy streets of little Oakbridge and continued about a mile on the main Plymouth road. Then they plunged into a maze of cross-country lanes, steep, green and narrow.

General Macarthur said:

‘Don’t know this part of Devon at all. My little place is in East Devon—just on the border-line of Dorset.’

Vera said:

‘It really is lovely here. The hills and the red earth and everything so green and luscious looking.’

Philip Lombard said critically:

‘It’s a bit shut in... I like open country myself. Where you can see what’s coming.’

General Macarthur said to him:

‘You’ve seen a bit of the world, I fancy?’

Lombard shrugged his shoulders disparagingly.

‘I’ve knocked about here and there, sir.’

He thought to himself: ‘He’ll ask me now if I was old enough to be in the War. These old boys always do.’

But General Macarthur did not mention the War.

II

They came up over a steep hill and down a zigzag track to Sticklehaven—a mere cluster of cottages with a fishing boat or two drawn up on the beach.

Illuminated by the setting sun, they had their first glimpse of Soldier Island jutting up out of the sea to the south.

Vera said, surprised:

‘It’s a long way out.’

She had pictured it differently, close to shore, crowned with a beautiful white house. But there was no house visible, only the boldly silhouetted rock with its faint resemblance to a giant head. There was something sinister about it. She shivered faintly.

Outside a little inn, the Seven Stars, three people were sitting. There was the hunched elderly figure of the judge, the upright form of Miss Brent, and a third man—a big bluff man who came forward and introduced himself.

‘Thought we might as well wait for you,’ he said. ‘Make one trip of it. Allow me to introduce myself. Name’s Davis. Natal, South Africa’s my natal spot, ha, ha!’

He laughed breezily.

Mr Justice Wargrave looked at him with active malevolence. He seemed to be wishing that he could order the court to be cleared. Miss Emily Brent was clearly not sure if she liked Colonials.

‘Any one care for a little nip before we embark?’ asked Mr Davis hospitably.

Nobody assenting to this proposition, Mr Davis turned and held up a finger.

‘Mustn’t delay, then. Our good host and hostess will be expecting us,’ he said.

He might have noticed that a curious constraint came over the other members of the party. It was as though the mention of their host and hostess had a curiously paralysing effect upon the guests.

In response to Davis’s beckoning finger, a man detached himself from a nearby wall against which he was leaning and came up to them. His rolling gait proclaimed him as a man of the sea. He had a weather-beaten face and dark eyes with a slightly evasive expression. He spoke in his soft Devon voice.

‘Will you be ready to be starting for the island, ladies and gentlemen? The boat’s waiting. There’s two gentlemen coming by car but Mr Owen’s orders was not to wait for them as they might arrive at any time.’

The party got up. Their guide led them along a small stone jetty. Alongside it a motor boat was lying.

Emily Brent said:

‘That’s a very small boat.’

The boat’s owner said persuasively:

‘She’s a fine boat that, Ma’am. You could go to Plymouth in her as easy as winking.’

Mr Justice Wargrave said sharply:

‘There are a good many of us.’

‘She’d take double the number, sir.’

Philip Lombard said in his pleasant easy voice:

‘It’s quite all right. Glorious weather—no swell.’

Rather doubtfully, Miss Brent permitted herself to be helped into the boat. The others followed suit. There was as yet no fraternizing among the party. It was as though each member of it was puzzled by the other members.

They were just about to cast loose when their guide paused, boat-hook in hand.

Down the steep track into the village a car was coming. A car so fantastically powerful, so superlatively beautiful that it had all the nature of an apparition. At the wheel sat a young man, his

hair blown back by the wind. In the blaze of the evening light he looked, not a man, but a young God, a Hero God out of some Northern Saga.

He touched the horn and a great roar of sound echoed from the rocks of the bay.

It was a fantastic moment. In it, Anthony Marston seemed to be something more than mortal. Afterwards more than one of those present remembered that moment.

III

Fred Narracott sat by the engine thinking to himself that this was a queer lot. Not at all his idea of what Mr Owen's guests were likely to be. He'd expected something altogether more classy. Togged-up¹⁶ women and gentlemen in yachting costume and all very rich and important-looking.

Not at all like Mr Elmer Robson's parties. A faint grin came to Fred Narracott's lips as he remembered the millionaire's guests. That had been a party if you like—and the drink they'd got through!

This Mr Owen must be a very different sort of gentleman. Funny, it was, thought Fred, that he'd never yet set eyes on Owen—or his Missus either. Never been down here yet he hadn't. Everything ordered and paid for by that Mr Morris. Instructions always very clear and payment prompt, but it was odd, all the same. The papers said there was some mystery about Owen. Mr Narracott agreed with them.

Perhaps after all, it *was* Miss Gabrielle Turl who had bought the island. But that theory departed from him as he surveyed his passengers. Not this lot—none of them looked likely to have anything to do with a film star.

He summed them up dispassionately.

One old maid—the sour kind—he knew them well enough. She was a tartar he could bet. Old military gentleman—real Army look about him. Nice-looking young lady—but the ordinary kind, not glamorous—no Hollywood touch about her. That bluff cheery gent—*he* wasn't a real gentleman. Retired tradesman, that's what he is, thought Fred Narracott. The other gentleman, the lean hungry-looking gentleman with the quick eyes, he was a queer one, he was. Just possible he *might* have something to do with the pictures.

No, there was only one satisfactory passenger in the boat. The last gentleman, the one who had arrived in the car (and what a car! A car such as had never been seen in Sticklehaven before. Must have cost hundreds and hundreds, a car like that). He was the right kind. Born to money, he was. If the party had been all like him... he'd understand it...

Queer business when you came to think of it—the whole thing was queer—very queer...

¹⁶ *Togged-up* – (разг.) Разодетые

IV

The boat churned its way round the rock. Now at last the house came into view. The south side of the island was quite different. It shelved gently down to the sea. The house was there facing south—low and square and modern-looking with rounded windows letting in all the light.

An exciting house—a house that lived up to expectation!

Fred Narracott shut off the engine, they nosed their way gently into a little natural inlet between rocks.

Philip Lombard said sharply:

‘Must be difficult to land here in dirty weather.’

Fred Narracott said cheerfully:

‘Can’t land on Soldier Island when there’s a southeasterly. Sometimes ’tis cut off for a week or more.’

Vera Claythorne thought:

‘The catering must be very difficult. That’s the worst of an island. All the domestic problems are so worrying.’

The boat grated against the rocks. Fred Narracott jumped out and he and Lombard helped the others to alight. Narracott made the boat fast to a ring in the rock. Then he led the way up steps cut in the cliff.

General Macarthur said:

‘Ha! delightful spot!’

But he felt uneasy. Damned odd sort of place.

As the party ascended the steps and came out on a terrace above, their spirits revived. In the open doorway of the house a correct butler was awaiting them, and something about his gravity reassured them. And then the house itself was really most attractive, the view from the terrace magnificent...

The butler came forward bowing slightly. He was a tall lank man, grey-haired and very respectable. He said:

‘Will you come this way, please.’

In the wide hall drinks stood ready. Rows of bottles. Anthony Marston’s spirits cheered up a little. He’d just been thinking this was a rum kind of show. None of *his* lot! What could old Badger have been thinking about to let him in for this? However, the drinks were all right. Plenty of ice, too.

What was it the butler chap was saying?

Mr Owen—unfortunately delayed—unable to get here till tomorrow. Instructions—everything they wanted—if they would like to go to their rooms?... dinner would be at eight o’clock...

V

Vera had followed Mrs Rogers upstairs. The woman had thrown open a door at the end of a passage and Vera had walked into a delightful bedroom with a big window that opened wide upon the sea and another looking east. She uttered a quick exclamation of pleasure.

Mrs Rogers was saying:

‘I hope you’ve got everything you want, Miss?’

Vera looked round. Her luggage had been brought up and had been unpacked. At one side of the room a door stood open into a pale blue-tiled bathroom.

She said quickly:

‘Yes, everything, I think.’

‘You’ll ring the bell if you want anything, Miss?’

Mrs Rogers had a flat monotonous voice. Vera looked at her curiously. What a white bloodless ghost of a woman! Very respectable-looking, with her hair dragged back from her face and her black dress. Queer light eyes that shifted the whole time from place to place.

Vera thought:

‘She looks frightened of her own shadow.’

Yes, that was it—frightened!

She looked like a woman who walked in mortal fear...

A little shiver passed down Vera’s back. What on earth was the woman afraid of?

She said pleasantly:

‘I’m Mrs Owen’s new secretary. I expect you know that.’

Mrs Rogers said:

‘No, Miss, I don’t know anything. Just a list of the ladies and gentlemen and what rooms they were to have.’

Vera said:

‘Mrs Owen didn’t mention me?’

Mrs Rogers’ eyelashes flickered.

‘I haven’t seen Mrs Owen—not yet. We only came here two days ago.’

Extraordinary people, these Owens, thought Vera.

Aloud she said:

‘What staff is there here?’

‘Just me and Rogers, Miss.’

Vera frowned. Eight people in the house—ten with the host and hostess—and only one married couple to do for them.

Mrs Rogers said:

‘I’m a good cook and Rogers is handy about the house.

I didn’t know, of course, that there was to be such a large party.’

Vera said:

‘But you can manage?’

‘Oh yes, Miss, I can manage. If there’s to be large parties often perhaps Mrs Owen could get extra help in.’

Vera said, ‘I expect so.’

Mrs Rogers turned to go. Her feet moved noiselessly over the ground. She drifted from the room like a shadow.

Vera went over to the window and sat down on the window seat. She was faintly disturbed. Everything— somehow—was a little queer. The absence of the Owens, the pale ghostlike Mrs Rogers. And the guests! Yes, the guests were queer, too. An oddly assorted party.

Vera thought:

‘I wish I’d seen the Owens... I wish I knew what they were like.’

She got up and walked restlessly about the room.

A perfect bedroom decorated throughout in the modern style. Off-white rugs on the gleaming parquet floor—faintly tinted walls—a long mirror surrounded by lights. A mantelpiece bare of ornaments save for an enormous block of white marble shaped like a bear, a piece of modern sculpture in which was inset a clock. Over it, in a gleaming chromium frame, was a big square of parchment—a poem.

She stood in front of the fireplace and read it. It was the old nursery rhyme that she remembered from her childhood days.

Ten little soldier boys went out to dine;
One choked his little self and then there were Nine.

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

Eight little soldier boys travelling in Devon;
One said he’d stay there and then there were Seven.

Seven little soldier boys chopping up sticks;
One chopped himself in halves and then there were Six.

Six little soldier boys playing with a hive;
A bumble bee stung one and then there were Five.

Five little soldier boys going in for law;
One got in Chancery and then there were Four.

Four little soldier boys going out to sea;
A red herring swallowed one and then there were Three.

Three little soldier boys walking in the Zoo;
A big bear hugged one and then there were Two.

Two little soldier boys sitting in the sun;
One got frizzled up and then there was One.

One little soldier boy left all alone;
He went and hanged himself and then there were None.

Vera smiled. Of course! This was Soldier Island!

She went and sat again by the window looking out to sea.

How big the sea was! From here there was no land to be seen anywhere—just a vast expanse of blue water rippling in the evening sun.

The sea... So peaceful today—sometimes so cruel... The sea that dragged you down to its depths. Drowned... Found drowned... Drowned at sea... Drowned—drowned—drowned...

No, she wouldn't remember... She would *not* think of it! All that was over...

VI

Dr Armstrong came to Soldier Island just as the sun was sinking into the sea. On the way across he had chatted to the boatman—a local man. He was anxious to find out a little about these people who owned Soldier Island, but the man Narracott seemed curiously ill-informed, or perhaps unwilling to talk.

So Dr Armstrong chatted instead of the weather and of fishing.

He was tired after his long motor drive. His eyeballs ached. Driving west you were driving against the sun.

Yes, he was very tired. The sea and perfect peace—that was what he needed. He would like, really, to take a long holiday. But he couldn't afford to do that. He could afford it financially, of course, but he couldn't afford to drop out. You were soon forgotten nowadays. No, now that he had arrived, he must keep his nose to the grindstone.¹⁷

He thought:

'All the same, this evening, I'll imagine to myself that I'm not going back—that I've done with London and Harley Street and all the rest of it.'

There was something magical about an island—the mere word suggested fantasy. You lost touch with the world—an island was a world of its own. A world, perhaps, from which you might never return.

He thought:

'I'm leaving my ordinary life behind me.'

And, smiling to himself, he began to make plans, fantastic plans for the future. He was still smiling when he walked up the rock cut steps.

In a chair on the terrace an old gentleman was sitting and the sight of him was vaguely familiar to Dr Armstrong. Where had he seen that frog-like face, that tortoise-like neck, that hunched up attitude—yes and those pale shrewd little eyes? Of course—old Wargrave. He'd given evidence once before him. Always looked half-asleep, but was shrewd as could be when it came to a point of law. Had great power with a jury—it was said he could make their minds up for them any day of the week. He'd got one or two unlikely convictions out of them. A hanging judge, some people said.

Funny place to meet him... here—out of the world.

¹⁷ *No, now that he had arrived, he must keep his nose to the grindstone.* – Нет, теперь, когда он всего достиг, он должен заставлять себя работать, без отдыха.

VII

Mr Justice Wargrave thought to himself:

‘Armstrong? Remember him in the witness-box. Very correct and cautious. All doctors are damned fools. Harley Street ones are the worst of the lot.’ And his mind dwelt malevolently on a recent interview he had had with a suave personage in that very street.

Aloud he grunted:

‘Drinks are in the hall.’

Dr Armstrong said:

‘I must go and pay my respects to my host and hostess.’ Mr Justice Wargrave closed his eyes again, looking decidedly reptilian, and said:

‘You can’t do that.’

Dr Armstrong was startled.

‘Why not?’

The judge said:

‘No host and hostess. Very curious state of affairs. Don’t understand this place.’

Dr Armstrong stared at him for a minute. When he thought the old gentleman had actually gone to sleep, Wargrave said suddenly:

‘D’you know Constance Culmington?’

‘Er—no, I’m afraid I don’t.’

‘It’s of no consequence,’ said the judge. ‘Very vague woman— and practically unreadable handwriting. I was just wondering if I’d come to the wrong house.’

Dr Armstrong shook his head and went on up to the house.

Mr Justice Wargrave reflected on the subject of Constance Culmington. Undependable like all women.

His mind went on to the two women in the house, the tight-lipped old maid and the girl. He didn’t care for the girl, cold-blooded young hussy. No, three women, if you counted the Rogers woman. Odd creature, she looked scared to death. Respectable pair and knew their job.

Rogers coming out on the terrace that minute, the judge asked him:

‘Is Lady Constance Culmington expected, do you know?’

Rogers stared at him.

‘No, sir, not to my knowledge.’

The judge’s eyebrows rose. But he only grunted. He thought:

‘Soldier Island, eh? There’s a fly in the ointment.’

VIII

Anthony Marston was in his bath. He luxuriated in the steaming water. His limbs had felt cramped after his long drive. Very few thoughts passed through his head. Anthony was a creature of sensation—and of action.

He thought to himself:

‘Must go through with it, I suppose,’ and thereafter dismissed everything from his mind.

Warm steaming water—tired limbs—presently a shave—a cocktail—dinner.

And after—?

IX

Mr Blore was tying his tie. He wasn't very good at this sort of thing.

Did he look all right? He supposed so.

Nobody had been exactly cordial to him... Funny the way they all eyed each other—as though they *knew*...

Well, it was up to him.

He didn't mean to bungle his job.

He glanced up at the framed nursery rhyme over the mantelpiece.

Neat touch, having that there!

He thought:

Remember this island when I was a kid. Never thought I'd be doing this sort of a job in a house here. Good thing, perhaps, that one can't foresee the future.

X

General Macarthur was frowning to himself.

Damn it all, the whole thing was deuced odd! Not at all what he'd been led to expect...

For two pins¹⁸ he'd make an excuse and get away... Throw up the whole business...

But the motor-boat had gone back to the mainland.

He'd have to stay.

That fellow Lombard now, he was a queer chap.

Not straight. He'd swear the man wasn't straight.

¹⁸ *For two pins* – Была бы малейшая возможность

XI

As the gong sounded, Philip Lombard came out of his room and walked to the head of the stairs. He moved like a panther, smoothly and noiselessly. There was something of the panther about him altogether. A beast of prey¹⁹—pleasant to the eye.

He was smiling to himself.

A week—eh?

He was going to enjoy that week.

¹⁹ *A beast of prey* – Хищное животное

XII

In her bedroom, Emily Brent, dressed in black silk ready for dinner, was reading her Bible.

Her lips moved as she followed the words:

*'The heathen are sunk down in the pit that they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken. The Lord is known by the judgment which he executeth: the wicked is snared in the work of his own hands. The wicked shall be turned into hell.'*²⁰

Her lips tight closed. She shut the Bible.

Rising, she pinned a cairngorm brooch at her neck, and went down to dinner.

²⁰ «Обрушились народы в яму, которую выкопали; в сети, которые скрыли они, запуталась их нога. Познан был Господь по суду, который Он совершил; нечестивый уловлен делами рук своих. Да обратятся нечестивые в ад ...» (Ветхий Завет, Псалтирь, 9:16–18)

Chapter 3

I

Dinner was drawing to a close.

The food had been good, the wine perfect. Rogers waited well.

Everyone was in better spirits. They had begun to talk to each other with more freedom and intimacy.

Mr Justice Wargrave, mellowed by the excellent port, was being amusing in a caustic fashion, Dr Armstrong and Tony Marston were listening to him. Miss Brent chatted to General Macarthur, they had discovered some mutual friends. Vera Claythorne was asking Mr Davis intelligent questions about South Africa. Mr Davis was quite fluent on the subject. Lombard listened to the conversation. Once or twice he looked up quickly, and his eyes narrowed. Now and then his eyes played round the table, studying the others.

Anthony Marston said suddenly:

‘Quaint, these things, aren’t they?’

In the centre of the round table, on a circular glass stand, were some little china figures.

‘Soldiers,’ said Tony. ‘Soldier Island. I suppose that’s the idea.’

Vera leaned forward.

‘I wonder. How many are there? Ten?’

‘Yes—ten there are.’

Vera cried:

‘What fun! They’re the ten little soldier boys of the nursery rhyme, I suppose. In my bedroom the rhyme is framed and hung up over the mantelpiece.’

Lombard said:

‘In my room, too.’

‘And mine.’

‘And mine.’

Everybody joined in the chorus. Vera said:

‘It’s an amusing idea, isn’t it?’

Mr Justice Wargrave grunted:

‘Remarkably childish,’ and helped himself to port.

Emily Brent looked at Vera Claythorne. Vera Claythorne looked at Miss Brent. The two women rose.

In the drawing-room the French windows were open on to the terrace and the sound of the sea murmuring against the rocks came up to them.

Emily Brent said, ‘Pleasant sound.’

Vera said sharply, ‘I hate it.’

Miss Brent’s eyes looked at her in surprise. Vera flushed. She said, more composedly:

‘I don’t think this place would be very agreeable in a storm.’

Emily Brent agreed.

‘I’ve no doubt the house is shut up in winter,’ she said. ‘You’d never get servants to stay here for one thing.’

Vera murmured:

‘It must be difficult to get servants anyway.’

Emily Brent said:

‘Mrs Oliver has been lucky to get these two. The woman’s a good cook.’

Vera thought:

‘Funny how elderly people always get names wrong.’ She said:

‘Yes, I think Mrs Owen has been very lucky indeed.’

Emily Brent had brought a small piece of embroidery out of her bag. Now, as she was about to thread her needle, she paused.

She said sharply:

‘Owen? Did you say Owen?’

‘Yes.’

Emily Brent said sharply:

‘I’ve never met anyone called Owen in my life.’

Vera stared.

‘But surely—’

She did not finish her sentence. The door opened and the men joined them. Rogers followed them into the room with the coffee tray.

The judge came and sat down by Emily Brent. Armstrong came up to Vera. Tony Marston strolled to the open window. Blore studied with naive surprise a statuette in brass—wondering perhaps if its bizarre angularities were really supposed to be the female figure. General Macarthur stood with his back to the mantelpiece. He pulled at his little white moustache. That had been a damned good dinner! His spirits were rising. Lombard turned over the pages of *Punch* that lay with other papers on a table by the wall.

Rogers went round with the coffee tray. The coffee was good—really black and very hot.

The whole party had dined well. They were satisfied with themselves and with life. The hands of the clock pointed to twenty minutes past nine. There was a silence—a comfortable replete silence. Into that silence came The Voice. Without warning, inhuman, penetrating...

‘Ladies and gentlemen! Silence please!’

Everyone was startled. They looked round—at each other, at the walls. Who was speaking?

The Voice went on—a high clear voice:

‘You are charged with the following indictments:

‘Edward George Armstrong, that you did upon the 14th day of March, 1925, cause the death of Louisa Mary Clees.

‘Emily Caroline Brent, that upon the 5th of November, 1931, you were responsible for the death of Beatrice Taylor.

‘William Henry Blore, that you brought about the death of James Stephen Landor on October 10th, 1928.

‘Vera Elizabeth Claythorne, that on the 11th day of August, 1935, you killed Cyril Ogilvie Hamilton.

‘Philip Lombard, that upon a date in February, 1932, you were guilty of the death of twenty-one men, members of an East African tribe.

‘John Gordon Macarthur, that on the 4th of January, 1917, you deliberately sent your wife’s lover, Arthur Richmond, to his death.

‘Anthony James Marston, that upon the 14th day of November last, you were guilty of the murder of John and Lucy Combes.

‘Thomas Rogers and Ethel Rogers, that on the 6th of May, 1929, you brought about the death of Jennifer Brady.

‘Lawrence John Wargrave, that upon the 10th day of June, 1930, you were guilty of the murder of Edward Seton.

‘Prisoners at the bar²¹, have you anything to say in your defence?’

²¹ *Prisoners at the bar* – Обвиняемые

II

The voice had stopped.

There was a moment's petrified silence and then a resounding crash! Rogers had dropped the coffee tray!

At the same moment, from somewhere outside the room there came a scream and the sound of a thud.

Lombard was the first to move. He leapt to the door and flung it open. Outside, lying in a huddled mass, was Mrs Rogers.

Lombard called:

'Marston.'

Anthony sprang to help him. Between them, they lifted up the woman and carried her into the drawing-room.

Dr Armstrong came across quickly. He helped them to lift her on to the sofa and bent over her. He said quickly:

'It's nothing. She's fainted, that's all. She'll be round in a minute.'

Lombard said to Rogers:

'Get some brandy.'

Rogers, his face white, his hands shaking, murmured:

'Yes, sir,' and slipped quickly out of the room.

Vera cried out:

'*Who was that speaking?* Where was he? It sounded—it sounded—'

General Macarthur spluttered out:

'What's going on here? What kind of a practical joke was that?'

His hand was shaking. His shoulders sagged. He looked suddenly ten years older.

Blore was mopping his face with a handkerchief.

Only Mr Justice Wargrave and Miss Brent seemed comparatively unmoved. Emily Brent sat upright, her head held high. In both cheeks was a spot of hard colour. The judge sat in his habitual pose, his head sunk down into his neck. With one hand he gently scratched his ear. Only his eyes were active, darting round and round the room, puzzled, alert with intelligence.

Again it was Lombard who acted. Armstrong being busy with the collapsed woman, Lombard was free once more to take the initiative.

He said:

'That voice? It sounded as though it were in the room.'

Vera cried:

'*Who was it?* Who was it? It wasn't one of us.'

Like the judge, Lombard's eyes wandered slowly round the room. They rested a minute on the open window, then he shook his head decisively. Suddenly his eyes lighted up. He moved forward swiftly to where a door near the fireplace led into an adjoining room.

With a swift gesture, he caught the handle and flung the door open. He passed through and immediately uttered an exclamation of satisfaction.

He said:

'Ah, here we are.'

The others crowded after him. Only Miss Brent remained alone sitting erect in her chair.

Inside the second room a table had been brought up close to the wall which adjoined the drawing-room. On the table was a gramophone—an old-fashioned type with a large trumpet attached. The mouth of the trumpet was against the wall, and Lombard, pushing it aside indicated where two or three small holes had been unobtrusively bored through the wall.

Adjusting the gramophone he replaced the needle on the record and immediately they heard again 'You *are charged with the following indictments—*'

Vera cried:

'Turn it off! Turn it off! It's horrible!'

Lombard obeyed.

Dr Armstrong said, with a sigh of relief:

'A disgraceful and heartless practical joke, I suppose.'

The small clear voice of Mr Justice Wargrave murmured:

'So you think it's a joke, do you?'

The doctor stared at him.

'What else could it be?'

The hand of the judge gently stroked his upper lip. He said:

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

Anthony Marston broke in. He said:

'Look here, there's one thing you've forgotten. Who the devil turned the thing on and set it going?'

Wargrave murmured:

'Yes, I think we must inquire into that.'

He led the way back into the drawing-room. The others followed.

Rogers had just come in with a glass of brandy. Miss

Brent was bending over the moaning form of Mrs Rogers.

Adroitly Rogers slipped between the two women.

'Allow me, Madam, I'll speak to her. Ethel—Ethel—it's all right. All right, do you hear? Pull yourself together.'

Mrs Rogers' breath came in quick gasps. Her eyes, staring frightened eyes, went round and round the ring of faces. There was urgency in Rogers' tone.

'Pull yourself together, Ethel.'

Dr Armstrong spoke to her soothingly:

'You'll be all right now, Mrs Rogers. Just a nasty turn.' She said:

'Did I faint, sir?'

'Yes.'

'It was the voice—that awful voice—*like a judgment—*'

Her face turned green again, her eyelids fluttered.

Dr Armstrong said sharply:

'Where's that brandy?'

Rogers had put it down on a little table. Someone handed it to the doctor and he bent over the gasping woman with it.

'Drink this, Mrs Rogers.'

She drank, choking a little and gasping. The spirit did her good. The colour returned to her face. She said:

'I'm all right now. It just—gave me a turn.'

Rogers said quickly:

'Of course it did. It gave me a turn, too. Fair made me drop that tray. Wicked lies, it was! I'd like to know—'

He was interrupted. It was only a cough—a dry little cough but it had the effect of stopping him in full cry. He stared at Mr Justice Wargrave and the latter coughed again. Then he said:

'Who put on that record on the gramophone. Was it you, Rogers?'

Rogers cried:

‘I didn’t know what it was. Before God, I didn’t know what it was, sir. If I had I’d never have done it.’

The judge said dryly:

‘That is probably true. But I think you’d better explain, Rogers.’

The butler wiped his face with a handkerchief. He said earnestly:

‘I was just obeying orders, sir, that’s all.’

‘Whose orders?’

‘Mr Owen’s.’

Mr Justice Wargrave said:

‘Let me get this quite clear. Mr Owen’s orders were—what exactly?’

Rogers said:

‘I was to put a record on the gramophone. I’d find the record in the drawer and my wife was to start the gramophone when I’d gone into the drawing-room with the coffee tray.’

The judge murmured:

‘A very remarkable story.’

Rogers cried:

‘It’s the truth, sir. I swear to God 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 looked at Lombard.

‘Was there a title on it?’

Lombard nodded. He grinned suddenly, showed his white pointed teeth. He said:

‘Quite right, sir. It was entitled *Swan Song*..’

III

General Macarthur broke out suddenly. He exclaimed:

‘The whole thing is preposterous—preposterous! Slinging accusations about like this! Something must be done about it. This fellow Owen whoever he is—’

Emily Brent interrupted. She said sharply:

‘That’s just it, who is he?’

The judge interposed. He spoke with the authority that a lifetime in the courts had given him. He said:

‘That is exactly what we must go into very carefully. I should suggest that you get your wife to bed first of all, Rogers. Then come back here.’

‘Yes, sir.’

Dr Armstrong said:

‘I’ll give you a hand, Rogers.’

Leaning on the two men, Mrs Rogers tottered out of the room. When they had gone Tony Marston said:

‘Don’t know about you, sir, but I could do with a drink.’

Lombard said:

‘I agree.’

Tony said:

‘I’ll go and forage.’

He went out of the room.

He returned a second or two later.

‘Found them all waiting on a tray outside ready to be brought in.’

He set down his burden carefully. The next minute or two was spent in dispensing drinks. General Macarthur had a stiff whisky and so did the judge. Every one felt the need of a stimulant. Only Emily Brent demanded and obtained a glass of water.

Dr Armstrong re-entered the room.

‘She’s all right,’ he said. ‘I’ve given her a sedative to take. What’s that, a drink? I could do with one.’

Several of the men refilled their glasses. A moment or two later Rogers re-entered the room.

Mr Justice Wargrave took charge of the proceedings. The room became an impromptu court of law.

The judge said:

‘Now then, Rogers, we must get to the bottom of this. Who is this Mr Owen?’

Rogers stared.

‘He owns this place, sir.’

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

Rogers shook his head.

‘I can’t say, sir. You see, I’ve never seen him.’

There was a faint stir in the room.

General Macarthur said:

‘You’ve never seen him? What d’yer mean?’

‘We’ve only been here just under a week, sir, my wife and I. We were engaged by letter, through an agency. The Regina Agency in Plymouth.’

Blore nodded.

‘Old established firm,’ he volunteered.

Wargrave said:

‘Have you got that letter?’

‘The letter engaging us? No, sir. I didn’t keep it.’

‘Go on with your story. You were engaged, as you say, by letter.’

Yes, sir. We were to arrive on a certain day. We did. Everything was in order here. Plenty of food in stock and everything very nice. Just needed dusting and that.’

‘What next?’

‘Nothing, sir. We got orders—by letter again—to prepare the rooms for a house-party, and then yesterday by the afternoon post I got another letter from Mr Owen. It said he and Mrs Owen were detained and to do the best we could, and it gave the instructions about dinner and coffee and putting on the gramophone record.’

The judge said sharply:

‘Surely you’ve got that letter?’

‘Yes, sir, I’ve got it here.’

He produced it from a pocket. The judge took it.

‘H’m,’ he said. ‘Headed Ritz Hotel and typewritten.’

With a quick movement Blore was beside him.

He said:

‘If you’ll just let me have a look.’

He twitched it out of the other’s hand, and ran his eye over it. He murmured:

‘Coronation machine.²² Quite new—no defects. Ensign paper—the most widely used make. You won’t get anything out of that. Might be fingerprints, but I doubt it.’

Wargrave stared at him with sudden attention.

Anthony Marston was standing beside Blore looking over his shoulder. He said:

‘Got some fancy Christian names, hasn’t he? Ulick Norman Owen. Quite a mouthful.’

The old judge said with a slight start:

‘I am obliged to you, Mr Marston. You have drawn my attention to a curious and suggestive point.’

He looked round at the others and thrusting his neck forward like an angry tortoise, he said:

‘I think the time has come for us all to pool our information. It would be well, I think, for everybody to come forward with all the information they have regarding the owner of this house.’ He paused and then went on: ‘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 was a moment’s pause and then Emily Brent spoke with decision.

‘There’s something very peculiar about all this,’ she said. ‘I received a letter with a signature that was not very easy to read. It purported to be from a woman I had met at a certain summer resort two or three years ago. I took the name to be either Ogden or Oliver. I am acquainted with a Mrs Oliver and also with a Miss Ogden. I am quite certain that I have never met, or become friendly with any one of the name of Owen.’

Mr Justice Wargrave said:

‘You have that letter, Miss Brent?’

‘Yes, I will fetch it for you.’

She went away and returned a minute later with the letter.

The judge read it. He said:

‘I begin to understand... Miss Claythorne?’

Vera explained the circumstances of her secretarial engagement.

The judge said:

²² *Coronation machine.* – Пишущая машинка «Коронейшн».

‘Marston?’

Anthony said:

‘Got a wire. From a pal of mine. Badger Berkeley. Surprised me at the time because I had an idea the old horse had gone to Norway. Told me to roll up²³ here.’

Again Wargrave nodded. He said:

‘Dr Armstrong?’

‘I was called in professionally.’

‘I see. You had no previous acquaintanceship with the family?’

No. A colleague of mine was mentioned in the letter.’

The judge said:

‘To give verisimilitude... Yes, and that colleague, I presume, was momentarily out of touch with you?’

‘Well—er—yes.’

Lombard, who had been staring at Blore, said suddenly:

‘Look here, I’ve just thought of something—’

The judge lifted a hand.

‘In a minute—’

‘But I—’

‘We will take one thing at a time, Mr Lombard. We are at present inquiring into the causes which have resulted in our being assembled here tonight. General Macarthur?’

Pulling at his moustache, the General muttered:

‘Got a letter—from this fellow Owen—mentioned some old pals of mine who were to be here—hoped I’d excuse informal invitation. Haven’t kept the letter, I’m afraid.’

Wargrave said: ‘Mr Lombard?’

Lombard’s brain had been active. Was he to come out in the open, or not? He made up his mind.

‘Same sort of thing,’ he said. ‘Invitation, mention of mutual friends—I fell for it all right. I’ve torn up the letter.’

Mr Justice Wargrave turned his attention to Mr Blore. His forefinger stroked his upper lip and his voice was dangerously polite.

He said:

‘Just now we had a somewhat disturbing experience. An apparently disembodied voice spoke to us all by name, uttering certain precise accusations against us. We will deal with those accusations presently. At the moment I am interested in a minor point. Amongst the names recited 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 said sulkily:

‘Cat’s out of the bag, it seems.²⁴ I suppose I’d better admit that my name isn’t Davis.’

‘You are William Henry Blore?’

‘That’s right.’

‘I will add something,’ said Lombard. ‘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 and I’m prepared to swear that you’ve never set foot in South Africa in your life.’

All eyes were turned on Blore. Angry suspicious eyes. Anthony Marston moved a step nearer to him. His fists clenched themselves.

‘Now then, you swine,’ he said. ‘Any explanation?’

²³ to roll up – (разг.) явиться

²⁴ Cat’s out of the bag, it seems. – Дальше притворяться нет смысла.

Blore flung back his head and set his square jaw.

‘You gentlemen have got me wrong,’ he said. ‘I’ve got my credentials and you can see them. I’m an ex-CID²⁵ man. I run a detective agency in Plymouth. I was put on this job.’

Mr Justice Wargrave asked:

‘By whom?’

‘This man Owen. Enclosed a handsome money order for expenses and instructed me as to what he wanted done. I was to join the house-party, posing as a guest. I was given all your names. I was to watch you all.’

‘Any reason given?’

Blore said bitterly:

‘Mrs Owen’s jewels. Mrs Owen my foot!²⁶ I don’t believe there’s any such person.’

Again the forefinger of the judge stroked his lip, this time appreciatively.

‘Your conclusions are, I think, justified,’ he said. ‘Ulick

Norman Owen! In Miss Brent’s letter, though the signature of the surname is a mere scrawl the Christian names are reasonably clear—Una Nancy—in either case you notice, the same initials.

Ulick Norman Owen—Una Nancy Owen— each time, that is to say, U. N. Owen. Or by a slight stretch of fancy, UNKNOWN!’

Vera cried:

‘But this is fantastic—mad!’

The judge nodded gently.

He said:

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

²⁵ *C. I. D.* – Criminal Investigation Department – Отдел уголовного розыска

²⁶ *Mrs. Owen my foot!* – Какая к черту миссис Оуэн!

Chapter 4

I

There was a moment's silence. A silence of dismay and bewilderment. Then the judge's small clear voice took up the thread once more.

'We will now proceed to the next stage of our inquiry. First however, I will just add my own credentials to the list.'

He took a letter from his pocket and tossed it on to the table.

'This purports to be from an old friend of mine, Lady Constance Culmington. I have not seen her for some years. She went to the East. It is exactly the kind of vague incoherent letter she would write, urging me to join her here and referring to her host and hostess in the vaguest of terms. The same technique, you will observe. I only mention it because it agrees with the other evidence—from all of which emerges one interesting point. *Whoever it was who enticed us here, that person knows or has taken the trouble to find out a good deal about us all.* He, whoever he may be, is aware of my friendship for Lady Constance—and is familiar with her epistolary style. He knows something about Dr Armstrong's colleagues and their present whereabouts. He knows the nickname of Mr Marston's friend and the kind of telegrams he sends. He knows exactly where Miss Brent was two years ago for her holiday and the kind of people she met there. He knows all about General Macarthur's old cronies.'

He paused. Then he said:

'He knows, you see, a good deal. And out of his knowledge concerning us, he has made certain definite accusations.'

Immediately a babel broke out.

General Macarthur shouted:

'A pack of dam' lies! Slander!'

Vera cried out:

'It's iniquitous!' Her breath came fast. 'Wicked!'

Rogers said hoarsely:

'A lie—a wicked lie... we never did—neither of us...'

Anthony Marston growled:

'Don't know what the damned fool was getting at!'

The upraised hand of Mr Justice Wargrave calmed the tumult.

He said, picking his words with care:

'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 of the year 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 concurred with the verdict. An appeal was lodged on the grounds of misdirection. The appeal was rejected and the man was duly executed. I wish to say before you all that my conscience is perfectly clear on the matter. I did my duty and nothing more. I passed sentence on a rightly convicted murderer.'

Armstrong was remembering now. The Seton case! The verdict had come as a great surprise. He had met Matthews, KC on one of the days of the trial dining at a restaurant. Matthews had been confident. 'Not a doubt of the verdict. Acquittal practically certain.' And then afterwards he had heard comments: 'Judge was dead against him. Turned the jury right round and they brought him in guilty.'

Quite legal, though. Old Wargrave knows his law. It was almost as though he had a private down on the fellow.'

All these memories rushed through the doctor's mind. Before he could consider the wisdom of the question he had asked impulsively:

'Did you know Seton at all? I mean previous to the case.'

The hooded reptilian eyes met his. In a clear cold voice the judge said:

'I knew nothing of Seton previous to the case.'

Armstrong said to himself:

'The fellow's lying—I know he's lying.'

II

Vera Claythorne spoke in a trembling voice.

She said:

'I'd like to tell you. About that child—Cyril Hamilton. I was nursery governess to him. He was forbidden to swim out far. One day, when my attention was distracted, he started off. I swam after him... I couldn't get there in time... It was awful... But it wasn't my fault. At the inquest the Coroner exonerated me. And his mother—she was so kind. If even she didn't blame me, why should—why should this awful thing be said? It's not fair—not fair...'

She broke down, weeping bitterly.

General Macarthur patted her shoulder.

He said:

'There there, my dear. Of course it's not true. Fellow's a madman. A madman! Got a bee in his bonnet! Got hold of the wrong end of the stick all round.'²⁷

He stood erect, squaring his shoulders. He barked out:

'Best really to leave this sort of thing unanswered. However, feel I ought to say—no truth—no truth whatever in what he said about—er—young Arthur Richmond. Richmond was one of my officers. I sent him on a reconnaissance. He was killed. Natural course of events in wartime. Wish to say resent very much—slur on my wife. Best woman in the world. Absolutely—Caesar's wife!'

General Macarthur sat down. His shaking hand pulled at his moustache. The effort to speak had cost him a good deal.

Lombard spoke. His eyes were amused. He said:

'About those natives—'

Marston said:

'What about them?'

Philip Lombard grinned.

'Story's quite true! I left 'em! Matter of self-preservation. We were lost in the bush. I and a couple of other fellows took what food there was and cleared out.'

General Macarthur said sternly:

'You abandoned your men—left them to starve?'

Lombard said:

'Not quite the act of a *pukka sahib*, I'm afraid. But selfpreservation's a man's first duty. And natives don't mind dying, you know. They don't feel about it as Europeans do.'

Vera lifted her face from her hands. She said, staring at him:

'You left them—to *die*?'

Lombard answered:

'I left them to die.'

His amused eyes looked into her horrified ones.

Anthony Marston said in a slow puzzled voice:

'I've just been thinking—John and Lucy Combes. Must have been a couple of kids I ran over near Cambridge.

Beastly bad luck.'

Mr Justice Wargrave said acidly:

'For them, or for you?'

Anthony said:

²⁷ *Got a bee in his bonnet! Got hold of the wrong end of the stick all round.* – Помешанный! Что может прийти в голову сумасшедшему.

‘Well, I was thinking—for me—but of course, you’re right, sir, it was damned bad luck on them. Of course it was a pure accident. They rushed out of some cottage or other.

I had my licence suspended for a year. Beastly nuisance.’

Dr Armstrong said warmly:

‘This speeding’s all wrong—all wrong! Young men like you are a danger to the community.’

Anthony shrugged his shoulders. He said:

‘Speed’s come to stay. English roads are hopeless, of course. Can’t get up a decent pace on them.’

He looked round vaguely for his glass, picked it up off a table and went over to the side table and helped himself to another whisky and soda. He said over his shoulder:

‘Well, anyway it wasn’t my fault. Just an accident!’

III

The manservant, Rogers, had been moistening his lips and twisting his hands. He said now in a low deferential voice:

‘If I might just say a word, sir.’

Lombard said:

‘Go ahead, Rogers.’

Rogers cleared his throat and passed his tongue once more over his dry lips.

‘There was a mention, sir, of me and Mrs Rogers. And of Miss Brady. There isn’t a word of truth in it, sir. My wife and I were with Miss Brady till she died. She was always in poor health, sir, always from the time we came to her. There was a storm, sir, that night—the night she was taken bad. The telephone was out of order. We couldn’t get the doctor to her. I went for him, sir, on foot. But he got there too late. We’d done everything possible for her, sir. Devoted to her, we were. Anyone will tell you the same. There was never a word said against us. Not a word.’

Lombard looked thoughtfully at the man’s twitching face, his dry lips, the fright in his eyes. He remembered the crash of the falling coffee tray. He thought, but did not say: ‘Oh yeah?’

Blore spoke—spoke in his hearty bullying official manner. He said:

‘Came into a little something at her death, though? Eh?’

Rogers drew himself up. He said stiffly:

‘Miss Brady left us a legacy in recognition of our faithful services. And why not, I’d like to know?’

Lombard said:

‘What about yourself, Mr Blore?’

‘What about me?’

‘Your name was included in the list.’

Blore went purple.

‘Landor, you mean? That was the bank robbery—London and Commercial.’

Mr Justice Wargrave stirred. He said:

‘I remember. It didn’t come before me, but I remember the case. Landor was convicted on your evidence. You were the police officer in charge of the case?’

Blore said:

‘I was.’

‘Landor got penal servitude for life²⁸ and died on

Dartmoor a year later. He was a delicate man.’

Blore said:

‘He was a crook. It was he who knocked out the night watchman. The case was quite clear against him.’

Wargrave said slowly:

‘You were complimented, I think, on your able handling of the case.’

Blore said sulkily:

‘I got my promotion.’

He added in a thick voice.

‘I was only doing my duty.’

Lombard laughed—a sudden ringing laugh. He said:

‘What a duty-loving law-abiding lot we all seem to be! Myself excepted. What about you, doctor—and your little professional mistake? Illegal operation, was it?’

²⁸ *Landor got penal servitude for life* – Лэндора приговорили к пожизненной каторге

Emily Brent glanced at him in sharp distaste and drew herself away a little.

Dr Armstrong, very much master of himself, shook his head good-humouredly.

‘I’m at a loss to understand the matter,’ he said. ‘The name meant nothing to me when it was spoken. What was it—Clees? Close? I really can’t remember having a patient of that name, or being connected with a death in any way. The thing’s a complete mystery to me. Of course, it’s a long time ago. 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, they always consider it’s the surgeon’s fault.’

He sighed, shaking his head.

He thought:

Drunk—that’s what it was—drunk... And I operated! Nerves all to pieces—hands shaking. I killed her all right. Poor devil—elderly woman—simple job if I’d been sober. Lucky for me there’s loyalty in our profession. The Sister knew, of course—but she held her tongue. God, it gave me a shock! Pulled me up. But who could have known about it—after all these years?

IV

There was a silence in the room. Everybody was looking, covertly or openly, at Emily Brent. It was a minute or two before she became aware of the expectation. Her eyebrows rose on her narrow forehead. She said:

‘Are you waiting for me to say something? I have nothing to say.’

The judge said: ‘Nothing, Miss Brent?’

‘Nothing.’

Her lips closed tightly.

The judge stroked his face. He said mildly:

‘You reserve your defence?’²⁹

Miss Brent said coldly:

‘There is no question of defence. I have always acted in accordance with the dictates of my conscience. I have nothing with which to reproach myself.’

There was an unsatisfied feeling in the air. But Emily Brent was not one to be swayed by public opinion. She sat unyielding.

The judge cleared his throat once or twice. Then he said: ‘Our inquiry rests there. Now Rogers, who else is there on this island besides ourselves and you and your wife?’

‘Nobody, sir. Nobody at all.’

‘You’re sure of that?’

‘Quite sure, sir.’ Wargrave said:

‘I am not yet clear as to the purpose of our Unknown host in getting us to assemble here. But in my opinion this person, whoever he may be, is 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 tonight.’

Rogers said:

‘I beg your pardon, sir, but there’s no boat on the island.’

‘No boat at all?’

‘No, sir.’

‘How do you communicate with the mainland?’

‘Fred Narracott, he comes over every morning, sir. He brings the bread and the milk and the post, and takes the orders.’

Mr Justice Wargrave said:

‘Then in my opinion it would be well if we all left tomorrow morning as soon as Narracott’s boat arrives.’

There was a chorus of agreement with only one dissentient voice. It was Anthony Marston who disagreed with the majority.

‘A bit unsporting, what?’ he said. ‘Ought to ferret out the mystery before we go. Whole thing’s like a detective story. Positively thrilling.’

The judge said acidly:

‘At my time of life, I have no desire for “thrills” as you call them.’

Anthony said with a grin:

‘The legal life’s narrowing! I’m all for crime! Here’s to it.’

He picked up his drink and drank it off at a gulp.

Too quickly, perhaps. He choked—choked badly. His face contorted, turned purple. He gasped for breath—then slid down off his chair, the glass falling from his hand.

²⁹ *You reserve your defence?* – Вы откладываете свою защиту?

Chapter 5

I

It was so sudden and so unexpected that it took every one's breath away. They remained stupidly staring at the crumpled figure on the ground.

Then Dr Armstrong jumped up and went over to him, kneeling beside him. When he raised his head his eyes were bewildered.

He said in a low awe-struck whisper:

'My God! He's dead.'

They didn't take it in. Not at once.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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